Planning Liminalities: Mapping Black Trans Spaces in Washington, DC
An Ethnographic Exploration

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To Dedi Liem Gunawan,

In loving memory of a guide who showed me the true meaning of unconditional love and the beauty in every moment. Your teachings have not only influenced my work, but also my perspective on life. Thank you for shedding light on the path towards unconditional love and everlasting beauty. “Cinta, cinta, dan treus mencintai!”

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Shahab

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I humbly acknowledge that my research is based in Washington, DC, occupying the ancestral lands of the Nacotchtank and Piscataway tribes. These tribes have a profound connection to this land that predates the establishment of the capital, and it is essential to honor and recognize this history. By doing so, we can establish a framework for the present and emphasize the importance of acknowledging the historical and ongoing injustices that have shaped these lands. Any effort to promote the emancipation or liberation of a particular group must confront the historical narratives and contexts on which it is based. The quest for liberation requires acknowledging and addressing past and present injustices, ensuring the path toward freedom is authentic and inclusive. This recognition should extend beyond jurisdictional confines and national boundaries to resonate globally, including the ongoing plight of the indigenous Palestinian people against settler colonialism. Their resistance is a poignant reminder of the ongoing fight against oppression and dispossession, echoing the call for justice across diverse landscapes and histories. As we strive for justice in our respective contexts, we must stand in solidarity with all movements advocating for human dignity, equality, and liberation.

Abstract

The field of urban planning scholarship has not fully explored the concept of intersectionality, which offers a nuanced understanding of social categorizations. This dissertation aims to bridge this gap by integrating queer ethnography into urban planning research. The study employs ethnographic methods to uncover the everyday experiences of Black transgender women in Washington, DC, and provide a deeper understanding of their spatial encounters with planning interventions. By placing planning within the context of queer geographies, the study sheds light on the multifaceted experiences of Black trans women in urban spaces that have often been overlooked. Specifically, the study examines the *Stroll*, a significant location in their shared history where community formation and sexual labor intersect. The exploration reveals how these liminal spaces are constructed, negotiated, experienced, and reclaimed within normative planning paradigms. The dissertation begins by centering the voices of Black trans women who experienced the *Stroll* at the turn of the 21st century. The following three chapters embark on a comprehensive inquiry of the site, charting its spatial evolution over two centuries and shedding light on shifting planning paradigms and urban interventions, including zoning, and their implications for producing and sustaining liminal spaces. This research makes a significant contribution to critical planning theory, queer and trans geographies, and public policy, highlighting the limitations of traditional methods in capturing the intricate realities of marginalized communities. By shedding light on the lived experiences of Black trans women and their interactions with urban environments, the study advocates for more inclusive and intersectional approaches in future planning practices. Ultimately, this dissertation underscores the importance and utility of integrating queer ethnography into urban planning research to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse and complex experiences of marginalized communities. Its

findings have implications for more inclusive, compassionate, and equitable spatial policies and interventions, bridging the gap between urban theory and practice.

Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

On June 15, 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County*, establishing federal protection for LGBTQ+ workers against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Despite this significant ruling, there has been an alarming nationwide surge in anti-trans rhetoric and violence, specifically targeting Black trans women (HRC, 2021; NCAVP, 2018). Data from the non-profit organization Everytown for Gun Safety indicates a staggering 93% increase in homicides of transgender and gender nonconforming individuals in the U.S. and Puerto Rico between 2017 and 2021, with Black trans women accounting for 68% of reported victims (Everytown Research & Policy, 2023). This disconcerting backlash is pervasive, observed even in the most liberal and trans-welcoming jurisdictions, including Washington, DC, the nation's capital.

Studies examining the causes and ramifications of anti-trans violence often concentrate on economic, legal, political, and social factors. Urban redevelopment, however, is rarely seriously considered in this context, with limited explorations into how it shapes and is shaped by transgender experiences (Doan, 2007; Todd, 2021). Recent homicides of transgender individuals in the District of Columbia reveal disturbing spatial patterns, suggesting a strong correlation between locational geography and Black trans embodiments. For instance, the murders of Ashanti Carmon in March 2019 and Zoe Spears in June of that same year occurred within a half-mile radius near Eastern Avenue, raising suspicion of a potential targeting of trans women in that marginal area of the District (Bui, 2019; Schmidt, 2019).

Studies on trans geographies and spatial embodiments characterize urban environments as often hostile towards transgender individuals due to the assumed heteronormative and gendered nature of their spaces (Doan, 2007). While this may be true, little is known concerning

the agency embedded in or exerted by space over how trans lives manifest. To gain a deeper understanding of how and why certain areas of the urban landscape pose a greater risk to the personal safety of vulnerable groups, including transgender persons, more in-depth qualitative research is needed. Emphasizing the everyday spatial experiences of trans individuals can help promote more robust and divergent theories of liminality concerning the constructed environment that can inspire transformative and actionable spatial planning and policy objectives geared toward urban justice.

This dissertation delves into this complex milieu by explicitly examining how urban planning interventions spanning more than a century have inadvertently and advertently influenced the daily spaces and experiences of Black trans women in the nation's capital today. This niche focus addresses a resounding gap in both planning literature and LGBTQ+ studies. While previous inquiries have probed transgender urban experiences at a surface level (Brown, 2014; Doan, 2010; Halberstam, 2005; Namaste, 2000), this study offers nuanced insight into a previously less examined facet of urban life: specifically, the repercussions of planning and zoning decisions on the experiences of Black trans women in Washington, DC. Drawing from critical ethnography, my exploration examines the implications of planning across the intersections of class, gender, race, and sexuality, thereby challenging dominant planning paradigms and spatial practices that have historically perpetuated various forms of social inequality (Foglesong, 2014; Harvey, 1977; Spain, 2005; Thomas & Ritzdorf, 1997).

By investigating everyday spaces unique to Black trans women, such as the *Stroll*—a dual-functioning site for economic survival and community formation—, this study challenges normalized binary categorizations of space as evidenced in dichotomous notions of "public" vs. "private" and "safe" vs. "unsafe." Instead, it promotes a multilayered and fluid understanding of

space influenced by emotional, cultural, and psychological dimensions, wherein identities constantly evolve and communities are forged. By highlighting the lived experiences of an understudied group, this research advances a critical framework in planning scholarship, which tends to favor quantitative, rationalistic strategies and prescriptive frameworks.

A *Queer* Critique of Modern Planning

The mid-20th century witnessed the dominance of modernist planning in the U.S., a framework renowned for its top-down and technocratic methodologies in urban development and governance. Critics have demonstrated how modernist planners champion functionality and economic profitability, sometimes at the direct cost of preserving the social fabric of vernacular communities (Fainstein, 2001; Jacobs, 2016). Nevertheless, applying a queer lens offers an additional layer of scrutiny, spotlighting how modernist planning promotes normative ideologies that perpetuate and reinforce the marginalization of disenfranchised communities. Modernist planning fundamentally gravitates toward universal principles and standardized approaches to zoning, transport, and urban development, all under the guise of the 'greater good' (Harvey, 1989). Such universalizing principles can mask underlying commitments to heteronormative and cisnormative ideologies. Seemingly impartial decisions, such as designating zones exclusively for single-family homes and narrowed regulatory definitions of family, commercial entities, and public amenities, often carry the weight of entrenched beliefs about what defines a 'conventional' family or 'socially acceptable' behavior (Doan, 2007; Frisch, 2002).

Aaron Betsky's (1995) "queer space" concept offers a compelling counter-narrative to these normalized assumptions. According to Betsky, queer spaces challenge and disrupt prevalent understandings of gender and sexuality, epitomizing the fluidity and multiplicity that modernist planning fails to consider or omits altogether (Betsky, 1995; Brown, 2014). Where

modernist planning gravitates towards homogeneity and well-defined spatial categorizations, queer spaces flourish in their ambiguity and flux. Queer studies have the potential to revolutionize the way we understand sexuality relative to other identity formations. However, the lack of attention given to race and class in traditional queer studies is a significant theoretical shortcoming. Mainstream queer theory either disregards race and class entirely or examines their effects in terms of language rather than tangible realities. 'Quare' studies, as defined by E. Patrick Johnson (2001), bridges this gap by offering a colloquial reinterpretation and application of queer theory that accounts for racialized and sexualized knowledge. Extending this framework to the spatial realm, ‘quare’ spaces reference locations where LGBTQ+ experiences intertwine with other identity markers, notably race and class. These spaces articulate the specificity, locality, and intersectionality of experiences, thereby challenging the overarching spatial classifications central to modernist planning (Johnson, 2001).

Moreover, the tendrils of modernist planning have often reached the realm of delegitimizing, if not criminalizing, queer identities and, by extension, their associated spaces. Past and present zoning regulations and municipal ordinances have persistently sought to impose moral codes, frequently targeting LGBTQ+ spaces and gatherings (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Oswin, 2008). Such regulations do not merely sideline queer communities but actively erase them from mainstream urban narratives, reinforcing what Sarah Ahmed terms as "straightening devices" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 107). Employing a queer lens serves more than merely a critique of past planning practices; it offers an invaluable framework for envisioning alternative urban futures that are more inclusive and equitable. A queer gaze enables us to expose the deep-rooted normativities and inherent biases of modernist planning that extend beyond functionalist and economic objectives. Such normativities function to marginalize and exclude, therefore making

it crucial to reconceptualize what planning can and should be in our diverse urban landscapes. This is the focus of the present study.

My inquiry draws inspiration from various critical discourses to dissect and amplify our understanding of modernist planning and its ramifications on marginalized communities. It seeks transformative paradigms that genuinely resonate with inclusion and intersectionality. Using an ethnographic lens centered on the *Stroll*, a space of paramount importance for Black trans women in the U.S. capital, as expounded in Chapter Two, I investigate the interplay of planning decisions, physical spaces, identities, relationships, and power dynamics. My research challenges long-standing planning paradigms that have persistently overshadowed marginalized perspectives. It emphasizes an acute necessity for a more nuanced, inclusive planning approach. By anchoring my insights within a broader sociocultural milieu, I illuminate the dual potential of planning and urban policy to marginalize or emancipate communities. I aim for this work to serve as a beacon, fostering richer dialogues in urban and environmental planning and inciting a shift towards more equitable urban futures.

Mapping the Discourse

This dissertation sits at the confluence of studies rooted in issues of race and space, queer and trans geographies, and critical planning theory. To fully comprehend the spatial and social dynamics of the *Stroll* - a significant space for Black trans women - it is crucial to chart the intellectual terrain that underpins this exploration. Katherine McKittrick's groundbreaking work in *Demonic Grounds* (2006) sheds light on the complex nexus between Black identities and spaces, providing a discerning lens into Black geographies. McKittrick details how Black women maneuver and reconfigure geographies wrought from systems of racial subjugation. These geographies resonate with Doreen Massey's spatial theories (Massey, 1994). In *Space, Place,*

and Gender, Massey deconstructs static conceptualizations of space, underscoring their continual metamorphosis and interconnectedness (1994). In a related vein, though not spatially oriented, Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1991) in *Mapping the Margins* provides an elaborate grasp of the multifaceted intersections of race and gender. Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy* delves into the intricacies of racial capitalism, unveiling the symbiotic relationship between neoliberal multiculturalism and racializing mechanisms to govern and define differences (Melamed, 2011). Together, these works provide the structural scaffolding for decoding the processes that sculpt such spaces as the *Stroll*.

Methodologically, Clifford Geertz's influential text, *Thick Description*, emerges as a lodestar for ethnographic depth (2017), enriched further by Dwight Conquergood's performative paradigms (2002) and Kath Weston's methodologies tailored for LGBTQ+ contexts (1995). Such methodological compasses ensure a comprehensive portrayal of the nuanced lives of Black trans women in the U.S. capital. While these scholars lay foundational and methodological bedrocks, the discourse dovetails with works illuminating specific facets of the research spectrum.

Planning literature has often only superficially addressed the unique challenges and experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. Petra Doan's contributions (2010) remain pioneering in this realm. Doan emphasizes the myriad ways that planning neglects or actively marginalizes the LGBTQ+ populace, underscoring the biases within planning mechanisms and policies that perpetuate heteronormative ideals and thus relegate non-normative identities to the fringes. The scant literature accentuates the experiences of subsets, like Black trans women, even less. Despite isolated efforts like Doan's, most discourse remains delimited to overarching LGBTQ+ issues, sidelining the unique and multivalent experiences of Black trans communities. This study

aims to bridge this gap, spotlighting the intersection of space, identity, and socioeconomic dynamics pertinent to Black trans women (Doan, 2010).

'Quare' studies, as framed by E. Patrick Johnson (2001) and applied to the spatial realm, foster a nuanced understanding of the intersecting gendered, racial, and sexual matrices that characterized the *Stroll*. The 'quare' spatial perspective underpins the study's theoretical scaffold, particularly informing the cartographic methodologies utilized in visualizing the *Stroll* and distilling its multifaceted essence. Queer geographies, resolute in contesting predominant spatial narratives, have critically evaluated normative mapping techniques. Rooted in Cartesian paradigms, conventional mapping has historically oversimplified or concealed the rich spatialities of marginalized groups, especially given the colonial legacy of maps (Harley, 1989). However, dismissing these normative techniques entirely could negate their potential merits. When wielded critically, they can delineate the spatial imprints and subtleties of the dominant power structures that queer geographies challenge (Kitchin & Dodge, 2007). Strategically employing these traditional methodologies enables us to uncover tangible spatial patterns crafted by hegemonic forces. This is paramount in fields such as urban planning, where such patterns can catalyze transformative changes. Centering on the *Stroll* and the lived realities of Black trans women, this investigation augments the dialogues initiated by scholars like Doan. It endeavors to redress an evident empirical gap, intertwining planning scholarship with trans studies—a pursuit hitherto uncharted with such granularity. The study embodies a nuanced meld of queer geographies, 'quare' spatial concepts, and judicious use of mainstream mapping techniques, aiming to uplift historically marginalized spaces and communities and challenge the disciplinary limits of planning literature.

Planning and Race Matters

The trajectory of urban planning's confrontation with racial considerations reflects broader societal shifts and nuances. The foundational stages of Western planning, particularly in the U.S., were deeply rooted in colonial and segregationist principles. Richard Rothstein (2017) details the racial ramifications of housing policies, while Leonie Sandercock (1998) charts the colonial undertones of planning. These historical threads were often intertwined, using tools such as covenants, zoning, and infrastructure as mechanisms for racial exclusion. As June Thomas and Marsha Ritzdorf (1997) elaborate, these instruments were not just passive outcomes of prevailing racial ideologies but actively deployed to sustain racial divisions and inequalities. However, the Civil Rights era marked a discernible shift in planning discourses. Arnold Hirsch (1998) notes that this period was characterized by a burgeoning awareness in the planning community, leading to introspection and subsequent critiques of embedded racial biases. However, he posits that the successive transformations were more inclined towards policy amendments, pointing to a need for deeper, structural reassessments.

The emergence of the environmental justice discourse further enriched the dialogue on racial implications within urban planning. Robert Bullard (1995) is seminal in emphasizing how environmental harms are mapped onto low-income communities of color. Bullard suggests that these injustices are not incidental but the product of systemic forces. Building on this, Laura Pulido (2000) extends the conversation, examining the layered socio-spatial dynamics that enable such targeting and its broader implications on social hierarchies.

The contemporary turn towards community-based planning is heralded as a transformative moment in planning literature. Peter Marcuse and Tom Angotti (2008) are particularly enthusiastic about this shift, heralding the potential of racial and ethnic community insights to reshape planning paradigms. Likewise, John Forester (1999) presents community-

based planning as conducive to bridging divides and ensuring that decision-making becomes genuinely inclusive. However, every paradigm shift invites scrutiny. Faranak Miraftab (2009) strikes a cautionary note, emphasizing that while seeking community voices is commendable, it often remains just that: seeking. Miraftab critiques the current state of affairs, arguing that these voices seldom shape actual policy despite good intentions, leading to concerns about the depth and authenticity of such participatory exercises.

The last few decades have witnessed a growing acknowledgment of intersectional and critical race theories in planning discourses. Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton (2007) posit that these inclusions signify a crucial evolution, bringing more complex layers of analysis into planning narratives. Similarly, Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (2007) discuss the transformative potential of these perspectives, emphasizing their ability to capture the spatial politics of race. Despite their inclusion, these novel theories and frameworks remain on the periphery and have yet to be adequately embedded in mainstream discourses, consequently causing an impediment to more nuanced, holistic research centered on race. This observation resonates with the concerns raised by John Logan and Harvey Molotch (2007), who note the planning sector's historical bias towards economically profitable models. This economic centricity, they argue, often sidelines the lived realities of racialized communities. Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (2002) extend this argument, underlining how lucrative land uses, in the name of 'development,' push vulnerable communities outwards, exacerbating inequities.

A dichotomy between academic theorizing and practical application is evident, a sentiment echoed by both Susan Fainstein (2005) and Leonie Sandercock (1998). While scholarship might advocate for more inclusive approaches, on-the-ground implementations are often mired by economic and political roadblocks. Furthermore, there is a pervasive

reductionism in how planning confronts racial intersections. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) and Patricia Collins (2000) both stress that racial intersections, while acknowledged, are rarely examined in conjunction with other compounding axes of marginalization, such as classism, genderism, and ableism, to list a few. This oversight leads to a flattened narrative, emphasizing a dire need for planning discourse to move beyond the superficial and engage in more profound, interconnected analyses.

Planning and Gender Matters

The historical trajectory of gender considerations within urban planning discourses is riddled with silences and sidelining. The dominant patriarchal and heteronormative framings, as Leonie Sandercock (1998) and Dolores Hayden (1980) assert, marginalized gender discussions, categorizing them as mere "special interests." Nonetheless, this intellectual landscape was destined to shift as works by scholars like Linda McDowell (1999) and Liz Bondi (1998) heralded a transformative moment with the rise of feminist geography and planning theories by the early 21st century. These works underscored the ways gender intricacies profoundly shape urban topographies and experiences. Consequently, gender mainstreaming found proponents in voices like Jo Beall (1996) and Caren Levy (2013), emphasizing the necessity to incorporate gender considerations throughout the planning spectrum.

However, this wave of acknowledgment is not without criticism. Andrea Cornwall et al. (2008) punctuate the conversation, expressing skepticism over the transformative potential of mainstreaming. They argue that such mechanisms, in their present state, often placate bureaucratic checkboxes rather than challenging the deep-seated gender inequities. Reflections on gender within planning are further critiqued for their simplifications. Gill Valentine (2007)

sheds light on the problematic trend of homogenizing women's experiences, consequently glossing over the multifaceted interactions of gender with race, class, and sexuality.

Similarly, the predominant focus on binary gender representations, as Petra Doan (2010) opines, leads to a glaring oversight of non-binary and transgender perspectives. Furthermore, feminist paradigms, particularly from the West, are not beyond reproach. Chandra Mohanty (1988) and Richa Nagar et al. (2002) critically examine their oftentimes limited resonance across varying cultural landscapes, suggesting a potential alienation of non-Western women and diverse gender identities. While scholars like Petra Doan and Harrison Higgins (2011) have begun delving into the less explored terrains of private and semi-public spaces, there remains a considerable shortage of nuanced explorations of diverse identities within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Beebeejaun (2016) aptly encapsulates this sentiment, advocating for a more intersectional lens in planning research.

However, even as academic spheres make headway, a disconnect with mainstream practice lingers, a disparity underscored by Isabelle Anguelovski et al. (2016). The persistence of a monolithic gender narrative threatens to exacerbate exclusions. However, as our collective consciousness grows, so does the promise of change. The task now is not just to question but to reimagine — a mission that permeates contemporary inquiries, including my own research, into the multifaceted intersections of gender in urban and environmental planning.

Planning and Sexuality Matters

Sexuality, as an essential dimension of human identity, has garnered increasing attention in urban and planning discussions. One predominant area of study centers on the evolution and significance of LGBTQ+-centric neighborhoods, colloquially termed ‘gayborhoods’ (Ghaziani, 2014; Knopp, 1995). These zones, distinguished by their cultural, social, and political resonance,

have been dissected for their dynamics, including gentrification, commodification, and the ripple effects of displacement (Hanhardt, 2013). Additionally, there is a developing dialogue on the intersection of sexual politics and urban planning, with investigations highlighting the inadvertent impact of market forces and planning strategies on LGBTQ+ spaces (Doan & Higgins, 2011).

However, as the discourse expands, gaps and limitations become more evident. A glaring oversight is in the disproportionate emphasis on gay and lesbian narratives, often sidelining other pivotal identities like bisexuals, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual individuals (Browne, 2006; Doan, 2010). The bulk of the existing scholarship also displays a Euro-American lean, mainly focusing on Western settings (Gorman-Murray et al., 2018). This narrow scope threatens the universal relevance of such studies, especially in non-Western geographies where sexual identities might manifest differently and grapple with distinct challenges.

The spatial lens of this research is similarly restricted. While ‘gayborhoods’ undergo intense scrutiny, other spaces integral to the LGBTQ+ experience, such as healthcare establishments, public transit systems, or workplaces, are underrepresented in the literature. These areas are essential arenas where LGBTQ+ individuals confront and express their identities (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2016). Additionally, a conspicuous gap lies in the lack of structural critique. Although numerous studies have touched upon issues of marginalization, few delve deep into the systemic roots and entrenched power dynamics perpetuating these disparities (Weststrate et al., 2017). This chasm becomes even more pronounced when recognizing the limited influence of academic deliberations on real-world planning policies and practices, which often stymie the translation of theoretical insights into actionable changes (Brown, 2013; Namaste, 2000).

Planning and Self Matters

The title of this research is "Planning Liminalities: Mapping Black Trans Spaces in Washington, DC." It is fundamentally concerned with how the built environment shapes and is shaped by our multiple and varying social identities. Upon arriving in Charlottesville to commence my doctoral journey at the University *of* Virginia, I was exposed to the intersectionality theory. However, I found the term "theory" ill-placed in my vocabulary. As someone hailing from Kuwait with a comparably conservative upbringing, intersectionality was not a theoretical construct but rather a tangible reality. Navigating the complexities of queer visibility has been a lifelong dance for me, with my maneuvers constantly adapting to the social and geographic contexts in which I find myself. Reflecting on my personal experiences of inhabiting liminal spaces while living in Washington, DC, a place where I rarely had to think about these issues, I started questioning how less privileged members of the LGBTQ+ community, specifically Black trans women, navigated their own liminalities within the urban landscape. Various reasons compelled me to narrow the scope of my research, specifically on the experiences of Black trans women. This decision is rooted in both historical and ongoing realities. Throughout history, Black trans women and trans women of color have been at the forefront of the LGBTQ+ struggle, bravely leading the way toward progress and equality. Their activism and resilience have helped pave the way for the rights and acceptance that LGBTQ+ individuals, including gay men, enjoy today. Icons like Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera played pivotal roles in the early LGBTQ+ rights movement, making their mark as trailblazers and martyrs for a more inclusive society.

Despite their monumental contributions, Black trans women continue to face disproportionate levels of discrimination, violence, and marginalization. Their struggles and sacrifices have been historically underrepresented and frequently sidelined not only by the

dominant heterosexist society but also in the early LGBT political movement. Indeed, most study participants have voiced concern about the placement of the 'T' toward the end of the LGBTQ+ acronym to symbolize their feeling of being relegated to the 'bottom of the totem pole' (Garçon et al., 2021), receiving little attention or advocacy from their cisgender LGB counterparts. To disrupt the status quo, I opted to reorganize the acronym LGBTQ as T-LGBQ for the remainder of this dissertation. This deliberate reordering serves both as a methodological and political act, aligning with bell hooks' notion of the "oppositional gaze" that aims to prioritize marginalized voices and subvert mainstream narratives (hooks, 1984, p. 116). It is also an innately personal move since this dissertation pays homage to those whose activism helped obtain greater liberties for many historically oppressed groups, including myself.

Additionally, study participants emphasized that trans issues are not exclusively bound to matters of sexuality, expounding that many of their struggles are deeply centered around issues of gender. Thus, incorporating the dash between the T and the L in T-LGBQ serves as a conceptual separator, offering space to acknowledge the complexities of gender as a distinct axis of identity and experience (Butler, 1990). It is a subtle, albeit important step in recognizing and addressing the intersectional marginalization that affects the lives of Black trans women. Thus began my ethnographic exploration, intending to shed light on repressed stories silenced in mainstream discourse for too long.

As a cisgender gay man and foreigner who is neither Black nor trans, I am acutely aware of my positionality and the power dynamics that come into play as a researcher during my interactions with study participants. To navigate these dynamics ethically and with sensitivity, I employed several strategies. Firstly, I prioritized availability and openness, allowing participants to set the terms of our interactions. This built trust and rapport, which is essential for reflexive

ethnography (Emerson et al., 2011). Secondly, I adopted a relational methodology, sharing aspects of my personal journey and embracing inquisition from participants. This emphasizes reciprocity and vulnerability, fundamental tenets of feminist research (Oakley, 1981). Thirdly, I centered participant agency, giving them complete control over what they shared and how they shared it. This aligns with participatory research, which prioritizes the voices of those being studied (Fine & Torres, 2008). Fourthly, I conducted meetings in locations chosen by participants, affirming their agency in shaping the research process and underscoring the importance of place-based research and environment in ethnographic studies (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Lastly, I maintained transparent communication about the study's goals, limitations, and ethical considerations, engaging participants as active contributors rather than subjects (Israel & Hay, 2006). By employing these strategies, I aimed to conduct authentic and ethical research, minimizing power imbalances and creating a space that honors the community's agency and autonomy (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008).

Planning and the "Public Interest" – Crux of the Matter

Urban planning has long positioned itself on the moral high ground, viewed as a civic good, with its promotion of the 'public interest' as its cardinal compass (Fainstein & DeFilippis, 2016). This ethos embodies planning's quintessential role: acting as a spatial mediator, harmonizing societal conflicts to pursue collective benefits (Campbell, 2002). Intertwined with the broader objectives of social justice, this process ideally ensures that all groups, particularly marginalized ones, have equitable access to urban resources and opportunities (Fainstein, 2011). However, defining and achieving a common 'public interest' becomes complex in practicality.

Classical economics demarcates public goods by their non-excludability and non-rivalrous nature (Samuelson, 1954). Planning extends this rudimentary understanding,

incorporating nuances of ethics, culture, history, and societal contexts (Sager, 1994). But herein lies the challenge: the gap between the idealized concept of the public interest and its tangible realization in urban landscapes. At the heart of this debate is the role of power and politics. Like David Harvey (1973), critical scholars assert that planning can inadvertently perpetuate societal hierarchies, undermining its neutral facade. John Forester (1989) further critiques planning as an arena not purely driven by technocratic expertise but shaped by vested interests. The lingering question emerges: In pursuing the greater common interest, whose voices get amplified, and whose get muted?

This dilemma becomes even more palpable when broad societal interests collide with the specific needs of marginalized groups. The resulting friction underscores the importance of re-evaluating whose interest takes precedence (Young, 1990). Modern discourses emphasize a more inclusive, participatory planning ethos to bridge this chasm. Such an approach prioritizes community engagement and integrates intersectional lenses that reflect the multifaceted complexities of societal identities, from race and gender to socioeconomic status (Crenshaw, 1991; Healey, 1997). While pursuing the public interest remains an ethical cornerstone in urban planning, this critique highlighted the practical and moral complexities of operationalizing this core value.

Arguing a Case for Washington, DC

Washington, DC, was chosen as the geographical focus of this study due to its political symbolism, demographic diversity, unique governance model, and historical significance. The city's rich milieu makes it an unparalleled site for investigating the everyday spaces and lived experiences of marginalized groups, including Black trans women (Beemyn, 2014). As the political heart of the United States, Washington, DC, holds profound symbolic significance

(Zukin, 1995). It is a national stage where various aspects of American identity undergo continual negotiation and representation. For marginalized populations, such as Black trans women, these symbolic locales take on distinctive import. Contemporary social movements, including Black Lives Matter and the National Trans Visibility March, further solidify the city's pivotal place in civil rights activism (McQuarrie, 2017).

From a planning standpoint, Washington, DC, is governed by a dual structure, with a mayor and city council overseeing local matters, while simultaneously Congress retains ultimate authority, even having the power to override local decisions. This unique governance dynamic creates a valuable framework for exploring intersections of federal and local policies, especially those impacting marginalized residents. Additionally, DC's governance framework serves as an experimental platform for social justice and public health policies, shedding light on the repercussions of top-tier decisions at the grassroots (Naylor, 2015). Despite some scholars avoiding studying DC due to its distinctive intersection of governing powers (Hyra, 2017), it is for that very reason that this study is grounded in the nation’s capital. As this study demonstrates, Washington, DC, is a “battleground wherein the limits of citizenship are manifest” (Carr et al., 2009, p. 1964). Adding another layer of complexity, Washington, DC, is the only U.S. city guided by two official planning agencies operating in parallel: the federally-controlled National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and the locally-run District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP). Approximately 29% of DC's land is federally owned, including parks, monuments, and administrative structures (NCPC, 2017). This coexistence engenders unique public spaces oscillating between local and federal realms. This intricate web of jurisdiction and landuse offers a compelling context for studying spatial politics impacting Black trans women,

particularly how intertwined federal and local regulations shape spaces like the *Stroll* (Asch & Musgrove, 2017; Weir et al., 2005).

Socially speaking, DC's substantial Black populace, combined with its vibrant LGBTQ+ community, provides an unmatched platform for scrutinizing intersections of race, gender, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991; Gallup, 2019; U.S. et al., 2020). The city's demographics, mirroring and intensifying broader societal tensions, are further highlighted by DC's transient nature—an attribute driven by its status as the seat of federal powers and national governance. Such flux influences multiple urban dimensions, notably housing and zoning, which bear significant implications for Black trans women in the city (Price et al., 2005; Purcell, 2001). Choosing Washington, DC, as the foundation of this study stems from a myriad of considerations, ranging from its symbolic prominence and demographic composition to its governance peculiarities and national sway. These factors collectively form a comprehensive, multifaceted backdrop optimal for examining the lived experiences and spatial narratives of Black trans women in the nation's capital.

A *Queer* Approach

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the spaces that hold significance for Black trans women in the U.S. capital, this study initially employed a broad ethnographic approach. However, traditional sampling methods presented significant ethical and logistical challenges due to the sensitive nature of the spaces and the marginalized status of Black trans women. As a result, a snowball sampling method was utilized to recruit participants, which is particularly effective in researching hidden or hard-to-access communities (Small, 2009). This approach fostered trust between the researcher and participants, resulting in a nuanced and comprehensive

understanding of community structure and dynamics (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Sadler et al., 2010).

In addition to ethnographic methods, this study also employed queer methods to shed light on the complexities of everyday spaces important to Black trans women, specifically within the context of the *Stroll*. Queer methods challenge and disrupt normative structures, offering nuanced perspectives on marginalized experiences and spaces (Ghaziani & Brim, 2016). A notable example of queer methods in spatial studies is Gavin Brown's work on T-LGBQ activism and its spatial dynamics (2012). Brown examines how the act of parading through city streets can be seen as a reclamation of urban space, positing that Pride is not merely a celebration but a political act wherein queer bodies occupy and transform the urban landscape, contesting heteronormative spatial orders (Brown, 2012). While the original research design did not specifically target the *Stroll*, this geography emerged as a significant locus through preliminary interviews and observations. Responding to its importance to participants, the research adapted to focus more intensively on the *Stroll*. This adaptability both challenges traditional spatial research paradigms and aligns with the fluidity inherent in queer methods (Browne & Nash, 2010; Jagose, 1996; Munoz, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

The concept of liminality provides a nuanced framework for understanding the state of being "in-between" distinct stages of identity or societal structure. This idea was first introduced by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 to describe the transitional phase between pre-liminal and post-liminal stages encountered in rites of passage. Traditional societal hierarchies and roles are suspended during this phase, leading to uncertainty and ambiguity (Thomassen, 2009; van Gennep, 2019).

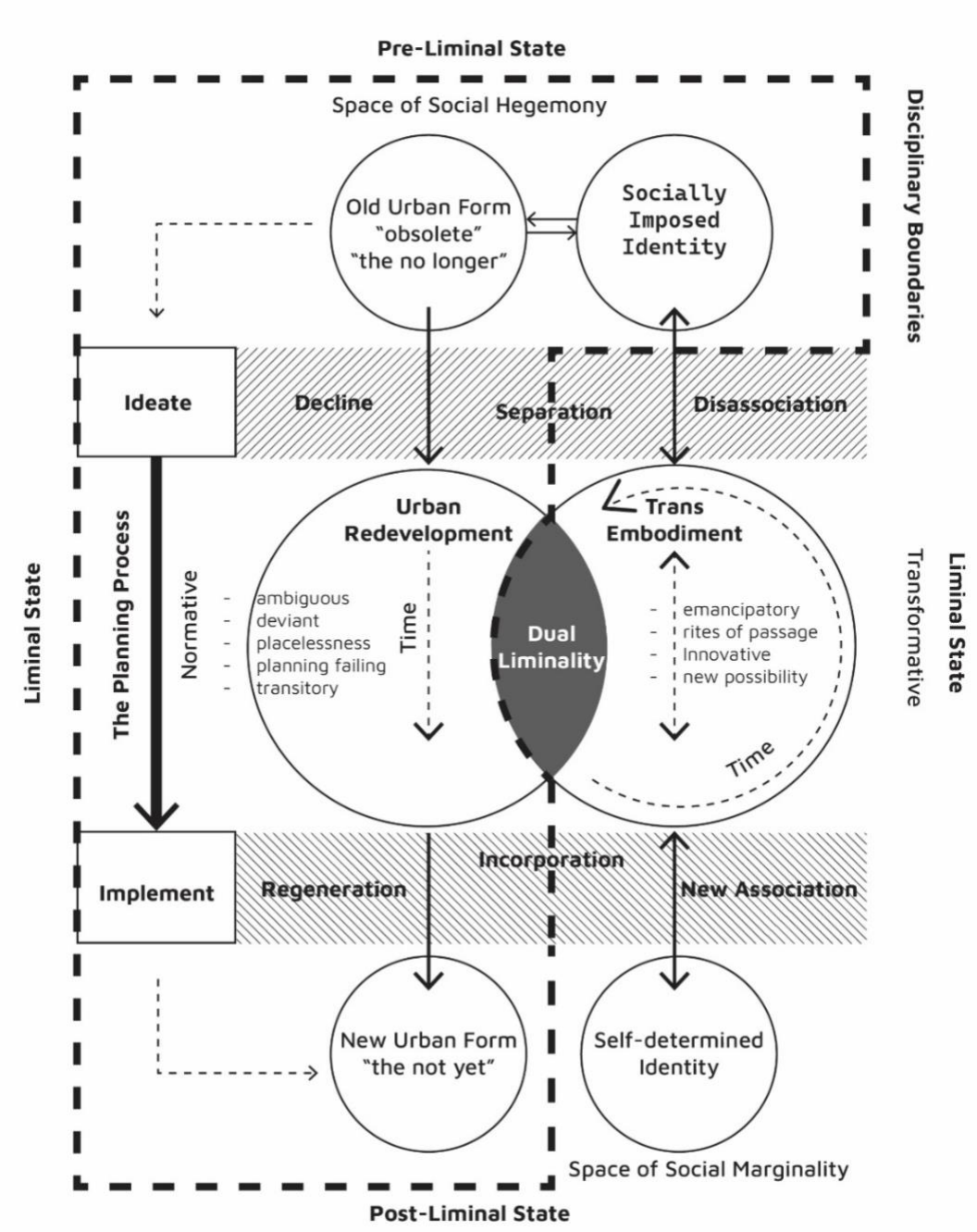
Scholars have also explored the concept of spatial liminality, which has been defined in negative terms as a transition zone or gray space in the urban environment characterized by ambiguity, deviance, and social disorder (Levesque, 2016). However, others have taken a more positive view of spatial liminality. Geographer Doreen Massey suggests that spaces are always in a state of becoming and that they are never fixed or static. She argues that spatial liminality can be understood as a space of possibility where new connections and possibilities can emerge (Massey, 2005). Architectural philosopher Juhani Pallasmaa also believes that spatial liminality can be intentionally created in architectural design by designing ambiguous, undefined, or transitional spaces. Pallasmaa (2012) suggests that spatial liminality can foster a sense of openness, possibility, and freedom in architecture.

On the other hand, a notable body of literature delves into the transformative and empowering possibilities inherent in liminal spaces. Scholars like Elizabeth Grosz (2001) view these spaces as fertile ground for personal growth and evolution. Phil Hubbard (2000) and Gill Valentine (2003) go even further, identifying liminal spaces as counter-sites that challenge dominant narratives of heterosexuality. This echoes the perspective of Miraftab (2009), who sees these margins as creative spaces of counterhegemony. This perspective is particularly relevant in the field of queer and trans studies, where liminality is used to interpret and articulate the experiences of trans individuals navigating a binary society. This ongoing conversation has been enriched by Loren March (2020), who calls for a deeper exploration of how the experiences of queer and trans lives can further deepen our understanding of liminality. Building on this discussion, this study seeks to develop a new framework for exploring spatial liminality through a Black trans lens. By bridging the seemingly conflicting narratives of liminality - as marginal fringe spaces and as sites of potential and transcendence - I situate the geographies of Black trans

women at the intersection of spatial and social liminalities. This integration gives rise to the concept of "dual liminality," a lens that examines the urban spaces embedded in the experiences of Black trans women. This lens is crucial in analyzing the spatial implications imposed by urban planning and policy on these relatively unexplored geographies, a critical exercise in enhancing our understanding of the multi-dimensional facets of liminality (Figure 1).

Figure 1.

A Framework of Dual Liminalities



The *Stroll* as a Locus for the Study

In the late 20th century, the landscape of opportunities for transgender individuals in the U.S. was fraught with challenges and limitations. Employment prospects were often confined to marginal sectors, usually in informal underground economies, and inclusive social spaces were scant (Namaste, 2000). This constriction was particularly acute for Black trans women, who faced a nexus of racial and gender inequalities. Homonormativity and binary gender norms further marginalized them, complicating their quest for gainful employment and safe social spaces (Bost, 2018; Duggan, 2002). In response, many Black trans individuals reclaimed their own spaces within peripheral zones, often characterized by "betwixt-and-between" states (Turner, 1969, p. VIII).

Understanding the spatial dynamics of exclusion is crucial for comprehending the experiences of marginalized groups like Black trans women (Budge et al., 2018; Seelman et al., 2015). Scholars, including McKittrick (2006) and Crenshaw (1991), underscore the intersectionality of these dynamics. The survival strategies of Black trans women—including employment, social interaction, and safety—are profoundly intertwined with spatial issues. While these spaces can concurrently empower and marginalize, they reflect broader socio-spatial relationships and planning paradigms. However, geographical inquiries that aim to uncover the spaces inhabited by marginalized groups pose distinct challenges, as conventional methods can often overlook or risk misinterpreting their multifaceted dynamics, leading to a lack of representation or mischaracterization of these complex landscapes (Kobayashi, 1994).

Ethnographic approaches, which prioritize lived experiences and cultural contexts, offer a nuanced lens for exploring these complexities (Gewertz et al., 1997). For example, Gill Valentine's work (2007) illuminates the importance of examining urban landscapes through the

lens of marginalized communities. By delving into the multifaceted dynamics of Black trans women's unique embodiments of urban landscapes, ethnography offers critical insights often obscured in broader urban studies, paving the way for a more inclusive and empathetic exploration of the built environment (England, 2003; Pink, 2009).

Engaging in extensive conversations with six Black trans women in Washington, DC, provided valuable insights into the diverse geographies and spaces that shape their daily lives. Through these candid dialogues, it became evident that the *Stroll*, located at the heart of the present-day Mount Vernon Triangle neighborhood, was not merely a landscape for sexual labor. It also functioned as a sanctuary, a communal space, and a testament to the ingenuity and spirit of the Black trans community. This 'Thirdspace,' as professed by Edward Soja, embodies the intersection of physical reality, social relationships, and cultural symbolism, embracing the complexity of human exchange, symbolism, and meaning in shaping spaces (Soja, 1996).

Historically, strolls have been associated with street-based sex work, a vocation tracing back to the earliest human societies (Hubbard, 2004). Across different eras and regions, trans women engaging in sex work have often coexisted with their cisgender counterparts, operating within the same socio-spatial context (Stryker, 2009). However, as the trans-political movement in the U.S. gained traction in the 1990s, it catalyzed the emergence of new forms of strolls influenced by associative identity politics (Minter, 1999). For these reasons, I situated my study within the historical urban milieu of the late 1990s before reflecting in time to unpack the planning processes and spatial practices that have collectively engendered this urban phenomenon.

In Washington, DC, a succession of trans-associated strolls evolved, reflecting shifts in local culture, politics, economics, and visibility (Oselin et al., 2022). The K Street stroll—

commonly known as the *Stroll*[1]—held prominence during the 1990s and early 2000s and was where all my participants initially met and formed the social group central to this study. While this research primarily critiques planning centered on the lives of Black trans women, it also sheds light on the resilience, ingenuity, and unwavering spirit of the broader Black trans community in urban America.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter Two of this study focuses on the emergence of trans-oriented strolls in Washington, DC, specifically the *Stroll* that manifested on K Street during the late 1990s and early 2000s. The decision to concentrate on K Street was made because it played a central role in the social dynamics and relationships that are the focus of this study. Through ethnographic interviews, the chapter explores the multidimensional experiences of Black trans women, with a particular emphasis on Yazmina Tadesse's narrative. In addition to individual stories, the chapter also examines the Stroll's daily rhythms and spatial aspects, highlighting how built environments shape experiences and community dynamics. Ultimately, the narratives presented in this chapter intersect with broader spatial frameworks, challenging traditional urban interpretations and highlighting the ingenuity and resilience of a community largely overlooked in Washington's recent urban history.

Chapter Three provides historical context for the narrative presented in Chapter Two, tracing the development of the Mount Vernon Triangle area in Washington, DC, from the inception of the U.S. capital to World War II. This examination goes beyond a simple chronicle

1 In the scope of this inquiry, the “Stroll" designates a specific location in Washington, DC, where Black trans women have established a sense of belonging and financial stability since the latter part of the 20th century. Although not precisely defined in terms of its boundaries, this area is typically situated at the convergence of 5th and K Street and falls within the general vicinity now recognized as Mount Vernon Triangle. Hence, the term Stroll can indicate either the particular street corner or the broader neighborhood.

of architectural and urban changes, instead engaging with a multidimensional narrative of the area that reveals how urban transformation intersects with community dynamics, social relations, and broader ideologies. The chapter begins by exploring Mount Vernon Triangle's evolution from an overlooked peripheral space in the 19th century to a central geography within the city's expanding urban landscape, highlighting the neighborhood's working-class character and resistance to middle-class speculative ventures. The chapter then examines how the introduction of landuse zoning in 1920 was a powerful determinant in the neighborhood's future evolution, revealing zoning as a tool not just for urban design but also for social marginalization, particularly concerning issues of race and class. Finally, the chapter emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between spaces and the societies that inhabit them, demonstrating how a detailed historical understanding of one can provide essential insights into the other. This illuminates unexplored realms of urban landscapes like the *Stroll*, setting the stage for a more nuanced understanding of the complex intersection between spatial governance and the lives of Black trans women in the nation's capital.

Chapter Four delves into the spatial realm of the *Stroll*, which is considered "abject." It highlights how Mount Vernon Triangle embodies the contradictions embedded within modernist planning ideals and their shortcomings. The context is post-WWII, marking a shift in planning paradigms to more interventionist approaches, often sidelining marginalized communities such as those that manifested on the *Stroll*. This chapter positions the area's trajectory amidst postwar urban renewal endeavors, exposing the cisnormative and heteronormative foundations of these policies. A queer lens dissects the heteronormative anchors of prevailing planning drives, especially concerning renewal and redevelopment. Archival research and policy evaluations

illustrate how 20th-century planning faltered in delivering urban betterment and fortified the *Stroll's* liminality.

Chapter Five navigates the nuanced intricacies of neoliberal forms of urban governance and their ramifications on marginalized demographics, particularly Black trans women, in the Mount Vernon Triangle. While urban redevelopment often dons the cloak of progress, this chapter unearths the covert agendas aimed at urban sanitization for a middle-class populace, perpetuating exclusionary patterns. Dissecting market-centric ideologies, it showcases how planning instruments, like zoning and policing, evolve into tools of exclusion. Two case studies spotlight the rise of "Not In My Back Yard" sentiments, otherwise known as NIMBYism, and the establishment of prostitution-free zones. These mechanisms not only imperil the well-being and freedom of Black trans women but also reflect an overarching urban shift where sexuality and spatial dynamics meld seamlessly. The chapter invites a contemplative gaze on spatial governance intersections, sexual modulation, and the neoliberal framework, interrogating the morality and fairness of urban progression.

In Chapter Six, I embark on a reflective journey that draws together the ideas and insights explored in the preceding chapters. This concluding chapter advances the concept of "planning liminalities" as a visionary lens through which planners and urban designers can reevaluate liminal spaces less as sites of deterioration and malaise and more as fluid zones teeming with untapped potential and empowerment. By delving into the profound implications of this notion, I encourage a rethinking of planning's normative frameworks, wherein the idea of liminality is embraced as a realm of infinite possibilities for promoting vibrant, inclusive, and dynamic urban futures.

Chapter Two: Mapping the *Stroll*, a Black Trans Geography in Washington, DC

This chapter focuses on the experiences of a group of Black trans women who frequented the *Stroll* in Washington, DC, during the turn of the 21st century. Based on oral histories, it presents a detailed examination that reveals the resilience, ingenuity, and determination defining an underexplored facet of the District's recent urban history. Through extensive interviews and dialogues with study participants, a layered spatial narrative of the *Stroll* emerges, transcending conventional cartographic representations to vividly encapsulate their embodied realities. Guided by Yazmina Tadesse's recollections, a key informant in this study, we are taken on a riveting journey back to the subaltern world of the *Stroll* on the night she first entered its fold. As we retrace Yazmina's footsteps, a suppressed cartography surfaces, bearing witness to the authenticity of a space teeming with endless possibilities. Yazmina's navigation of self within this urban milieu offers a deeply personal insight into the transformative essence of often-overlooked mundane corners of our constructed environment (Hayden, 1997).

Following this introductory subtext, the chapter is organized into five segments. It begins by recounting Yazmina's journey, from her early childhood years in Addis Ababa to her successive migration that landed her in the streets of Washington, DC. Her journey illustrates the profound pervasiveness of heteronormativity and how it informs queer- and trans-global migrations (Luibhéid & Chávez, 2020). The chapter then moves on to Yazmina's initial encounter with the *Stroll*, vividly etched in the late summer of 1998. The following section delves deeper, expounding on the *Stroll's* daily cadences, casting light on its intrinsic social and spatial dynamics. Using a grounded interpretive lens, it draws attention to themes of visibility, clandestine negotiations, and subversive challenges to the hegemonic spatial order. This section foregrounds architectural and urban configurations, including building setbacks, landuse

patterns, and public transit systems, revealing the latent potential of these often-overlooked elements of the material environment in fostering empowering experiences and opportunities amid societal adversities and exclusions (Ferguson, 2004; Lefebvre, 1992; Savela, 2023; Shaw, 2013). The fourth section emphasizes anchoring these narratives within critical spatial frameworks. It underscores the pivotal role of the built environment in shaping liminalities, enriching our understanding of the dynamic and co-constitutive nature of urban spaces and social identity. The chapter concludes with a mapping of the *Stroll*, sketched from the memory of study participants as a form of extending 'quare' frameworks to the domain of cartography (Johnson, 2001). Alexis' cognitive map and the material elements it encapsulates serve as a compass guiding the scope of my inquiry in the ensuing chapters.

From Addis Ababa to the Streets of Washington, DC, A Journey of Self-Discovery

I was shipped off to a Catholic boarding school in England, and at that moment, it felt like he sent me from the lion's den to the jaguar's bedroom. What was he seriously thinking? I was the only Black kid in a town so far away from London, where people were very ignorant and not used to having a very dark-skinned child from Africa adapting to the local culture and who has transgender tendencies…When England wasn't working, he sent me to another Catholic school in Nairobi, taking me from the jaguar's bedroom into the tiger's office…I never understood why my dad kept sending me to these fucking concentration camps as I saw them.

- Yazmina Tadesse, *Personal Communication*, June 6, 2021.

I first met Yazmina Tadesse in 2018 at a holiday gathering hosted by our late friend, Dedi Liem Gunawan, at his DC home. Her warm smile and welcoming demeanor immediately drew me in, but it was her remarkable story that truly captivated me. As a trans woman and African immigrant, Yazmina has faced many challenges on her journey, but she has never lost her unwavering dedication to living life on her own terms. Throughout our conversation, she generously shared her insights and experiences, offering a window into her unique perspective

on the world. In recounting her story, I am struck by her tenacity, resilience, and profound humanity, all of which she embodies with grace and generosity. Yazmina's story is a testament to the power of perseverance and the importance of living authentically, and I feel grateful to have had the opportunity to know her.

Born on December 17, 1972, Yazmina Tadesse was raised in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa during the waning days of Haile Selassie's autocratic rule. Shielded by an upper-middle-class upbringing, her early childhood was adorned with material comfort and privilege. Nevertheless, she was at odds with societal expectations from a tender age, rejecting orthodox masculine norms—a dichotomy that set the stage for a lifetime of challenges and triumphs. She was more drawn to the activities and inclinations of her siblings, including an older sister and two younger half-sisters, rather than conforming to the conventional societal roles prescribed for males. Aligning with her sisters' interests was not simply a preference but a profound realization of her true self. As signs of Yazmina's non-conformity began to manifest visibly, she was met with fierce resistance and retaliation from her family, specifically her father, whose disciplinary and often punitive measures reflected the deep-rooted heteronormative orthodoxy that permeated their Ethiopian culture.

In a quest to 'rectify' what he perceived as a rebellion against acceptable gender ideals, Yazmina's father sent her to Catholic boarding schools in distant lands—decisions that led her to experiences filled with anguish. During the early 1980s, in England's remote British Midlands, Yazmina's dual marginal status as a foreigner and sole Black student rendered her as the 'other,' as she became a victim of consistent harassment. Her gentle demeanor, misconstrued as weakness, made her a constant target of physical, sexual, and verbal abuse from her classmates and even some of her instructors. Yazmina's suffering reached a dark nadir with a suicide

attempt. When her father learned of her desperate situation, he hurried to England to retrieve Yazmina. Nonetheless, his response was not sympathy nor understanding but further attempts at suppression. He condemned Western liberalism for enabling her to persist in her non-conformity, viewing her struggles as a continuation of her rebellion rather than a cry for acceptance.

Another Catholic boarding school, this time outside Nairobi in the Kenyan highlands, was meant to instill "the African ways." Yazmina's life assumed a liminal state, oscillating between diverse cultures, identities, and conflicting expectations. The perpetual displacement from numerous boarding schools and her father's insistence on conformity only amplified Yazmina’s feelings of alienation. Returning to England in 1988 to complete her final two years of high school, she moved in with her older sister in their family-owned London apartment, only to find herself shadowed by the specter of the AIDS crisis, which intensified the stigma against T-LGBQ individuals (Herek et al., 1998).

A brief respite arrived upon escaping to the Greek island of Mykonos, a place where queer modalities challenge and subvert heteronormative hegemony. There, Yazmina's drag performances became an exuberant expression of self-acceptance, not just a façade. Feeling at ease with her authentic being, this short-lived period propelled her to embrace her trans identity. However, upon her return to England, this newfound empowerment ran headlong into her father's intractable opposition, culminating in an ultimatum between suppressing her identity or facing permanent exile to the U.S.—a dilemma that underscores the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in dictating global migratory patterns (Grewal & Kaplan, 2001; Luibhéid, 2008; Weston, 1991).

Determined to break free from the rigidity of enforced heterosexism and live authentically, Yazmina applied to the Diversity Immigrant Visa program, established by the

Immigration Act of 1990 and first activated in 1995 (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). Despite tangible barriers arising from the stipulations of this newly instituted program, requiring applicants to secure a U.S. sponsor and present mandatory evidence of a negative HIV test, she overcame these bureaucratic hurdles and nestled marginalization, gaining admission to the U.S. in 1997 (Cohen, 1999). In his final attempt to exert control, Yazmina's father furnished her a lump sum of $13,000 to facilitate her relocation expenses, but only on the condition that she severed all familial ties. Yazmina's arrival in the United States in August 1997 initiated a new chapter in her life journey, marked concurrently by banishment and self-reclamation. While she eventually reconnected with her sisters, her ties with her father remain irreparably severed, underscoring the profound personal costs that may be incurred when deviating from orthodox gender norms. (Butler, 1990).

Starting anew in Washington, DC, was no simple feat, especially during the turbulent '90s when violent crime coupled with a drug epidemic ravaged the U.S. capital, tainting its reputation as the country's 'murder capital.' Upon relocating to the U.S., Yazmina initially presented as a gay man despite a burgeoning awareness of her trans identity. Confined between the home of a distant relative sponsor and her workplace in a city she barely knew, Yazmina was caught in a limbo of isolation. The harsh realities of the time, compounded with the absence of digital means to connect socially, made Yazmina's efforts to build friendships and find her place ever more challenging. However, a pivotal moment occurred with a fortuitous encounter at a department store in Tyson's Corner while Yazmina was working in sales. There, she met Mauna Horad, a Black trans woman and veteran of the streets. Mauna's independence and self-assurance captivated Yazmina, and the pair quickly formed a deep bond. They regularly enjoyed each other's company at Mauna's place, a basement rental unit in Shaw's bustling U Street corridor.

Yazmina was intrigued by the material luxuries her friend could afford, relying entirely on sex work as her sole source of income. Despite her initial fears of violating the law—a trepidation amplified by having pledged not to engage in sex work or related activities on her U.S. immigration application—Mauna's stories and palpable success slowly eroded Yazmina's fears after learning that local police officers were too preoccupied in dealing with the city's surging homicides than to pay attention to streetwalkers and petty crimes. Nevertheless, Yazmina's angst serves as a concrete example of how immigration laws can induce fear as a tactic for wielding power and exerting disciplinary control over newcomers.

On a decisive late summer night in 1998, Mauna proposed that Yazmina accompany her to the *Stroll*, offering the possibility of finding community and kinship. Though Yazmina's heart pounded with apprehension, Mauna's reassuring words and the promise of a transformative experience convinced her to go along. Together, they assembled an outfit befitting for the occasion while honoring Yazmina's wish for a less revealing appearance. Mauna held Yazmina close and tight as they prepared to leave, assuring her that she would protect and guide her through the night. As Mauna imparted her final words, Yazmina began realizing that the *Stroll*, beyond its assumed site of sexual labor, was a space of community, self-discovery, and, in many ways, a rite of passage. Navigating the *Stroll* requires mastering the art of performance - skills honed through routine practice. Even if Yazmina failed to attract clients that inaugural night, she recognized the invaluable stride she had already achieved: the courage to enter into a world she had long feared alongside a mentor who grasped and shared her true identity. As they set out into the night, destined for the liminal space of the *Stroll*, Yazmina's journey was marked concurrently by excitement and trepidation.

Figure 2.

Yazmina Tadesse "The Transsexual Menace"

Photo Credit: Portrait of Yazmina Tadesse. Used with permission.

5th and K Streets: Black Trans Embodiments

The Stroll, for me, was more than just a place to make money. It was where I found myself and learned how to live my authentic self. I knew I was trans since I was a little child, but I didn't quite understand what that meant or if it was even possible. But after going to Fifth and K Street, I was blown away by what I saw – femme queens bringing realness with their perfect bodies, hair, and makeup. They looked like Black Barbies, strutting up and down K Street in heels and scanty outfits – I'm talking see-through tops, bodysuits, catsuits, miniskirts. They was voguing, sashaying, and slaying. It was better music than what the DJs played at the clubs. We was jamming and dancing all night long. I mean, it was one big festivity that brought our community together.

- Chantal Lee, *Personal Communication*, June 18, 2021

Yazmina and Mauna's expedition through the narrow alleys and backstreets of Shaw was a visceral experience as they navigated territory, both familiar and unsettling. The dark, winding paths evoked an ominous unease in Yazmina. However, Mauna's whispered assurance - "This way, we will stay out of sight" - underscored the omnipresent urge to avoid law enforcement, a constant force that dictated their movements. Police patrols along main streets and commercial corridors presented a challenge that indelibly prescribed their chosen pathways, turning a routine 30-minute journey into an anxious hour-long crawl (Figure 3). As they made their way through the vibrant nighttime landscape of historic Shaw, the familiar sounds of laughter, go-go beats, and clinking bottles began fading into the background as they approached the neighborhood's southern fringe.

Figure 3.

Tracing Footsteps and Unfolding Stories: A Cartographic Exploration of Paths, Spaces, and Possibilities.

This mapping endeavors to visualize Yazmina and Mauna's meandering journey through the alleys of Shaw. The white strokes indicate the alleys in 1998, whereas the dotted yellow line represents a hypothetical direct route from Mauna's U Street apartment to 5th and K, shown at the bottom right. GIS data sourced from DC Open Data. Image created by the author.

Upon reaching the intersection of 5th Street and New York Avenue, Yazmina was caught off guard by an unexpected scene. The dense urban fabric they had just traversed suddenly gave

way to a desolate expanse marked by an asphalt and concrete-laden surface that seemed to defy the very essence of a downtown landscape. Standing at the intersection, Yazmina surveyed the barren stretch, struggling to comprehend the stark contrast. Despite being closer to the city center, the space bore no resemblance to the bustling downtown areas she was accustomed to. Instead, the surrounding landscape resembled a "wasteland," a "dead zone," empty and desolate, save for a handful of buildings that stood like lonely sentinels isolated in the deserted terrain. When it was time to cross safely, she and Mauna dashed across the avenue to a weedy parking lot, where Yazmina suddenly felt exposed and vulnerable. Once cloaked by shadows, Yazmina's body was now hyper-visible on full public display, her presence magnified in a space shaped by invisible forces she could neither perceive nor understand.

Figure 4.

"Dead Zone," Washington, DC

Source: D.C. Office of Zoning archives. Exhibit 34 from Z.C. Case No. 88-30.

Approaching the 5th and K Street intersection, the lifeless expanse began to shift. Ahead, a group of low-rise buildings appeared, their vacant windows resembling blank stares, some of them concealed behind boarded-up frames. These abandoned structures loomed like forlorn specters, casting long shadows across the dim streets. Then, a sudden burst of life pierced the darkness: a neon sign at the southeast corner flickered to life, its bold glow painting the ground with inviting red and blue hues. This unexpected splash of color and warmth beckoned them closer, creating an oasis of vitality amidst desolation. With a mix of eagerness and apprehension, Yazmina and Mauna crossed the street, lured by the lively crowd that awaited them.

When Yazmina first set foot into the subversive universe of the *Stroll*, she was confronted by a scene she least expected, both brilliant and enthralling: "It was very much alluring and nothing like I expected," she recalls. Alongside her confidante, Mauna, Yazmina found herself submerged in a sea of Black trans women, each one more passable and stunning than the next. She had always understood the term 'passable'[2]—how closely a trans person is perceived to align with their identified gender—but now it came alive before her in vivid color, the sheer number of women in one place astonishing her. "When we first got there, and I realized the number of people there, it blew me away. I couldn't believe they were all trans women at first. They were some of the most beautiful and real-looking women I had ever seen," said Yazmina. An initial wave of intimidation washed over newcomer Yazmina, but Mauna's knowing smile and gentle introductions soon melted away barriers, enveloping Yazmina in a warm embrace of acceptance and sisterhood.

The scene burst into life, a symphony of sensory delights as the women claimed the sizable open space between the sidewalk and the building, transforming the mundane urban backdrop into a vibrant social canvas. It was as if they had brought the eclectic world of the drag ballroom outdoors, making it a visible, integral part of the city's public life. Yazmina observed the women in awe and admiration as they vogued, sashayed, and strutted with unrivaled confidence and grace that defied expression. ‘Femme queen realness’ was elevated to a new level, and every movement and gesture radiated a strong sense of community and uplift. The air pulsated with go-go beats, infused with chatter, laughter, and affirmations. The scents of

[2] "Passable" in transgender terms refers to the degree to which a transgender person is perceived as the gender with which they identify. If a transgender person is considered "passable," it means that others see them as the gender they identify with and may not even realize that they are transgender. This concept is concurrently a private and public matter, reflecting individual feelings about identity and societal expectations and norms around gender. It is worth noting that the idea of "passing" can be controversial and problematic for some, as it can imply a need to conform to conventional gender appearances or roles, which may not align with every individual's experience or identity.

cigarettes, marijuana, hairspray, and perfume mingled with the warm, late summer air, creating a potent aroma that seemed to imprint on Yazmina's soul. However, beyond these sights, sounds, and scents, the profound sense of belonging marked Yazmina's introduction to the *Stroll*. The scene was the antithesis of everything she had imagined, a vibrant and living testament to the power of community and self-expression.

As the night thickened and the city's nightlife retreated, the *Stroll* vibrated with fervor. Bars and clubs closed their gates, discharging a stream of suburban-bound vehicles down K Street. Meanwhile, the *Stroll* beckoned a distinctive crowd, metamorphosing into an insular, albeit penetrable cosmos. Amid the mechanized clamor, Black trans women took center stage as they conquered the intersection, their dynamic resilience contrary to the faltering departures of strip club patrons nearby. An authoritative voice shattered the night, blaring misgendering taunts from a patrolling officer's PA system. His misguided attempt at dominance was met with scorn. Mauna's unwavering retort, affirming no 'sirs' were present, startled Yazmina. Mauna's knowing glance at Yazmina as the officer withdrew spoke volumes about the complex power dynamics between the denizens of the *Stroll* and apathetic law enforcement.

The intersection's metamorphosis from social gathering to an arena of sexual labor unfolded next, as the crowd dispersed along K Street guided by an unspoken ethos premised on hierarchies of experience and 'passability.' Seasoned strollers assumed positions at the coveted 'Showcase Boulevard' near 7th Street, while novices or those recently transitioning found solace in 3rd Street's 'Mud Duck Lane.' Under Mauna's tutelage, newcomer Yazmina observed the landscape's hierarchies, carefully positioning herself between 5th and 3rd Streets. "Never start the conversation and never mention money," Mauna counseled, her voice laced with experience, "Let the date initiate; if he's undercover, that's entrapment, and he can't legally arrest you."

Yazmina marveled at the artful subtlety of silent solicitation, a complex craft requiring both finesse and savvy.

She looked on as the women dispersed along K Street's sidewalk, like pieces on a chessboard, each maintaining an impressively equal distance, a threshold reflecting a profound understanding of this labor-intensive space. It was a mesmerizing public tableau of diverse trans bodies, echoing the principles of marketing and retail. Instead of the conventional display of goods in window shops, their poised figures stood strategically spaced - close enough for mutual protection yet sufficiently distant to attract individual attention. Intrigued patrons were more likely to approach a solitary figure, making this arrangement mutually practical and protective. Meanwhile, the streetscape, devoid of the natural grace of trees, found its vitality in the Black trans women. Like harmonious sculptures, their equidistant poses enlivened the otherwise barren street. This was the contemporary art of solicitation, a vibrant testament to a subversive unity that belied the fragility of heteronormative constructs. On *K Street,* societal norms and dichotomies were not merely challenged but artfully dismantled, unsettled, and reconstructed. The street transformed into a stage where powerful narratives defied conventions, blending complexity and humanity in a beautiful, defiant dance.

Mauna then initiated Yazmina to partake in the ritual. After briefing her on street codes and ethics, Mauna ushered her mentee across the street to the intersection’s north. Momentarily lone at 5th and K, surrounded by the forlorn parking lot they traversed earlier, Yazmina's vulnerability gave way to a whirlwind of mixed emotions as she was approached by her first client, or 'date,’- a red Toyota Camry. Mauna's reassuring nod signaled that the driver was a regular— and it was safe to proceed. As they ventured into the dimly lit alley nestled within the same block that centered the *Stroll* (Figure 5), Yazmina's heightened anxiety was eased by the

driver's friendly demeanor. His respect for street codes and recognition of her challenges added a surprising layer of compassion to the transaction. This brief but resonant encounter turned initial fears into exhilarating emotions of empowerment and feminine affirmation.

Figure 5.

Yazmina's Initiation, Prathers Alley, Washington, DC

Prathers Alley, looking north from I to K Street. Image retrieved from "Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District Nomination Registration Form," resubmitted to the National Register of Historic Places, 2006, p. 52.

The *Stroll's* decline was a gentle yielding to dawn's embrace. The intersection's nocturnal vibrancy gave way to the mundane procession of workers, synchronized in their daily grind, abandoning suburban bubbles for their roles in the state-sanctioned economy. The neon sign,

once vibrant, now seemed spectral amid scattered remnants—lost wigs, fallen eyelashes, and discarded paraphernalia —bearing witness to the *Stroll's* transformative power. With deep insight into the return to routine, Mauna signaled it was time to go, leaving a lasting lesson imprinted in Yazmina's memory.

At the *Stroll*, Yazmina confronted her deepest fears and insecurities, discovering her essence through trials and courage. That first night marked her initiation, a defining genesis, and a testament to the power and resilience of Black trans women. Through collective fortitude and self-realization, she emerged as a seasoned veteran. More than a laboring ground, the *Stroll* affirmed strength and transcended societal norms, capturing the authentic essence of a marginalized community.

Understanding the Architecture of the *Stroll*

It was a dead zone, a wasteland full of parking lots convenient for tricking because you could hide between cars. The space lends itself to the situation. When I first went, there was a high-rise apartment building full of Section 8 people. Besides that, the area was predominantly abandoned. I also remember two sex shops and a strip bar in the same block where we hung out at 5th and K. The strip bar attracted a mixed crowd, both straight and gay. As you moved further east, you entered the ghetto of Sursum Corda, where young boys who lived in the neighborhood's public housing chased us out.

- Yazmina Tadesse, *Personal Communication*, November 2, 2020.

The *Stroll*, located in the heart of Washington, was a vibrant and integral feature of the city's urban fabric. Yazmina, a frequent visitor to the area, described it as more than just a place; it was an alluring spectacle. Every night, Black trans women took over the southeast corner of 5th and K Streets between 2:00 a.m. and 3:00 a.m. as the strip bar closed its doors and the last patrons dispersed. This empowered the women, giving them a sense of ownership over the block. While the *Stroll* may seem chaotic at first glance, closer inspection reveals a sophisticated geography that reflects intricate negotiations, strategies, and contradictions.

For the Black trans women who frequented the *Stroll*, it was more than just a physical space; it became an integral part of their collective consciousness. They defined its boundaries and shaped its identity. The *Stroll's* geography helped to negotiate the interplay between visibility and invisibility, legality and subversion, and freedom and constraint (Heap, 2006). This intricate paradox renders the *Stroll* a unique urban phenomenon. The boundaries of the *Stroll* were defined by its ebbs and flows, encapsulating the complexity of Black trans women's spatialities in Washington, DC (Halberstam, 2005).

The ever-shifting contours of this elusive geography were anchored at the southeast corner of 5th and K Streets. There, a tight cluster of low-rise historic structures, developed at a substantial setback from the property line, offered an unobtrusive gathering space for Black trans women, fostering a greater sense of freedom and belonging. The extension of the public sidewalk into privately owned land blurred the public/private divide, constituting a tangible and symbolic separation from the immediate urban environment. These spatial arrangements offered a degree of protection against petty charges like loitering or obstructing traffic, often leveled under the pretense of 'quality of life' measures (Dunn, 2010).

The strip club located at 476 K Street, Louis' Rogue (Figure 6), provided the site with an added layer of evasiveness. In the late 1980s, the establishment underwent a process of "de-gaying" to erase or diminish its association with T-LGBQ communities (Podmore, 2013). Despite this, the shift to a heterosexual identity brought an unintended outcome, empowering Black trans women to sustain dominance and legitimacy over the space. “Everywhere else on K Street, you couldn't just stand around. You had to keep moving, or the police assumed you were a hooker, but that was hardly the case where we stood at 5th and K outside the strip club. The

girls were very passable and easily mistaken for the cis girls that worked for the club," Yazmina noted.

Figure 6.

Louis' Rogue Anchoring the Stroll at the Southeast Corner of 5th and K Streets, Washington, DC

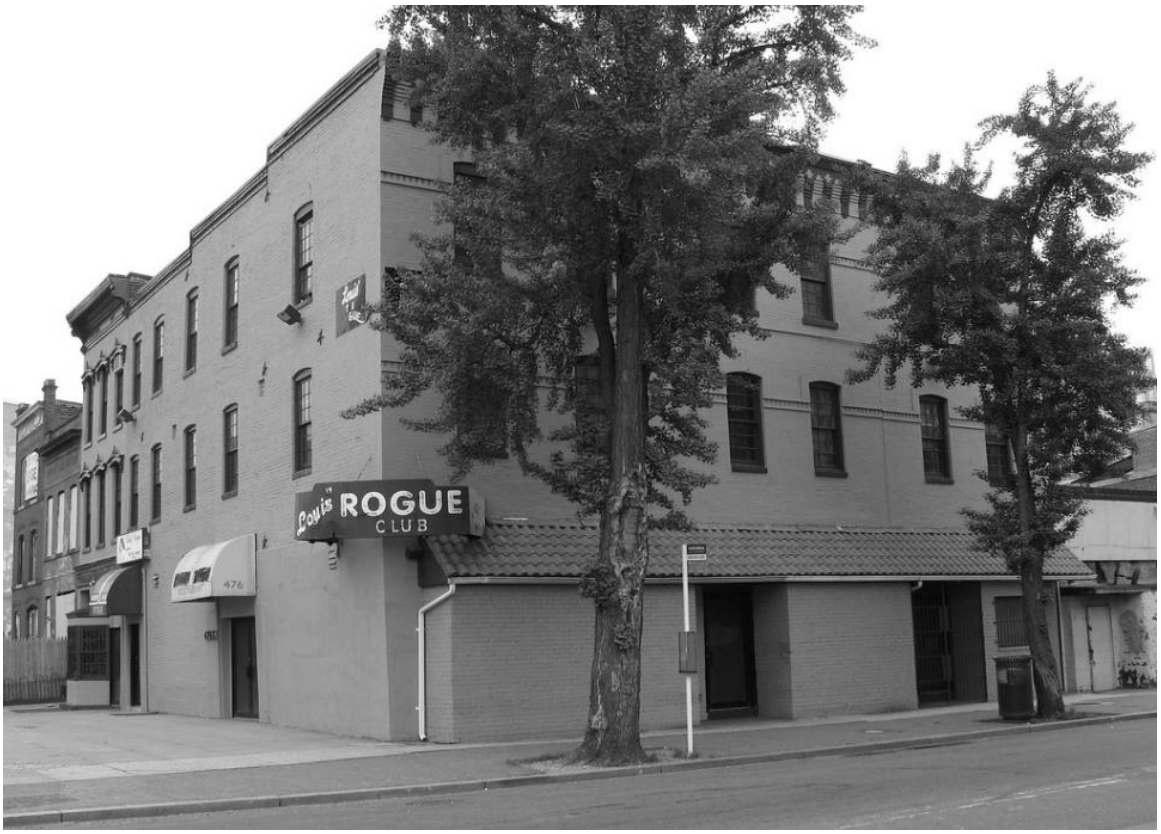


Photo Credit: Flickr

The *Stroll's* geographic domain fluctuated, extending between four and ten city blocks, establishing a striated spatial order based on intertwined notions of visibility and passability. Trans women considered more 'passable' or 'high caller' girls patronized the coveted 'Showcase Boulevard' along 7th Street. Conversely, those with fewer 'passing' privileges were relegated to the eastern end, nearer to the obscured 'Mud Duck Lane' or 3rd Street. This spatial hierarchy was further pronounced by the shadow cast by the Museum Square apartment building, a subsidized

housing project (see Figure 7). Occupying a liminal and underutilized urban zone, the *Stroll* provided a haven for Black trans women to exist without constant challenges or harassment (Savela, 2023).

Figure 7.

"Section 8"- Museum Square

Source: D.C. Office of Zoning archives. Exhibit 34 from Z.C. Case No. 88-30.

Meanwhile, the *Stroll's* location along K Street, a major thoroughfare within the broader road network, ensured continuous traffic flow, enabling Black trans women to assert their presence in public. By offering attractive rates, trans women overcame the limitations of their geographic liminality by luring mobile capital to their claimed turf, fiercely competing with their cisgender counterparts (Heap, 2003). The interplay between physical spaces and the lives of Black trans women was manifested in elements such as setbacks, sidewalks, strip clubs, and

street corners. These overlooked urban elements transformed into empowering spaces, shaping experiences and opportunities in the face of societal challenges (Ferguson, 2004; Shaw, 2013). The *Stroll* ultimately serves as a microcosm, reflecting the resilience and adaptability of the Black trans community in urban settings while shedding light on the nuanced relationship between physical space and their experiences.

Reimagining the Dominant Spatial Order

Here she is again, strolling K Street, her black skirt very short, her black top very tight…With long hair, long legs, and freshly shaved skin, Taneka, 21, heads to Fifth Street, then back to Third. The sidewalks are dimly lit. Two patrons from the nearby Louis' Rogue Go-Go Lounge pass her. The clock ticks 12:05 a.m.

- *The Washington Post*, August 22, 2003.

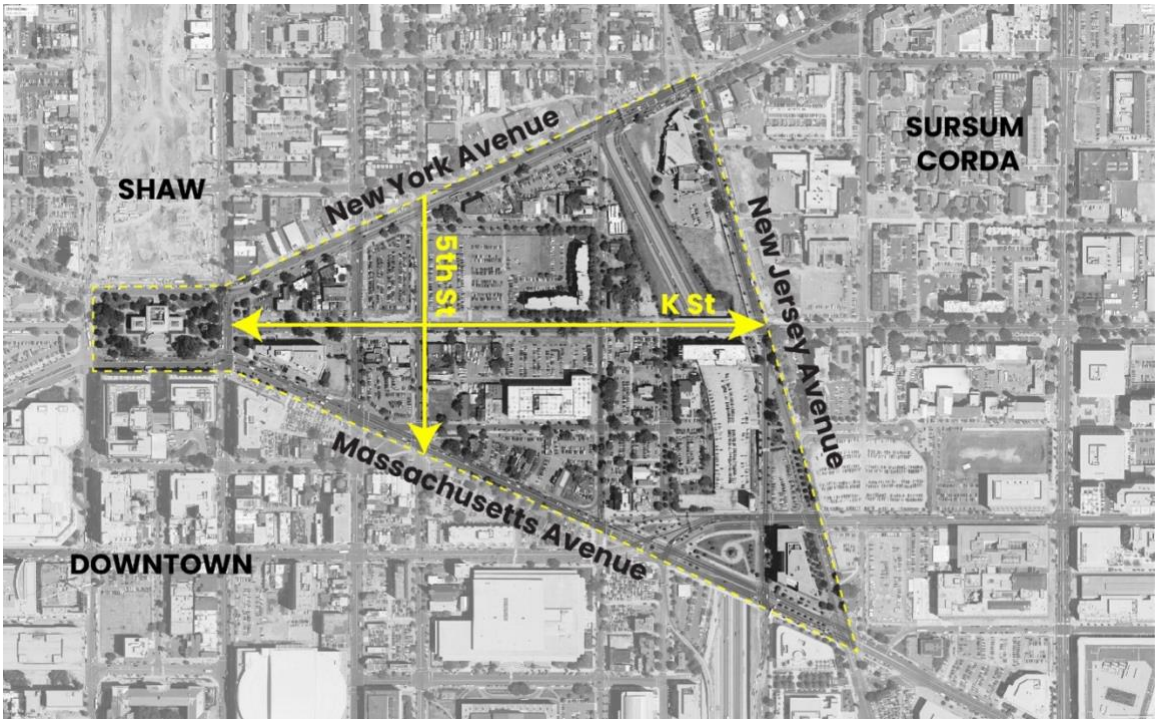
At the turn of the 21st century, the area east of Mount Vernon Square in Washington, DC, served as a stark reminder of the shortcomings of modernist planning ideals that dominated the previous century. This neglected and underutilized zone sat between the city's bustling downtown core and the neighboring residential communities of Shaw and Sursum Corda (Figure 8). With only a few scattered structures, most of the terrain was dominated by vacant lots and surface parking, resulting in a lack of vitality, identity, and character that resembled what Marc Augé conceptualized as a 'non-place' (Augé, 1995). These shortcomings highlight a failure to integrate diverse urban functions and foster social connections, a critique central to urban design discourse (Jacobs, 1961; Whyte, 1980).

However, as the sun set and the parking lots emptied, the landscape transformed into a catalyst for social change. The dormant buildings and vacant lots became hubs of subversive nocturnal activity. Under the cover of darkness, these spaces offered alternative venues for self-expression and countercultural activity. Within this nocturnal landscape, marginalized communities, particularly Black transgender individuals, found empowerment and a sense of

belonging. Situated at 5th and K Streets, the *Stroll* emerged as a site of resistance, resilience, and self-determination, encapsulating the entanglement between the built environment and the spatial embodiments of marginalized groups.

Figure 8.

The Stroll at the Heart of Mount Vernon Triangle, Washington, DC



Source: Google Earth historical satellite imagery dated April 1999. Created by the author.

The journey of Yazmina from Addis Ababa to Washington, DC, and the memories of the Black trans women who frequented the *Stroll* embody Katherine McKittrick's (2006) concept of "Black geographies." McKittrick (2006) posits that Black women's geographies are often linked to sites of struggle, which serve as transformative spaces for alternative knowledge, resistance, and identity formations. The spatial experiences of Black trans women in the *Stroll* similarly challenge dominant narratives and contribute to a broader understanding of Black geographies. Their stories reveal spaces that transcend traditional boundaries, rooted in the complexity and fragility of Black trans women's lives. These liminal spaces resist racialized, gendered, and sexualized habitation patterns and offer a transformative arena for empowerment, reflection, and identity formation. The physical landscape of the *Stroll* illustrates how seemingly mundane urban elements, such as building setbacks, occupancy types, and public transit networks, can converge to create transformative spaces for the marginalized Black transgender community, showcasing the profound power of ordinary spaces in shaping social realities. This chapter uncovers the transformative potential of everyday spaces, going beyond the city's symbolic representation to reveal hidden worlds. It highlights how planning and urban policy significantly influence the physical composition of our towns and cities and how they can either facilitate or impede subversive urban phenomena, such as the *Stroll*, with profound implications for marginalized communities. Reevaluating past architectural and urban planning approaches presents new avenues for rethinking future urban development and fostering more inclusive and equitable cities.

‘Quare’ Cartographies

At just fifteen years old, Alexis Blackmon took to the streets of *K Street* in the summer of '96. As a native Washingtonian, Blackmon's upbringing in the historic Shaw neighborhood was

deeply rooted in the pride and struggles of a community shaped by race, poverty, and crime. Her lineage can be traced back to the rebellious spirit of Nat Turner, a legacy that fuels her aspirations. However, her early existence was framed by the powerful 1512 cartel, a force in the drug trade centered around the Kelsey Gardens public housing complex. These connections offered protection but also confined Alexis within rigid norms, forcing her to reconcile her trans identity with hyper-masculine expectations bound in fear and dominance.

Growing up during the tumultuous 1980s AIDS crisis and the 1990s drug and murder epidemics in Washington, DC, Alexis was no stranger to violence and hardship. Her trans identity remained an unspoken truth, hidden away to protect both herself and her family's reputation. The pressure to conform and suppress her identity in favor of strength and masculinity was a constant undercurrent in her life. Nevertheless, five blocks from her Shaw home, the *Stroll* beckoned the young Alexis. A haven on the periphery of her neighborhood, this liminal zone gave Alexis a respite from her strictly heterosexist community, connecting her with fellow trans and queer individuals seeking mutual understanding and companionship. Living with her grandmother in Kelsey Gardens, Alexis was intimately familiar with the nocturnal landscape. Her cognitive mapping of the *Stroll*, illustrated in Figure 9, vividly captures the defining elements of this late-'90s urban geography, providing an insightful lens to interrogate urban politics and spatial governance.

Figure 9.

The Stroll: A Black Trans Cartography

A mental sketch of the *Stroll*, authored by Alexis Blackmon on the right, 2021. Image used with permission.

Alexis's mental map delineates the *Stroll* as manifesting primarily along K Street, characterized by its east-west orientation spanning three blocks from 4th to 6th Streets. In contrast, its north-south expanse is more constricted, covering just about a block on the southern end and bound to the north by a segment of L Street, colloquially termed the 'Drug Strip.' Central to this geography lies the intersection of 5th and K Streets, with the southeast corner anchored by the strip club premises. Adjoining this landmark establishment, vacant structures line K Street, ending mid-block where an alley bisects the square. The block's eastern portion stands empty. To the north, the 'Welfare Building,' a public housing establishment, remains the sole indication of human occupancy within the *Stroll's* threshold. Vast parking lots characterize the northern part of this intersection, echoing Yazmina's insight: "The genius of these women was in selecting an area that wasn't a neighborhood. We disturbed no one given its largely

abandoned nature." Within the same block, as depicted in Alexis' map, a 'Sex Bookstore' faces 5th Street. Directly across, another unoccupied building reputedly served as a frequented "dating" location. Nearby, at the northwest corner of 6th and K Streets, the forsaken remnants of a former hair salon, now labeled 'Sex House,' are rumored to have been a locus for "sexual transactions."

Alexis' illustrative map of the *Stroll* transcends mere pictorial representation, acting as an analytical prism that sheds light on the covert dynamics and systemic forces shaping the planning decisions that birthed such marginalized spaces. E. Patrick Johnson's concept of 'quare' spaces—localized, specific experiences that confront mainstream narratives—anchors the analysis, providing a fresh lens to comprehend these spatial realities' manifestations and repercussions (Johnson, 2001). In forthcoming chapters, I delve into the entrenched planning strategies that have fostered the emergence of these borderland spaces. Alexis's map, while profoundly revealing, becomes a gateway to explore the uncharted—the absent spaces inviting inquiry. These voids are not just omissions but silent attestations to urban renewal's lingering impact, especially in the Mount Vernon Triangle area.

Chapter Three – From L'Enfant to the Zoning Act: Tracing the Liminal Evolution of Mount Vernon Triangle from 1791-1946

Exploring the built environment necessitates grasping the contentious relationships between planning visions, urban realities, and the underlying socioeconomic forces that drive these visions and realities. Cities are continuously created and recreated, embodying histories, memories, and experiences of diverse individuals and communities (Rossi, 1982). Such continuous layering informs the evolving character of urban spaces, determining their usage and latent potential for transformation. Recognizing that understanding the past profoundly affects our perception of the present, in this chapter, I chart the spatial evolution of the Mount Vernon Triangle area in Washington, DC, from 1791 through the end of World War II. This place-based approach is informed by scholars like Doreen Massey (2005), who promoted a multifaceted understanding of cities as amalgamations of histories, experiences, and trajectories. By examining Mount Vernon Triangle's spatial evolution through this lens, the analysis becomes a nuanced examination, revealing the intricate interplay between urban transformation, marginalization, and identity. Moreover, this chapter also burrows from historical sociology, extending the lens of formation stories defined as the "processes of assemblage" to understand Mount Vernon Triangle's formation narrative (Hirschman & Reed, 2014, p. 267).

This chapter primarily spotlights the 19th-century trajectory of Mount Vernon Triangle, delving into its emergence from an overlooked peripheral area to a site of burgeoning importance within the urban landscape. This transformation was profoundly rooted in community dynamics and social relations, with the working-class nature of Mount Vernon Triangle resisting middle-class speculative ventures. The chapter suggests that this resistance forged a unique and somewhat insular enclave sustained through community investment, social capital, and the power of local agency. Transitioning into the early 20th century, the chapter examines how

Mount Vernon Triangle adapted to broader cultural shifts, such as the advent of the automobile industry—this period marked a significant change in the urban fabric, influenced by technological advancements and shifting societal norms. With the neighborhood's emergence as a major commuter route, commercial intensification was underway well before the introduction of zoning in 1920. Nonetheless, the chapter argues that adopting zoning was more than a mere reflection of this transformation but also an influential force that significantly shaped the neighborhood's trajectory, steering its development and determining its future evolution well into the 21st century.

By contextualizing zoning's implementation in the U.S. capital within the era's broader sociocultural milieu, this chapter views zoning through the critical lens of race and class implications. It posits that the genesis of zoning in Washington, DC, mirrored and responded to the prevailing sociocultural attitudes and forces of its time. By nestling the zoning discussion within the extensive historical backdrop of the Progressive Era, the chapter bridges the gap between the technical and the social, unearthing entrenched biases and nuances easily overlooked in mainstream urban discourse. This historical exploration is pivotal, laying the foundation for subsequent chapters by shedding light on the complex relationship between the past and present in shaping urban experiences, specifically as they relate to the hidden realms of subversive practices like the *Stroll*.

Early Visions and Realities: From L'Enfant to Northern Liberties

Lines or Avenues of direct communication have been devised to connect the separate and most distant objects with the principal and to preserve through the whole a reciprocity of sight at the same time. The situation of squares is such that they are the most advantageously and reciprocally seen from each other, and as equally distributed over the whole City district, and connected by spacious Avenues round the grand Federal Improvements, and as contiguous to

them, and at the same time as equally distant from each other, as circumstances would permit. The settlements' round these Squares must soon become connected.

- Notes, *L'Enfant Plan*, 1792

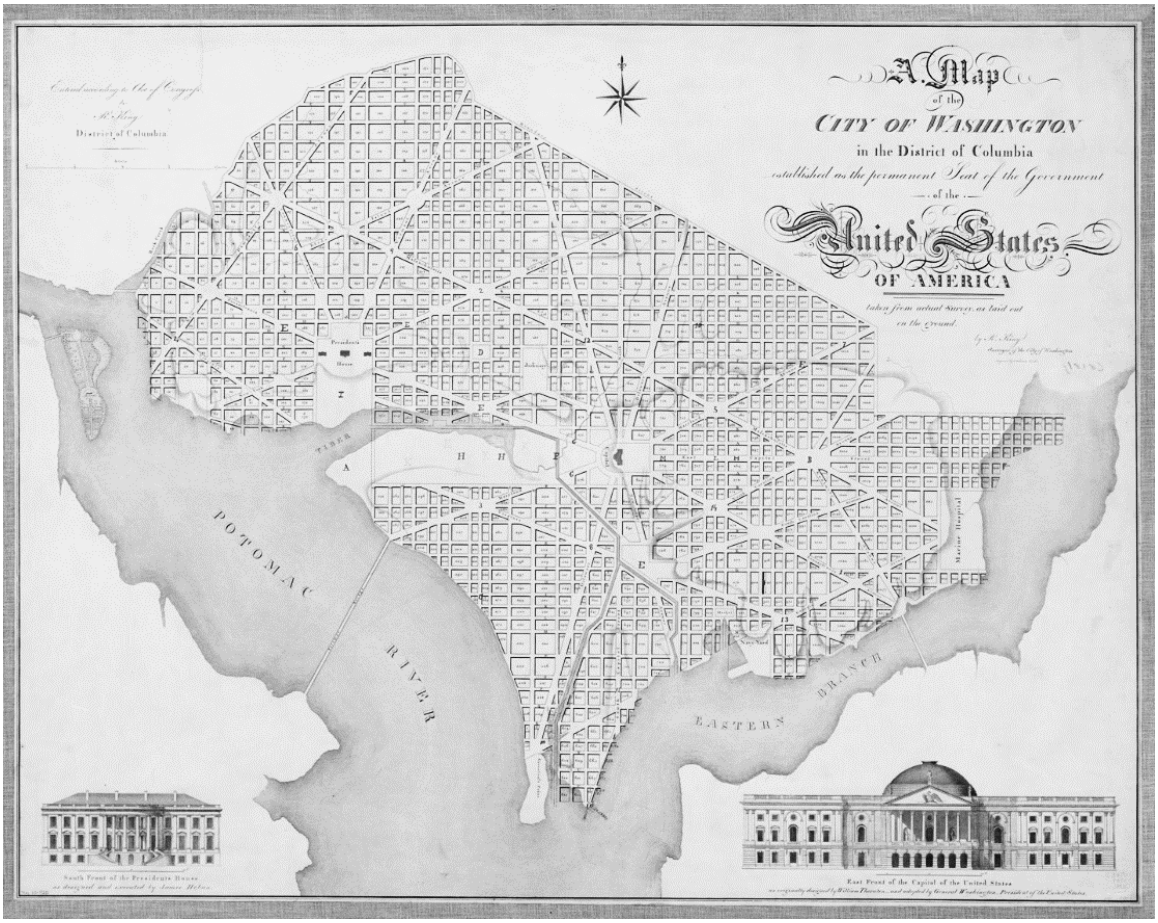
The genesis of the Mount Vernon Triangle neighborhood traces back to the establishment of Washington, DC, as the capital of the United States, which saw an ambitious plan laid out by Charles Pierre L'Enfant. The ensuing discussion contextualizes this nascent plan and underscores how L'Enfant's utopian vision grappled with the urban realities of the time. The blueprint for the federal city emerged against the backdrop of a regional socioeconomic milieu deeply rooted in a slave society. Within this setting, the physical landscape was dominated by sprawling plantations owned by powerful elites. When the *Residence Act* was ratified in 1791, designating the location for the future capital, slavery was a profoundly ingrained and ubiquitous aspect of daily life in the fields of southern Maryland and northern Virginia (Asch & Musgrove, 2017). At the city's founding, the geography constituting the Mount Vernon Triangle area lay within two land tracts known as Port Royal and Beals Levels. In 1791, a land subdivision led to Dominick Lynch and Comfort Sands of New York City acquiring the eastern third of Port Royal and Benjamin Oden procuring the east portion of Beals Levels. Together, these territories would coalesce into what we now recognize as the Mount Vernon Triangle (Bowling, 1991).

In 1791, Major L'Enfant was commissioned by President George Washington to design a capital city that would embody the ideals and principles of the young republic, aiming to surpass the established capitals of Western powers (Berg, 2008). L'Enfant's completed plan, unveiled in 1792, heavily emphasized visual harmony and reciprocity of sight. The design featured a gridiron layout, with east-west streets denoted by letters of the alphabet (up to the letter 'W') and north-south streets identified numerically. Overlaid atop this grid was an axial system of radiating avenues named after the states of the Union (Figure 10). These broad diagonal avenues

were intended to function as vistas connecting symbolic landmarks and significant monuments, thereby offering uninterrupted views (Kite, 1929). Among them, New York Avenue was conceived as an eastern artery, linking Maryland directly to the White House and thus serving as a processional route for visitors entering the city from its eastern gateway. Mount Vernon Triangle, a 30-acre site situated within the broader East End area of Washington, DC, is defined by New York and Massachusetts Avenues. These avenues radiate east from Mount Vernon Square to New Jersey Avenue, rendering the site of Mount Vernon Triangle a prominent feature of the L'Enfant Plan (Figure 11).

Figure 10.

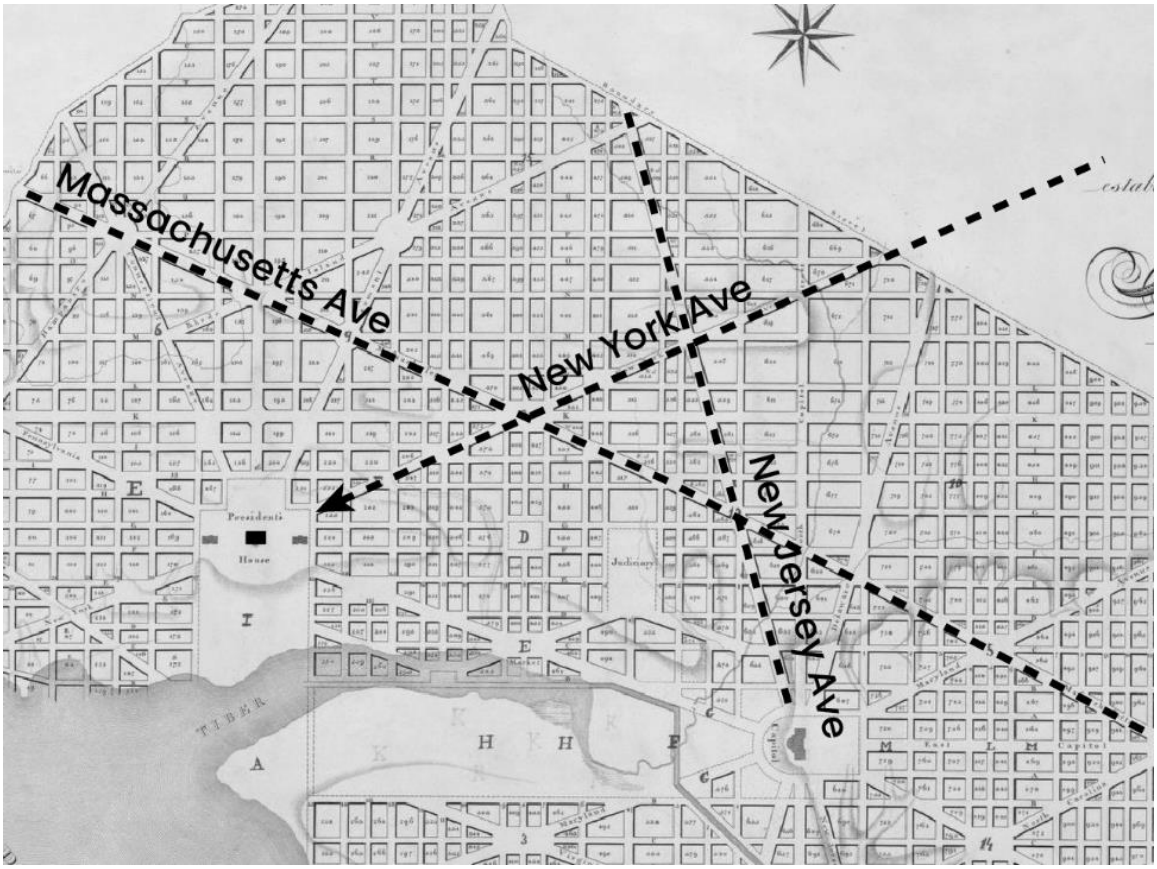
City of Washington by L'Enfant



"A map of the city of Washington in the District of Columbia: established as the permanent seat of the government of the United States of America." [Washington: W. Cooper] Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/map65001120/.

Figure 11.

Mount Vernon Triangle's Prominence in L'Enfant's Scheme



"A map of the city of Washington in the District of Columbia: established as the permanent seat of the government of the United States of America." [Washington: W. Cooper] Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/map65001120/. Created by the author.

Despite its prominence within L'Enfant's plan, development in the Mount Vernon area Triangle initially languished, as settlements during the first half of the 19th century were primarily concentrated in Georgetown, the Navy Yard, and the stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the Capitol (Gillette, 1995). The area's distance from the city's primary functions, compounded by the lack of infrastructure, hampered its development. In 1809, Congress enacted legislation that would reinforce its peripheral status. This decision,

which prohibited free-roaming pigs south of Massachusetts Avenue, established Massachusetts Avenue as the city's northern limit, leading to the Mount Vernon Triangle area being referred to as "Northern Liberties," a common nickname for areas beyond city limits (Goode, 2003, pp. 304-305).

The transformation of the 7th Street Turnpike into a vital commercial corridor in 1822, connecting Center Marker at Pennsylvania Avenue to Rockville, Maryland, catalyzed early growth in Northern Liberties. Coupled with the city's burgeoning population, the improved 7th Street fueled commercial expansion toward Massachusetts Avenue (Trieschmann, 1999). L'Enfant's innovative design for the city orchestrated urban focal points through intersecting avenues and gridiron streets, crafting distinctive public spaces. These spaces were envisioned as symbolic nodes, allocated among the states in the Union for embellishment with "Statues, Columns, obelisks, or any other ornaments..." to memorialize American achievements (Hoagland, 1990, p. 80). Among the initial fifteen planned squares, or "reservations," Reservation No. 8 later evolved into Mount Vernon Square. Rather than serving as a platform for symbolic monuments, this square saw pragmatic improvements, beginning with a firehouse station erected in 1840 to serve the growing community's needs (Topham, 1922, p. 48). Then, in 1846, following a successful community petition, President James Polk authorized federal funding, establishing a public market on the square's eastern portion facing 7th Street and fueling commercial developments to resume north of Massachusetts Avenue (Trieschmann, 1999).

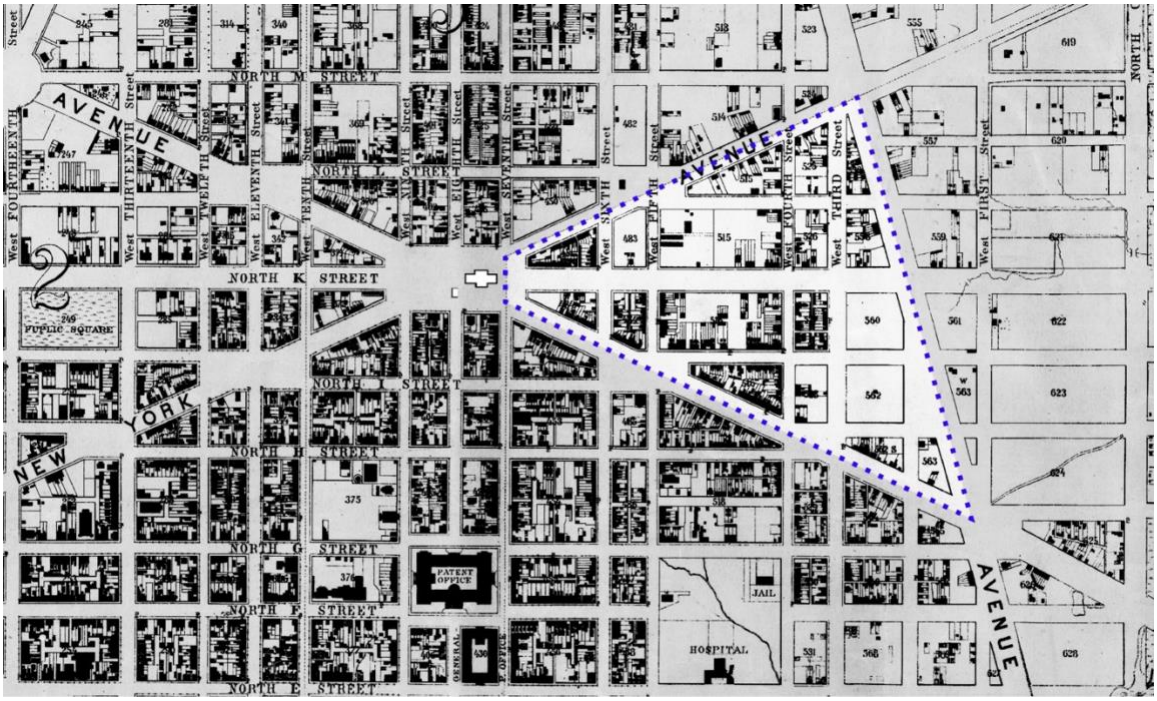
The Northern Liberties public market became a key focal point for a burgeoning immigrant community, significantly shaped by a working-class nucleus of German merchants. Capitalizing on the bustling corridor near the market building at Mount Vernon Square's eastern edge, they specialized in dry goods merchandising and artisanal trades, laying the groundwork

for a dynamic working-class community (Trieschmann, 1999). The German heritage of the area was immortalized in the names of store owners and builders that once populated the 1000-block stretch of 7th Street (Williams, 2006, p. E8). Though many tangible reminders have faded, St. Mary's Catholic Church at 724 5th Street endures as a symbol of the growing German Catholic immigrant population it has embraced since 1845 (Fogle, 1990).

By the mid-1800s, the Northern Liberties community, anchored by German immigrants, became synonymous with modest two-story wood-frame rowhouses, their continuous side gable roofs and plain facades reflecting its working-class identity. While most of these early structures have vanished, enduring religious institutions in the area today, including an African-American Baptist church, a German Catholic church, and a synagogue, resonate with the diverse cultural landscape of the time, weaving together a multifaceted geography marked by immigration, commerce, and cultural pluralism. As Northern Liberties flourished, growth methodically extended into the vacant lots east of the square, albeit constrained to 7th Street and adjacent squares, underscoring the limitations of urban expansion and a development bias towards the city's west end (Figure 12). The dramatic metamorphosis of Mount Vernon Triangle was set in motion by a decisive act in 1872, undertaken by the District's newly established Territorial Government—a catalyst that shaped the area's destiny.

Figure 12.

1870 Development in Northern Liberties with Mount Vernon Triangle Delineated in Blue



Blodget, L., Blodget, S. & District of Columbia. Board Of Commissioners. (1870) *Estate of Samuel Blodget, Jr.: one of the founders of the city of Washington, D.C.: Jamaica, Washington D.C.* Image courtesy of the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/88690869/. Created by the author.

Northern Liberty Market: Birth of a Neighborhood

On September 3, 1872, at about eight o'clock in the evening, a large force of workmen in the employ of the Board of Public Works suddenly appeared at the Northern Liberty Market at Seventh and Massachusetts Avenue with picks and axes and rapidly tore down the buildings and sheds and cleared the square. Some of the dealers were on hand arranging their stocks and display for the following morning; other dealers hearing of the demolition of their properties, promptly appeared on the scene and remonstrated with the workmen, but no effective resistance or delay was offered.

- Washington Topham, *Eyewitness Account*, September 3, 1872

The true catalyst for urban transformation in Mount Vernon Triangle occurred during the short-lived reign of the District's Territorial Government, established by Congress in February 1871. This newly organized governing entity included a legislative assembly, a governor, and a five-member Board of Public Works, significantly limiting the political freedoms of District residents (Asch & Musgrove, 2017). The Board of Public Works, under the authoritative command of Alexander "Boss" Shepherd, embarked on a bold mission to revamp and modernize the capital's urban landscape. These sweeping changes, such as creating public sewers and enhancing parks and public spaces, dramatically altered the city's physical and social makeup (Asch & Musgrove, 2017).

The Board also sought to rehabilitate the city's aging public facilities, including the deteriorating Northern Liberties market building, a symbol of the broader issue of inadequate sanitation within public structures. It had exhibited signs of deterioration even before the Civil War, and a faction of the local citizenry sought its removal as early as 1860, calling it an "intolerable nuisance" (Olszewski, 1970, p.7). Their pleas were ignored until the Territorial Government rose to power in 1871. The decision to condemn the market the following year incited outrage. Alexander Shepherd's stern declaration faced the vendors' impassioned pleas for preservation (Topham, 1922, p. 55), but their appeals fell on deaf ears. In a decisive move, Shepherd ordered a large demolition crew to raze the structure overnight on September 3, 1872, incurring the loss of life and property and igniting years of litigation (Olszewski, 1970, p. 8).

This drastic measure fragmented the community as some vendors were relocated to the new Center Market building that opened in July of that year, while others sought refuge in temporary sheds further north on 7th Street (Topham, 1922, p. 57). Uniting through their shared loss, a consortium of vendors founded the Northern Liberty Market Company Association in

1873—a grassroots insurgency (Miraftab, 2009)—marking the birth of a new Northern Liberty Market. In 1874, they acquired "Savage Square" at the northeast corner of 5th and K Streets for $110,000, and construction began in earnest that same year (Topham, 1922, p. 60).

Figure 13.

The New Northern Liberty Market: A Neighborhood Landmark

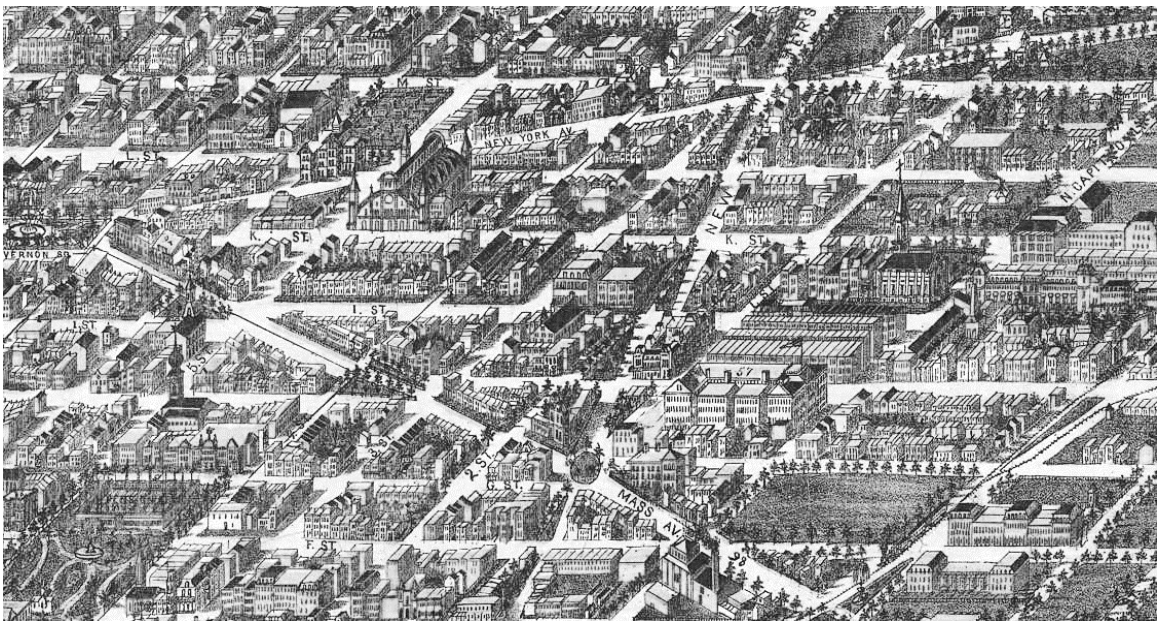
The former Northern Liberty Market from the southwest corner of 5th and K Streets in 1920. The market had already transformed to become Convention Hall Market. Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Designed by James H. McGill, the finished structure shown in Figure 13 was an architectural marvel, complete with red-brick walls, granite trim, and an imposing 200 tons of iron for roof trusses. At its 1875 unveiling, the building was hailed as a technological masterpiece and poised to outrank the recently opened Center Market on Pennsylvania Avenue

(Topham, 1922, p. 60). Despite the much-anticipated success, its relocation two blocks east posed challenges, resulting in declining business. Various contributing factors, including the economic panic of 1873 and the market's considerable distance from the main transportation artery along 7th Street, were attributed to its misfortune (Topham, 1922, p. 65). Nevertheless, the market became an anchor for the community that migrated east with it, featuring prominently in the urban landscape. As depicted in Sasche's Bird's Eye View, "The National Capital, Washington, D.C. Sketched from nature" (1883-84) (Figure 14), the Mount Vernon Triangle area seemingly matured by the mid-1880s, with buildings lining its streets and alleys. A Water Department survey conducted in 1875 indicates that most buildings were initially residential (D.C. Commissioners' Report, 1875-76), and the emergence of schools, churches, and a fire station by the late 19th century signals a crystallizing residential community (1887 G.M. Hopkins Map).

Figure 14.

A Matured Mount Vernon Triangle in the Late-1800s



Sasche's Bird's Eye View, "The National Capital, Washington, D.C. Sketched from nature" (1883-84). Image courtesy of the Library of Congress.

While developments were predominantly residential, the promise of the new market inspired commercial speculation in the neighborhood, especially near the market, in squares forming its perimeter (D.C. Commissioners' Report, 1875-76). Indeed, the three-story brick building at 472 K Street, adjacent to the premises that would anchor the *Stroll* more than a century later, was among the earliest speculative developments in Mount Vernon Triangle built in response to the market (Figure 15). Although its earliest function remains unknown, city directories indicate that, since 1890, the owner, German immigrant William Rupertus, operated a saloon on the ground floor while residing upstairs (Williams, 2006). Such dual-purpose dwelling-type constructions reflected prevailing development patterns in many urban centers at the time, particularly among working-class communities, where owners partitioned their homes

into distinct functions, usually dedicating the street level for commercial use while maintaining the upper floors as residential quarters (Krutilla & Fisher, 1975; Trieschmann, 1999).

Figure 15.

Beneath the Neon Glow – A Burgeoning Trans Community

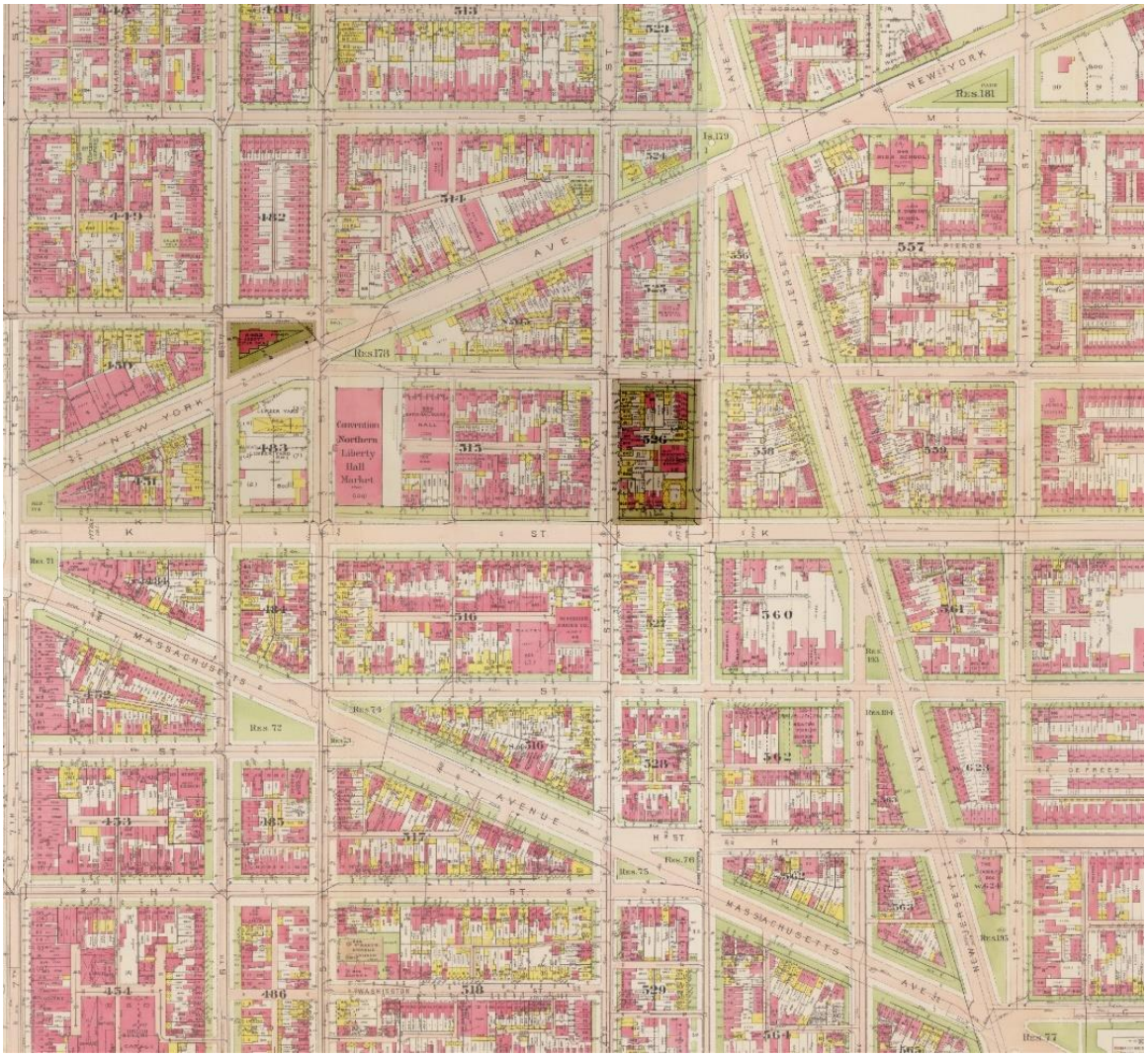
472 K Street, NW, looking east. Image retrieved from "Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District Nomination Registration Form," resubmitted to the National Register of Historic Places, 2006, p. 40.

At the turn of the 20th century, Mount Vernon Triangle had matured into an established mixed-use community. After the Northern Liberty Market changed ownership in 1891, a second floor was installed, leveraging the cavernous open space above the stalls for social functions. "Washington is no longer a convention city without a convention hall," proclaimed *The*

Washington Post in May 1893 upon viewing the newly instituted venue ("Convention Hall Viewed," 1893, p. 2). The transformed Convention Hall Market. had a reported capacity of up to 10,000 people on the second floor, hosting an array of events and ceremonies, from concerts, graduations, and labor rallies to unique exhibitions and attractions, including a temporary ice-skating rink installed in January 1986 ("One Thousand on Skates," 1896, p. 4). Reflecting the area's changing demographics and needs, the venue symbolized the neighborhood's cultural diversity and communal vitality. Nevertheless, within this vibrant landscape, a racial hierarchy was evident, with African Americans often relegated to dwellings in less desirable alleyways hidden from the public realm, a manifestation of the segregation and discrimination characterizing the era (Borchert, 1980). The presence of two elementary schools, the Banneker Colored School at 3rd and K Street and the all-white Abbott Public School, merely two blocks apart, offers a profound glimpse into the spatially segregated landscape of Mount Vernon Triangle (Figure 16).

Figure 16.

Banneker Colored & Abbott Elementary: Racial Divisions



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Washington, District of Columbia, District of Columbia. Sanborn Map Company, - 1916 Vol. 3, 1916. [Map] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn01227_004/

Mount Vernon Triangle also benefited from the initiatives of the Board of Public Works, mainly through the expansion of the streetcar network. By 1884, horse-drawn streetcars traversed Massachusetts Avenue and 4th Street (Williams, 2006, p. E10). In addition, 1888 saw the

inauguration of the city's first electric streetcar line along New York Avenue, extending northeast from Mount Vernon Square to the newly developed subdivision of Eckington at Boundary Street—present-day Florida Avenue (Williams, 2006, p. E10). These significant infrastructural enhancements contributed to a construction surge that swept across the city, with speculative ventures accounting for approximately 50% of all buildings during the 1870s, jumping to 75% by the mid-1880s (Trieschmann, 1999).

In sharp contrast to its appearance at the century's outset, the late 1800s witnessed Mount Vernon Triangle assuming a central geography within Washington's expanding urban landscape. Its prime location near downtown and the federal core, alongside significant transit routes, fostered an environment ripe for development. While these attributes encouraged some middle-class residential speculation, the prevailing working-class character of the area deterred large-scale investment in residential construction (Williams, 2006, p. E10). Consequently, the developments in Mount Vernon Triangle were often modest and reflective of smaller-scale investments by community members themselves. The neighborhood's strategic proximity to essential federal structures, such as the Government Printing Office headquarters on North Capitol Street (circa 1900), drew white-collar government workers, though this influx primarily consisted of renters, indicative of a more transient middle-class demographic (Trieschmann, 1999). A prime example of this trend is the Jefferson Apartment at 315 H Street, a speculative building completed in 1899 in direct response to the nearby Printing Office (Topham, 1922, p. 60). Despite these shifts, the Mount Vernon Triangle area preserved a unique liminal quality, where socioeconomic marginality intersected with spatial centrality, fostering a somewhat insular urban enclave during a transformative era in the nation’s capital.

Commercial Expansion and Zoning Enforcement

Every resident in the District should be interested in the development of a plan for control of building operations. All have witnessed the injury caused by haphazard building. They have witnessed the encroachment of garages, stables, and factories into residential districts.

- Charles Willauer Kutz, *The Washington Post*, February 23, 1919

The transformation of the Mount Vernon Triangle neighborhood was an evolutionary process rooted in commercial ventures. Construction of the Northern Liberty Market building at 5th and K Streets was the catalyst that shaped the area's early development, infusing the neighborhood with vibrant commercial activity and laying the groundwork for a series of speculative business undertakings. Early commercial ventures were modest and primarily confined to the market's immediate surroundings, particularly within the square that anchored the *Stroll* directly south of the market (D.C. Commissioners' Report, 1875-76). From the mid-1880s, Prathers Alley, nestled within this square, burgeoned into a hub for diverse residential, commercial, and light industrial activities, including a bakery, a tin shop, numerous privately owned stables, and several alley dwellings occupied by African American families (Sefton & Williams, 2006).

The expansion of enterprises like Charles Schneider's bakery and John Bowles' dairy bottling plant was pivotal in transforming Prathers Alley, and eventually the square, into a manufacturing zone (Sefton & Williams, 2006). These early changes, however, were not without consequences, as industrial and commercial expansions in Prathers Alley incurred the loss of dwellings, engendering the displacement of primarily African-American residents. For instance, two years after establishing his bottling plant in Prathers Alley in 1904, Bowles acquired the property at 462 K Street as a speculative venture. In 1906, he built a three-story brick townhouse comprising three apartment units, hoping to lure middle-class tenants (Figure 17). To this end,

Bowles oversaw the razing of the wood frame dwelling that previously occupied the site and was home to three Black families, displacing all fifteen of its residents (Sefton & Williams, 2006).

Figure 17.

Local Speculations

John Bowles' developments at 460-62 K Street, NW, looking west. Image retrieved from "Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District Nomination Registration Form," resubmitted to the National Register of Historic Places, 2006, p. 38.

While these developments marked a significant change, the real catalyst for Mount Vernon Triangle's transformation into a commercial zone was the advent of the automobile. Washington's first automobile exhibition at Convention Hall in December 1900 was an early harbinger of the seismic shifts looming for the neighborhood. With the emergence of New York

Avenue as a vital commuter artery, the community's entrepreneurs saw an opportunity. Individuals like William Beuchert were among the first to capitalize on this, transitioning from owning stables to trading real estate and ultimately opening Central Auto Works (Figure 18), a two-story automotive repair garage that replaced a former dwelling at 451 I Street (Sefton & Williams, 2006).

Beuchert's entrepreneurial venture was not an isolated effort but emblematic of a broader trend. New automobile-related establishments such as garages, gas stations, and showrooms sprouted along New York Avenue, K Street, and the side streets traversing the neighborhood. This shift in business focus resulted in the replacement of residential buildings and symbolized a transformative period in the neighborhood's history, epitomized by structures like the bygone Lord Baltimore Gas Station and the Hartig Motor Company building (Sefton & Williams, 2006). The evolution of the Mount Vernon Triangle area during the early 20th century, in response to the advent of the automobile and the growth of the suburbs, had profound implications, altering its landscape from a formerly pedestrian-oriented space to an increasingly automobile-oriented zone. During this transition, the neighborhood’s residential stock declined as former dwellings were either repurposed for commercial uses or replaced entirely, often resulting in the displacement of marginalized groups, namely African Americans – a significant consequence that must not be overlooked.

Figure 18.

A Neighborhood in Transition

Beuchert's Central Auto Works at 451-55 I Street, NW, looking north. Image retrieved from "Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District Nomination Registration Form," resubmitted to the National Register of Historic Places, 2006, p. 50.

Less than a year after Beuchert established his Central Auto Works business, zoning was formally introduced in Washington, DC, on March 1, 1920, ushering in a new regulatory framework that would profoundly shape the trajectory of Mount Vernon Triangle's evolution well into the 21st century. While the origin of zoning in the United States is often traced back to New York City's 1916 Zoning Resolution, designed to prevent overdevelopment and protect property values by regulating building height, bulk, and landuse (Kwartler & Longo, 2008), the practice was not entirely new to Washington, DC. Instead, the evolution of zoning in the nation's

capital has a long and convoluted history that extends back to the city's initial founding in the late 18th century.

As the first planned capital of the modern world, building regulations were intrinsic to Washington's development from the outset (Hoagland, 1990). Beginning with George Washington's building regulations in 1791, the drive to regulate building height and materials was framed as an aesthetic imperative to ensure uniformity and preserve the capital's appearance (Foglesong, 2016; Hoagland, 1990). These embryonic regulations were initially met with resistance and subsequently eased in 1796 (Hoagland, 1989), suggesting early tensions between regulation and development (Tarr, 1984). Throughout the 19th century, regulation continued to evolve, focusing on fire safety, structural integrity, and sanitation, including the first set of comprehensive municipal building codes issued in 1872 by the Territorial Government's Board of Public Works, which mandated obtaining building permits for the first time (Gillette, 2011). Indeed, these early forms of building regulations informed the spatial features of the *Stroll,* including the previously discussed setbacks that anchored its geography at 5th and K Streets. Nonetheless, the introduction of landuse zoning in the U.S. capital in the early 20th century, following the lead of other major cities, was an innovative tool that ushered in a new era of urban governance that, for the first time, empowered authorities to govern the uses of private space.

Soon after New York City established comprehensive zoning in 1916, Washington decision-makers rallied for a similar approach to be implemented in the nation's capital ("Bill Provides Building Regulations," 1916, p. 2). Concerns about outdated rules and obstacles to development were shared among various commercial and civic organizations, leading to calls for a zoning system that would allow for more specific distinctions, such as apartment districts, manufacturing sections, and commercial areas. In response to these concerns, the District

commissioners appointed a small committee to shape recommendations to Congress for a law that would embody a comprehensive and modern plan (“Take Up Capital Building Plans,” 1919, p. 16). The zoning process in Washington, DC, was kickstarted by a congressional act, establishing the Zoning Commission and empowering it with zoning authority. The five-member Zoning Commission consisted of the three-member Board of Commissioners elected to govern the city and two statutory members appointed by the federal government, including the officer in charge of the buildings and grounds of the District of Columbia, which in 1934 became known as the officer in charge of the National Parks Service, and the Superintendent of the U.S. Capitol Building and Grounds, later renamed the Architect of the Capitol (“Building Zones Planned for City,” 1919, p. 9). This small group of men was entrusted to rearrange future structures and designate city sections for specific landuses.

Under the guidance of the influential modernist planner Harland Bartholomew, the zoning plan divided the city into discrete, non-overlapping areas, and each assigned one of the following landuse designations: "Residential and Public Property," "1st Commercial District," "2nd Commercial District," and "Industrial District." The plan imposed the most stringent land-use restrictions within residential zones to protect residential neighborhoods and uphold property values. Under the new zoning laws, preexisting activities that were rendered nonconforming were allowed to continue under a grandfather clause (Haar, 1989). District Engineer Commissioner Charles Kutz, as cited in an article published in the *Washington Post* on March 31, 1920, expressed the belief that such inconsistencies would gradually be phased out over time due to these zoning regulations (“Kutz is Chairman of Zone Commission,” 1920, p. 8).

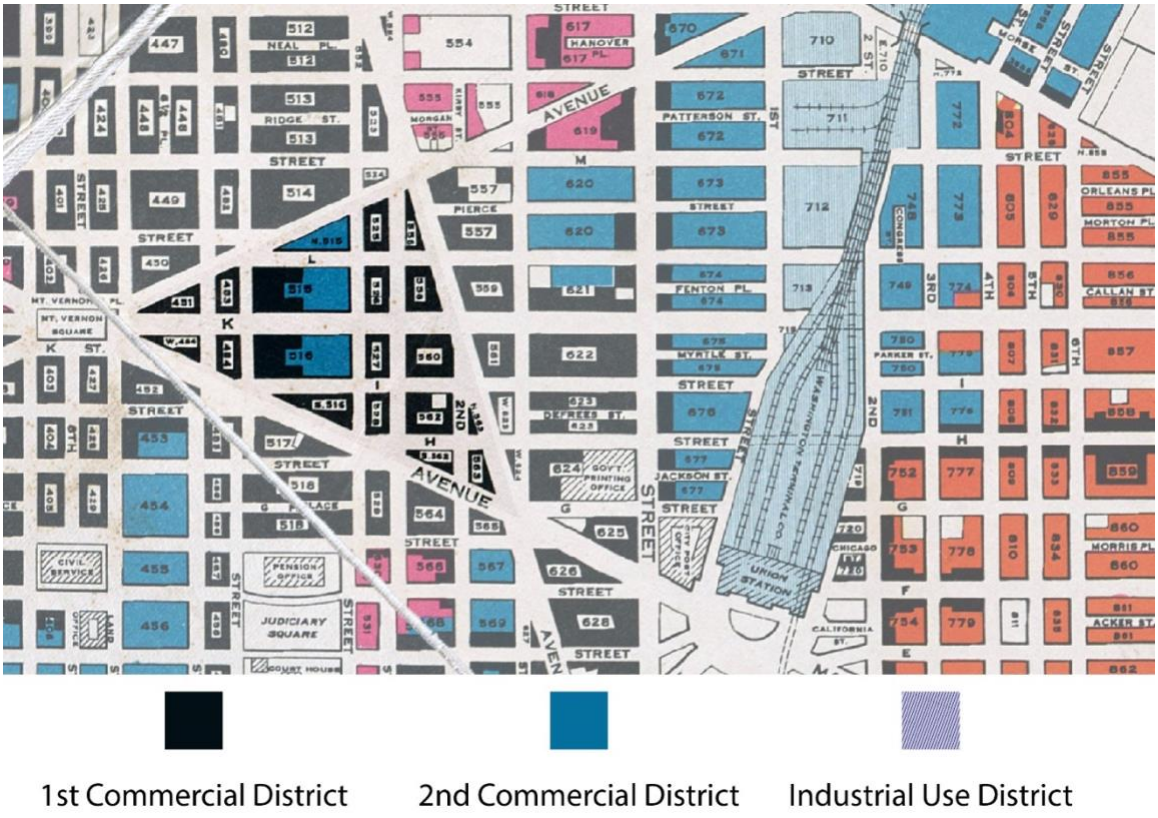
This approach bears a strong resemblance to what would later be known as the Euclidean zoning method, which derives its name from the Ohioan town of Euclid, infamous for a

landmark Supreme Court ruling that validated the constitutionality of zoning laws (*Village of Euclid v. Ambler Realty Co.,* 1926). The conventional Euclidean zoning framework organizes zones in a hierarchical, pyramid-like structure. This model frequently incorporates the principle of cumulative zoning, meaning that uses permitted in more restrictive zones are also allowed in less restrictive zones. For example, a landuse approved for a residential zone is also permissible in commercial and industrial zones, but not vice versa. This creates a cascading effect, with less intensive uses automatically permitted in zones of higher intensity.

From a technical standpoint, Washington's first enacted Zoning Plan in 1920 reflected a concerted effort to reorganize the city's urban landscape and introduce a systematic approach to landuse. The initial plan was met with little resistance or dispute since its designation decisions were rationalized as congruent to the prevailing landuses at the time ("Few Protests on Zoning," 1920, p. 2). To this end, Mount Vernon Triangle maintained its predominant character as a commercial and light manufacturing district (Figure 19). The overall outcome of the 1920 zoning, as depicted in Figure 19, saw the reorganization of Washington's geography, wherein most of its old city areas, inscribed by the L'Enfant Plan, were designated for commercial use, preserving much of the vast remaining territory for residential use. Industrial uses were limited to narrow zones strategically located along waterfronts and regional railway corridors to facilitate commerce (Figure 20). The plan further imposed controls regulating where apartment construction could occur and restricted rowhouse developments, the District's most prevalent housing type at the time (Bartholomew, 1958).

Figure 19.

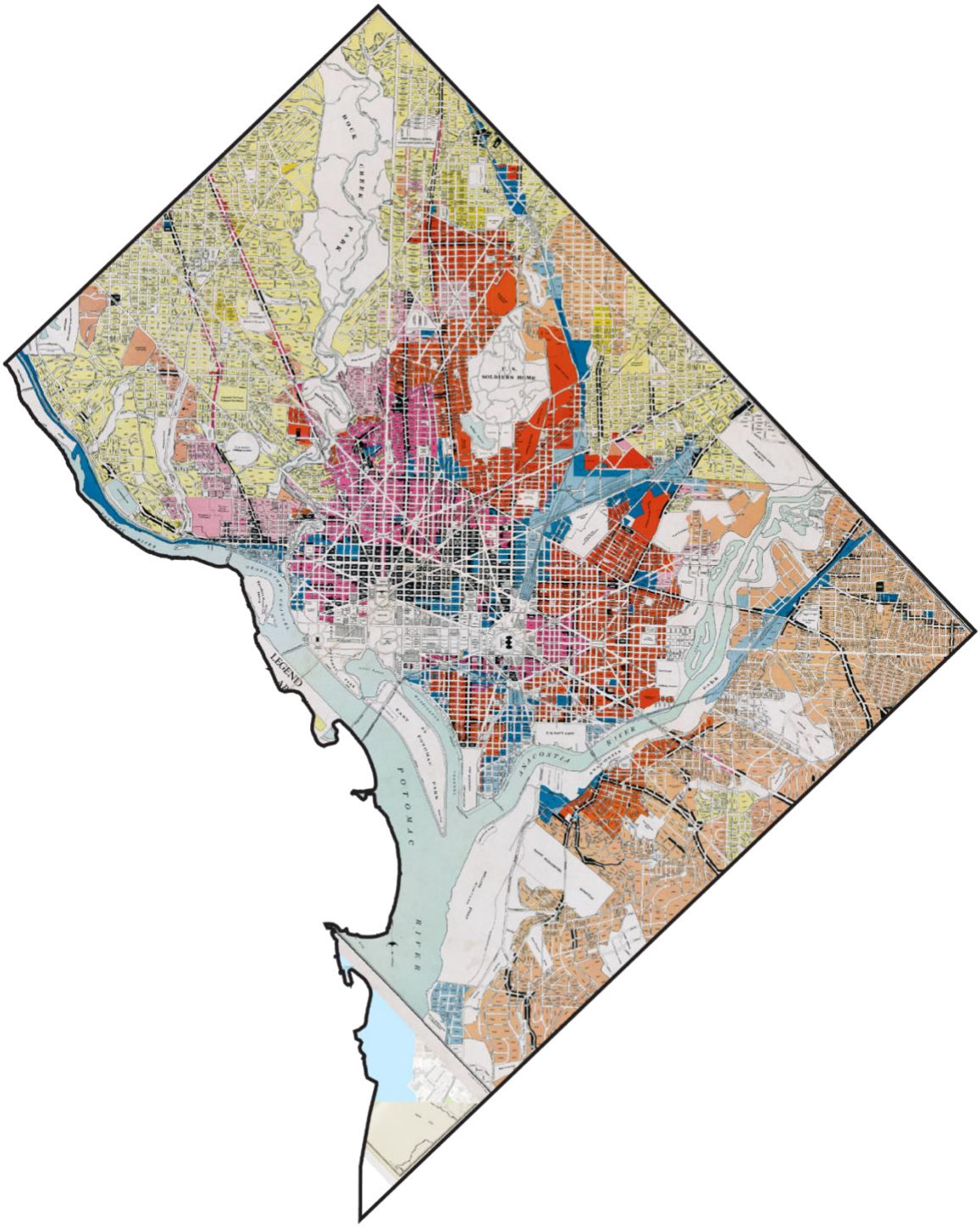
Mount Vernon Triangle Zoned



A close-up view of the Zoning Use Districts Map of Washington, DC, published by Rufus S. Lusk in 1936. The 1920 and 1936 zoning plans closely resembled each other, and virtually no zoning revisions were made in the Mount Vernon Triangle area. Image retrieved from the District of Columbia Office of Zoning.

Figure 20.

1936 Zoning Map for the District of Columbia



"Zoning Use Districts Map of Washington, DC," published by Rufus S. Lusk in 1936. Image retrieved from the District of Columbia Office of Zoning.

Zoning: A Critical Analysis of Washington's Regulatory Landscape

Is it discrimination because I want to live there with certain people and you want to live there with certain other people? Restrictive covenants simply mean that we believe the white race gets along better with itself and the Negro race gets along better by itself…Those who are trying to destroy them are driving us down the road of promiscuous intermingling. If the Supreme Court should legalize the encroachment of Negroes in white neighborhoods, there is no telling where these things will end.

- John Connaughton, *Federation of Citizens Associations,* December 1947.

By the early 20th century, the commercial takeover of Mount Vernon Triangle had already begun, but it was the implementation of landuse zoning in 1920 that cemented it by prioritizing commercial growth over residential stability. This led to a significant decrease in residential structures in the neighborhood over the next two decades. The Great Depression also took its toll on the community, resulting in the transformation of single-family homes into boarding houses for transient residents. This not only altered the physical landscape but also had a profound impact on the social makeup of the community.

Despite the Depression, a second commercial revitalization occurred in Mount Vernon Triangle. This time, external planning decisions elsewhere in the city played a more significant role than zoning. The process began in 1931 with the demolition of the Center Market building on Pennsylvania Avenue to make way for the Federal Triangle. The same urban reform forces that displaced and relocated vendors to Center Market in 1872 caused a second upheaval, instigating a reverse migration that led to the relocation of vendors to the Convention Hall Market building (EHT Traceries, 2004). The former Northern Liberty Market was rebranded as the New Center Market, sparking a second, albeit short-lived, commercial revival in the

neighborhood. The investments of speculative builders, such as Morris Wittlin and Sam Deckelbaum, led to innovative concepts like the 'modern food center' at the southwest corner of 5th and K Street. This foreshadowed the modern supermarket and exemplified the 20th-century trend of consolidating various businesses under one roof to enhance shopping convenience (EHT Traceries, 2004).

Figure 21.

Early 20th Century Commercial Revival, Mount Vernon Triangle

The Wittlin-Deckelbaum building at 501-6 K Street across from the *Stroll*. Image retrieved from "Mount Vernon Triangle Historic District Nomination Registration Form," resubmitted to the National Register of Historic Places, 2006, p. 44.

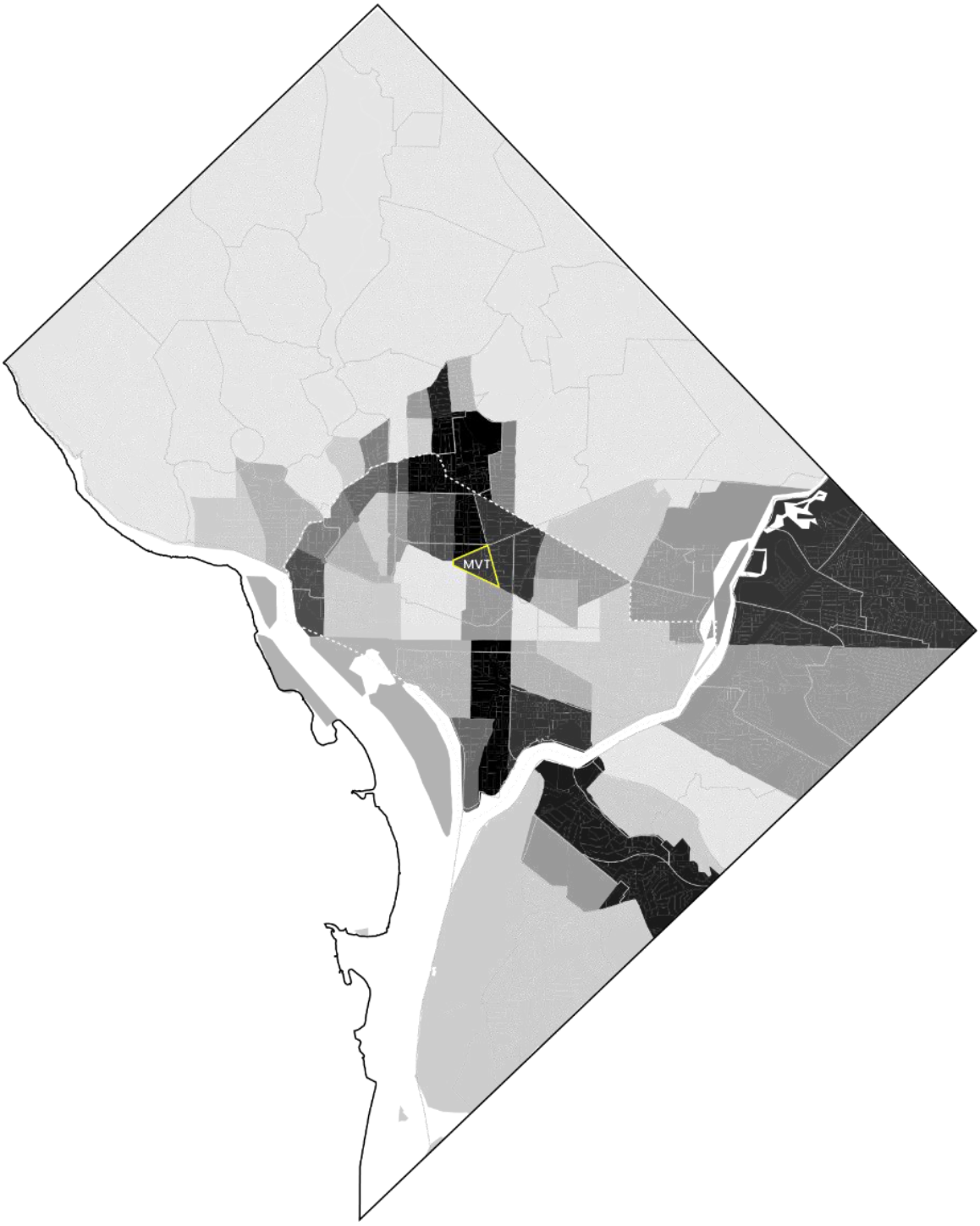
Despite its previous success, Mount Vernon Triangle experienced a decline in popularity due to the emergence of automobile suburbs, modern supermarkets, and suburbanization. The

area's gradual decline was exacerbated by a devastating fire in March 1946 that destroyed the Convention Hall space on the building's second floor, which had been converted into a bowling alley since the early 1920s. Although the market space below was salvaged and later repurposed to house the National Historical Wax Museum, it could not prevent the neighborhood's commercial downturn. The suspension of streetcar service in 1949 and the shift to bus lanes on New York Avenue further contributed to the decline, causing many businesses to abandon the area.

Meanwhile, the demographic makeup of Mount Vernon Triangle grew increasingly homogeneous, even before the onset of World War II. Census records gathered in 1930 indicate that African Americans constituted 58.3% of the population in the greater Mount Vernon Triangle tract (enclosed by North Capitol Street to the east), and this number dramatically rose to 70.8% by 1940 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1930; U.S. Census Bureau, 1940). When viewed at the comprehensive scale of the city, a clear division along racial lines is apparent, with African Americans mainly concentrated within and close to the historic urban core (Figure 22). Although Washington did not impose segregation explicitly, the city's bifurcated landscape along racial lines can be attributed to a confluence of discriminatory forces, including the implicit albeit influential impact of landuse zoning, which we will discuss next.

Figure 22.

Washington's Racialized Topography, 1940



Map produced using 1940 census tracts. Data source: U.S. Census Bureau. Created by the author.

Antebellum, Washington, was home to diverse neighborhoods that included people from different racial and economic backgrounds (Asch & Musgrove, 2017). Due to its underdeveloped infrastructure, it was difficult for segregationists to isolate themselves. However, the war brought about significant changes in demographics, social norms, and population composition. Between 1860 and 1870, the city's population almost doubled, with African Americans making up one-third of the total population, experiencing a remarkable 203% increase (Gilmore, 2014). This surge in population during the war years occurred while physical growth remained stagnant as resources were redirected to support the Union, leading to a housing crisis and worsening racial tensions. Despite this, the introduction of horse-drawn streetcars in 1862 sparked a transportation revolution, inspiring a building boom and unprecedented urban expansion during the late 19th century. New subdivisions emerged, almost half of them speculative, laying the foundation for the city's future segregated landscape (Asch & Musgrove, 2017).

During the Territorial Government's brief tenure, two laws were passed that required public services to be provided without discrimination based on race, with certain conditions that emphasized the importance of adhering to respectable behavior (Harris, 2003; Kelly, 2018). While these policies may have seemed progressive, they ultimately reinforced white middle-class values while masking the reality of racial inequality. Despite the supposed ban on racial discrimination under the 'Lost Laws' of Washington, segregation persisted during the Progressive Era, fueled by developers, private citizens, and the judiciary (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896).

In the early 1900s, segregation in Washington, DC, was privatized, with citizens, developers, realtors, and lending companies engaging in discriminatory housing practices. About

the same time Baltimore enacted the country's first racial ordinance in 1910, restrictive deeds and racial covenants proliferated in the U.S. capital. Although the Supreme Court invalidated racial zoning in 1917 (*Buchanan v. Warley*, 1917), the constitutionality of privately enforced measures was upheld in *Corrigan v. Buckley* (1926). This precedent led to the nationwide spread of restrictive covenants, creating a complex legal landscape (Rothstein, 2017). Landuse zoning emerged as a tool to fortify the ongoing project of racialization, disguised in color-blind rhetoric to undermine Black and working-class communities. Private citizens wielded explicit discrimination, while public agencies maintained the status quo through implicit means, such as landuse zoning, camouflaged in technocratic language to simulate impartiality (Rothstein, 2017; Silver, 1991).

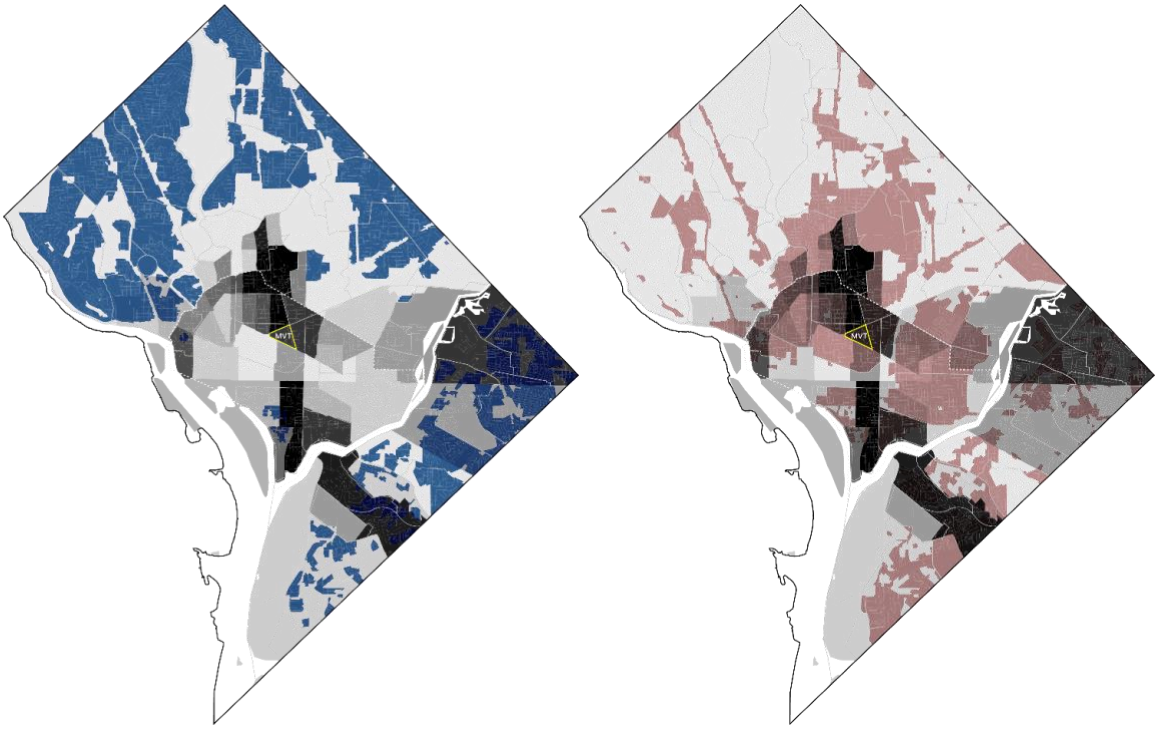
From its inception, the rationale for zoning has pivoted around public health and safety imperatives. Its purpose was justified as a necessary means to protect residential areas from industrial hazards and maintain property values. However, in Washington, DC, this reasoning is questionable since the city was never intended to be a hub for manufacturing. Additionally, an anti-smoke ordinance has been in effect since at least 1897, protecting Washingtonians from the deleterious effects of industrial waste (D.C. Commissioners' Report, 1897-98). Even the earliest zoning proponents recognized the capital city's unique context, which calls for a more nuanced examination of the 1920 zoning plan and a departure from conventional narratives in favor of critical analysis.

Washington's inaugural zoning plan designated commercial and industrial zones atop residential areas that predominantly belonged to racialized groups, thus denying them privileges to the same residential protections enjoyed by their white, affluent counterparts, who primarily lived in single-family zones (Figure 23). The underlying philosophy of this Euclidean zoning

approach helped preserve and institutionalize segregation patterns while portraying them as neutral and objective (Rothstein, 2017; Thomas & Ritzdorf, 1997). Beyond its progressive and ostensibly necessary façade, zoning's ramifications deeply permeated the urban fabric, affecting racial and class dynamics. In Washington, DC, the combined effects of landuse zoning and discriminatory private devices yielded a profoundly segregated geography. African Americans and working-class communities found themselves ensnared within L'Enfant's city, mirroring what Rashad Shabazz has termed a “prisoned landscape” (Lipsitz, 2007; Shabazz, 2015, pp. 2-4). As the city transitioned into the postwar era, these patterns continued to mold the urban landscape, establishing the blueprint for an increasingly entangled intersection between planning and matters related to class, gender, race, and sexuality.

Figure 23.

Intersections of Race and Landuse Zoning in Washington, DC



These mappings visualize the correlation between race and landuse in Washington, DC, using 1940 census data and the landuse map reflecting zoning patterns of the time. The areas shaded in blue are the most restrictive low-density residential zones exclusive for single-family uses, including detached and semi-detached dwellings. The areas shaded in red are all other areas permitting apartment and rowhouse types, including commercial and light manufacturing zones. Created by the author.

Chapter Four: Modernist Planning Intervention in the U.S. Capital and the Formation of Mount Vernon Triangle as Abject Space, 1952-1973

The Master Plan is expected to contain plans for the elimination of these blighted and slum areas in Washington…If money is not forthcoming, blight will fester in the Nation's Capital and local residents will seek newer housing outside the city itself, planners fear.

- 'City Planners Aim At Decentralization,' *The Washington Post*, June 13, 1948

As Yazmina Tadesse traversed the barren, asphalt-laden parking lot on her first foray to the *Stroll*, the surface beneath her silently testified to an entangled past scarred by the turbulent currents of urban renewal—a layered palimpsest replete with shifting public policy, legal battles, and social reform tradeoffs. Her every footfall resonated with the distant reverberations of legislative shifts and judicial verdicts that had, over the decades, reshaped this very ground. Such transitions frequently obscured and effaced stories of minoritized communities like Yazmina's, relegating them to mere footnotes within the broader narrative of urban transformation. This chapter revisits the defining material conditions of the *Stroll* at the close of the 20th century by reinterpreting its physical landscape as an 'abject space'—a domain molded by overlapping strata of marginalization (be it racial, sexual, or gendered) that dominant ideologies and planning interventions perpetuate (Ferguson, 2004). Within this context, the urban metamorphosis of Mount Vernon Triangle during the post-World War II era poignantly encapsulates how the normative frameworks of modernist planning principles manifested as intersecting matrices of exclusions and obliterations.

The postwar period was a pivotal moment for the United States, as the ethos of modernization permeated every facet of American life. Urban planning was elevated from a technical discipline to a moral undertaking, presented as the blueprint for promoting rational, efficient, and progressive cities (Avila, 2014; Jackson, 1985). Within this national panorama, the

U.S. capital stood as a critical case study, shaped by its symbolic significance as the geopolitical heart of the country, rendering it a testing ground for the practical applications of planning ideologies. Mount Vernon Triangle emerges as an illustrative example within this lacunae, embodying the complexities, political frictions, racial tensions, and bureaucratic hurdles endemic to modern planning paradigms. The narrative of renewal in Mount Vernon Triangle attests to the failed promises and unfulfilled visions of modern planning while further underscoring how planning interventions contributed to the formation of spatial marginality.

This chapter revisits the *Stroll* as delineated in Chapter Two, zeroing in on its spatial construction as a zone of abjection, profoundly shaped by planning endeavors, including urban renewal and redevelopment schemas. In this context, ‘abject spaces’ are envisioned as territories marginalized and overshadowed by prevailing sociopolitical constructs (Butler, 1993; Kristeva, 1982). Such terrains become sanctuaries for the societal 'others,' who often grapple with compounded layers of discrimination spanning race, gender, and sexuality, to name a few.

Applying a queer critique, this chapter investigates the heteronormative underpinnings of modernist planning initiatives, revealing how they have contributed to shaping and maintaining spaces like the *Stroll* as an abject space (Berlant & Warner, 1998). The primary focus is on renewal and redevelopment policies and procedures, which, despite intentions to improve the human condition (Scott, 1998), often act as conduits for engineering and sustaining the spaces of liminality. This analytical approach contributes to broader conversations on the social and spatial implications of urban and environmental planning, enriching the discourse by introducing a queer theoretical perspective to the study of planning histories and their impacts on marginalized communities (Butler, 1993; Crenshaw, 1991).

Northwest Urban Renewal Area

Washington has the tools and the financial capacity to eliminate slums in a small number of years – 10 years, plus or minus. I envision Washington being made into a city of neighborhoods – a somewhat self-contained area, perhaps a mile to a mile-and-a-half wide, organized around churches, a primary school, and playgrounds.

- James W. Rouse, *The Washington Post*., November 13, 1954

Despite decades of efforts to combat slums, legal roadblocks have hindered reformers since the late 19th century. Such obstacles prevented the District's Alley Dwelling Authority, established in 1934, from attaining its fundamental mission of eliminating unsafe and unsanitary housing conditions. Nevertheless, a series of legislative and judicial measures, beginning with the passage of the Standard State Zoning Enabling Act of 1926 and the Standard City Planning Enabling Act of 1928 – which formalized zoning and planning, respectively – laid an infrastructural foundation for planners and policymakers. Additionally, the landmark *Euclid* ruling in 1926 affirmed zoning as a legitimate legal mechanism, granting local authorities the power to regulate the use of private property. All these initiatives came under the banner of 'comprehensive planning.' While it ostensibly aimed at holistic urban development, this approach sometimes masked deeper social engineering motives.

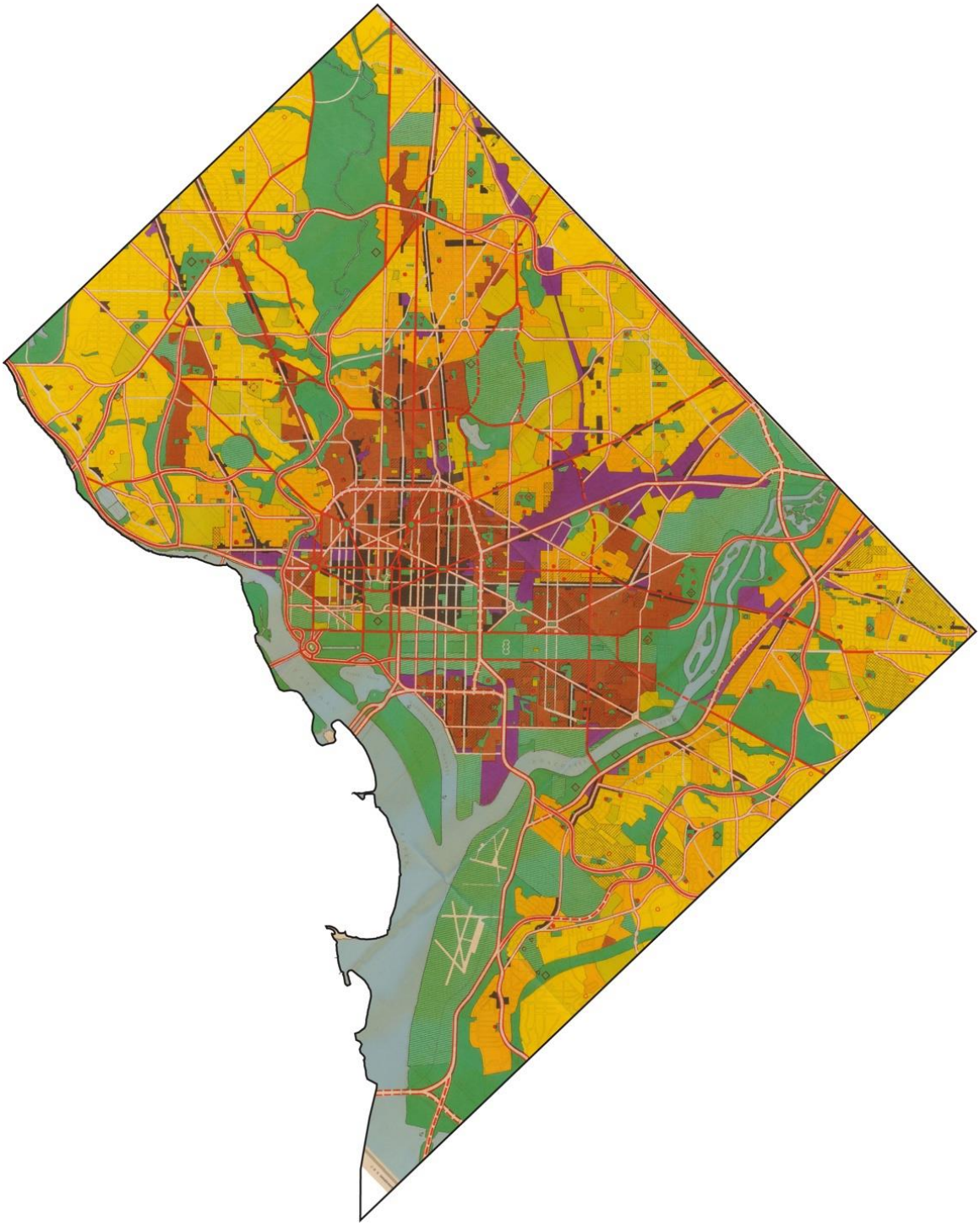
The passage of the District of Columbia Redevelopment Act in 1946 denoted a turning point in the national effort for urban renewal (Gillette, 1995). This legislation, transcending local policy, signaled a national commitment to reshape the urban American landscape through extensive and federally funded clearance and redevelopment programs (Ammon, 2009). It gave birth to the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) and bestowed it with eminent domain power. Consequently, establishing the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) in 1952 offered the foundational support upon which the entire edifice of urban renewal rested. This synergy

expanded urban governance, enabling authorities to reconfigure entire cities beyond the bare confines of zoning.

From November 1950 to May 1951, a series of pamphlets, beginning with "Washington Present and Future," was released, culminating in Washington's first Comprehensive Plan (NCPPC, 1950; Roberts, 1950, p.1). As postwar nuclear threats made decentralization of the federal government a national security matter, the 1950 Comprehensive Plan promoted a regional scope. This approach would disperse critical federal agencies and departments across the Washington metropolitan area and connect them through an extensive highway network system (Figure 24). Another unique element that distinguished the Comprehensive Plan from earlier planning endeavors in the U.S. capital was its promotion of urban renewal.

Figure 24.

1950 Comprehensive Plan



Source: National Capital Planning Commission

Intimately connected to the 1950 Comprehensive Plan was a study of the frequently modified Zoning Act of 1920. Implemented by the District commissioners even before the establishment of a central planning agency, this Act became a source of contention. Zoning powers were expanded by congressional action and through a growing number of cases subjected to judicial review. The 1926 Standard State Zoning Enabling Act emphasized the orderly development of the National Capital by mandating that zoning regulations align with a comprehensive plan (DOC, 1926). This approach to zoning, integral to comprehensive planning, inspired the 1958 revision of zoning regulations. The District's first Comprehensive Plan —the Lewis Plan — aimed to resolve the recurring clashes between the NCPC and the Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA). Modernist planners, among other proponents of the Comprehensive Plan, touted wholesale demolition and subsequent redevelopment as the only viable solution, rendering Southwest Washington ground zero in the national planning experiment for urban renewal in 1952 (Ammon, 2009).

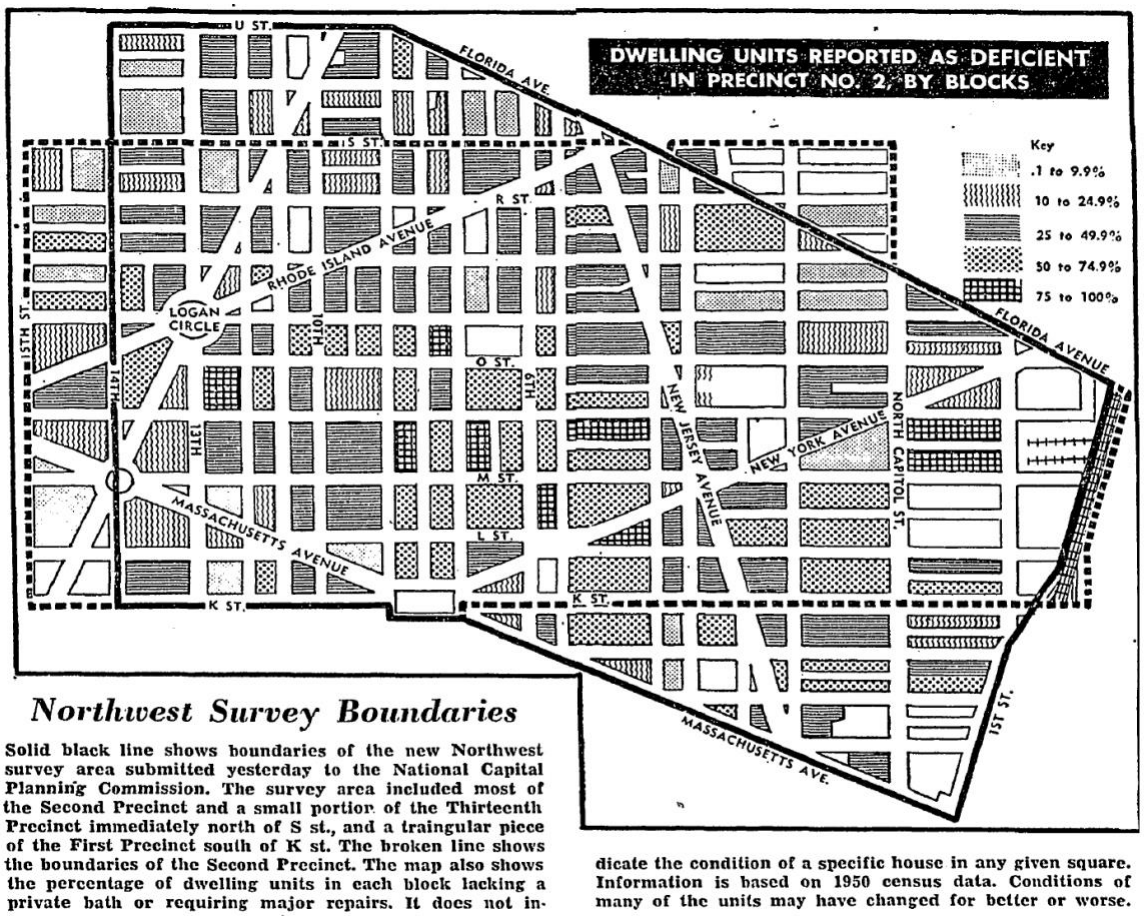
The crusade against slums in Washington, DC, reached its zenith in 1954, after Frederick Payne, a Republican senator from Maine, took to the congressional floor, fervently appealing for the redevelopment of the District's notorious "Wickedest" Second Precinct ("Payne Urges 2d Precinct Redevelopment," 1954, p. 8). Citing dismal housing conditions in the area and attributing its surging crime rates to poor living circumstances, Payne's call for action epitomized the protracted campaign against urban 'blight and squalor,' often crudely associated with racialized neighborhoods. This campaign, entrenched in legal and political frameworks, played a seminal role in creating abject spaces—areas deemed 'undesirable' or 'dangerous,' subsequently marked for public intervention or outright elimination (Isin & Rygiel, 2007). Payne's plea served less as a genuine quest to enhance the human condition and more as a

rhetorical tool. It effectively stigmatized specific neighborhoods and their residents, branding them as issues requiring solutions or outright removal.

In response, the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) asked the NCPC to define a renewal area, specifically focusing on the eastern half of the Second Precinct ("NCPC Asked to Consider Designation of New Project Area," 1954, p. 23). This action represented the third organized attempt to combat 'blight' within substantial sections of the District's historic core. However, the area designated for renewal by the NCPC was far more extensive, encompassing all but the western and northeastern fringes of the Second Precinct. Additionally, it included the southern portion of Mount Vernon Triangle from the First Precinct and the U Street corridor from the Thirteenth Precinct. The resulting Northwest Urban Renewal Area, as shown in Figure 25, was the most extensive territory designated for renewal by the NCPC, housing over 60,000 residents, of which 70% were "non-whites" (Albrook, 1954, p. 17). John Nolen, Jr., the NCPC's executive director, defended this broad approach by invoking modernist planning principles that championed uniformity and cohesion in urban development (Albrook, 1954). To bolster their argument, the NCPC employed visual aids, notably choropleth maps (see Figure 25), to highlight areas of "dwelling deficiency" within the proposed renewal zone (Fishbein, 1954, p. 19). RLA officials backed its comprehensive nature, deeming it crucial to halt the spread of blight.

Figure 25.

Mapping "Deficiencies"- The Northwest Survey Boundaries



"New Survey Area Covers 2d Precinct," *The Washington Post and Times Herald*, September 18, 1954, p.1.

James W. Rouse, a Maryland-based mortgage banker entrusted with crafting an efficient renewal program for Northwest Washington, was at the helm of this ambitious endeavor. Rouse was pivotal in popularizing the term 'urban renewal' and framing the 1954 housing legislation's provisions. He proposed a triad of treatments: conservation, rehabilitation, and demolition. Despite championing rehabilitation, Rouse denounced small-scale, isolated efforts for their lack of "unity" and their inability to withstand the pressures of surrounding slums ("Slumless D.C.

Seen In Decade," 1954, p. 17). As a result, Rouse believed rehabilitation initiatives in renewal zones should be under the sole jurisdiction of public authorities to ensure alignment with comprehensive plan visions, effectively sanctioning all urban improvement projects regarding private property as public actions.

Without further ado, the RLA submitted an application seeking $1.25 million in federal grants to conduct a survey study of the Northwest area over 30 months while the NCPC devised future landuse plans. The purpose of the study was to assess the structural integrity of each building within the survey area and its adherence to the District's enforced housing codes, in addition to gathering data regarding the socioeconomic status of their occupants. The RLA viewed these metrics as essential for deciding the treatment—conservation, rehabilitation, or demolition—each building would undergo and planning the relocation of affected families. A preliminary map depicting which of the three treatments each block in the renewal zone would receive was also submitted as part of the application but withheld from the public to preempt any challenges, as significant changes were anticipated by the time the survey was completed.

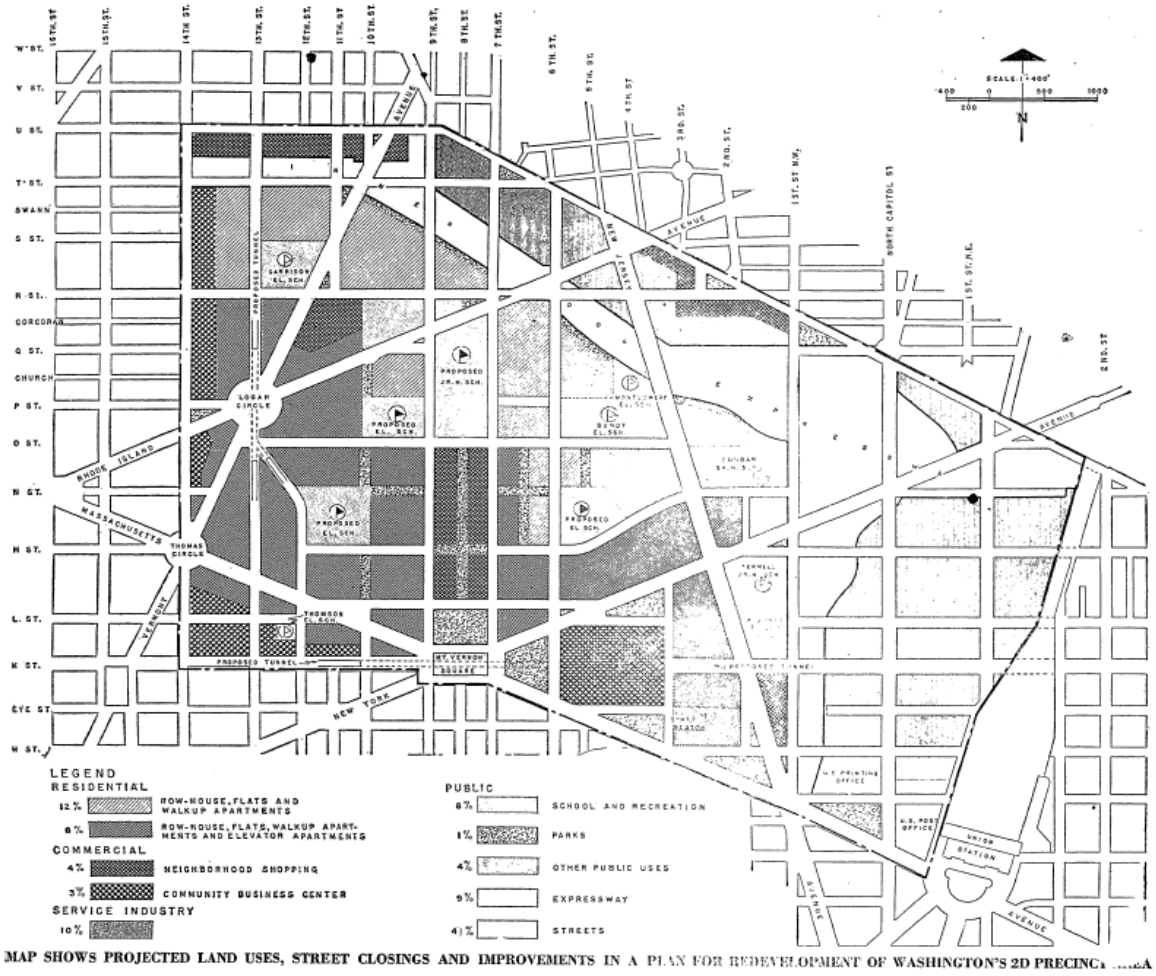
Early critics cautioned that blight might worsen in the demarcated renewal zone before any improvements were seen, given its expansive territory and the prolonged period required for the survey study and plan's finalization. Furthermore, designating the area as a renewal zone effectively stymied the natural pace of development as property owners were reluctant to invest in improvement or rehabilitation projects due to prevailing uncertainties and potential displacement risks. Indeed, since the original renewal zone was declared in 1954, it imposed a freeze on almost all private development and rehabilitation projects, and in an area where over 80% of residents were renters, the renewal plan accelerated decline, creating a conducive environment for property owners to become slumlords.

In 1957, the Urban Renewal Administration heralded a substantial policy shift ahead of the public unveiling of the Northwest Renewal Plan, significantly curtailing federal funding of the national urban renewal program to ensure economic prudence. Regardless of these changes, the initial grand vision for a "New Northwest" advanced, publicized in *The Washington Post* in November 1957. The Northwest Renewal Plan (Figure 26) was rooted in modernist planning ideals, emphasizing the superblock concept. Mount Vernon Triangle was reimagined as a self-contained neighborhood entity, with open green spaces encircling its perimeter. Most of its existing structures were initially slated for demolition. This area would encircle two superblocks at its eastern edge, earmarked for residential development. At the Triangle's heart, a 17-acre superblock was designed as a "community business center" instead of the 7th Street commercial strip (Eisen, 1957, p. A14). The plan proposed a radical break from L'Enfant's iconic street grid, which the NCPC later considered integral to the capital's historical legacy, meriting preservation (NCPC, 1965).

RLA staff and members of the American Institute of Architects local chapter voiced their criticism of the NCPC's plan, citing infeasibility and concerns about design impracticality (Eisen, 1958). When the plan was unveiled to residents later that month, many questions were raised, including what would happen if the plan failed. Officials responded that residents should assume it would work since it was intended to solve problems and not test theories of area improvement (Eisen, 1957, p. C14). With 15,000 people displaced from Southwest Washington and awaiting long-promised housing, the residents of Northwest remained skeptical. At the time, no legal protections were set to uphold the rights of vulnerable communities impacted by renewal programs. The North 7th Street Business Association protested the plan and a joint fact-finding committee was formed among citizen groups to monitor its progress.

Figure 26.

Utopian Visions



Initial NCPC proposal for Northwest Urban Renewal; map showing projected landuses, street closings, and improvements. Image retrieved from *The Washington Post*. "Northwest Slum Clearance Involves 914 Acres," November 9, 1957, p. A14.

Compromised Plans and Arising Tensions

As you moved further east, you'd enter Sursum Corda, the ghetto. Young boys who lived in public housing used to chase after us.

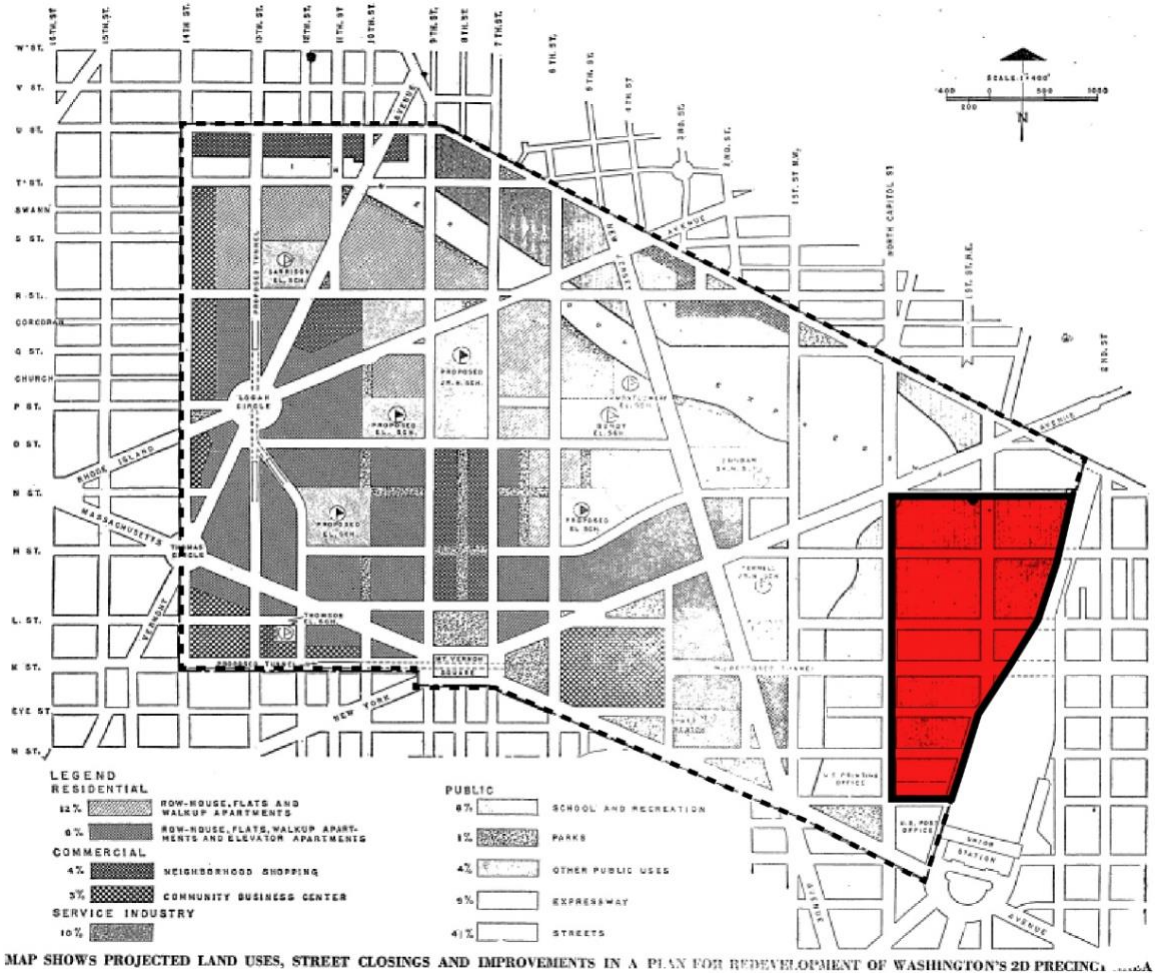
- Yazmina Tadesse, *Personal Communication*, November 24, 2020

By early 1958, with $40 million at stake, the RLA ultimately conceded to the provisions of the latest housing legislation, which limited federal funding for urban renewal to smaller, neighborhood-scale projects (“Piecemeal Renewal Gets Approval,” 1958, p. B1). Consequently, this led to the abandonment of the initial proposal and introduction of a revised, downsized plan that divided the expansive Northwest territory into smaller neighborhoods, each with its own "general landuse plan," providing a framework that would guide renewal over ten years, with detailed plans for the redevelopment of each neighborhood to follow (Eisen, 1958, p. C1). Meanwhile, the original comprehensive vision for the Northwest area was to be retained. An 80-acre tract at the eastern end of the Northwest Urban Renewal zone was chosen as the pilot project for these neighborhood plans.

The Northwest Project No. 1, shown in Figure 27, was technically part of the city's northeast quadrant but was included in the initial Northwest Renewal Plan. This project aimed to transform the territory into a "prestige address" advertised as a blue-chip area reserved exclusively for service and light industrial uses (White, 1958, p. B1). All existing residential uses were to be eliminated, and a ban was imposed on theaters and other venues that drew significant crowds to mitigate parking problems. Some 923 families resided in the area then, all of whom faced eviction. Despite the emphasis on rehabilitation over wholesale clearance, the RLA ultimately conceded to the displacement of these families as part of the broader Northwest Renewal scheme while promising ample private and public housing to be made available to the affected families over two years. Upon its approval in late 1959, this tract was officially detached from the Northwest Renewal Area. It was renamed “Northeast Project No. 1” once District planners realized they could initiate the project by addressing it independently (Feeley, 1959, p. B1).

Figure 27.

Fragmented Plans



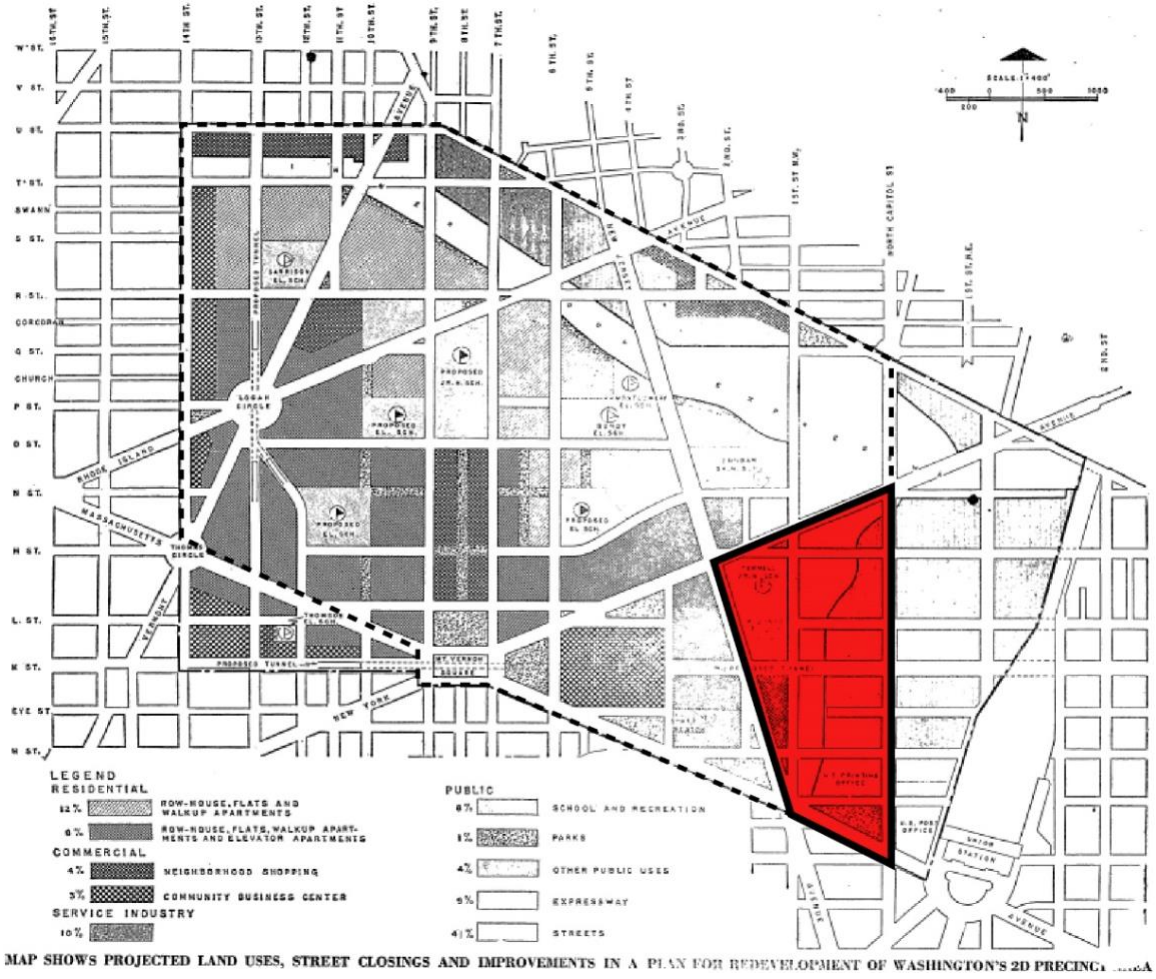
Northeast Project No. 1. The 80-acre tract at the eastern end of the Northwest Urban Renewal Area, shown in red, was approved in 1959 as an upscale light industrial and service area. Created by the author.

Soon after the Northwest Renewal area was downsized, a new neighborhood tract was slated for renewal in 1963, assuming its predecessor's name as Northwest Project No. 1. This tract lay just east of Mount Vernon Triangle. It was bounded by North Capitol Street, Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Street, and New York Avenue (Figure 28). Approximately 7,000

people were living in the area at the time. The RLA hoped to avoid repeating past mistakes made in Southwest Washington, which led to the displacement of thousands of low-income families to make room for luxury and middle-class housing. Some of these families relocated to the area and lived in the Northwest Project No. 1 renewal zone when the RLA began buying and boarding homes there in the mid-1960s.

Figure 28.

Shifting Agendas



Northwest Project No. 1, highlighted in red and bounded by North Capitol Street on the east and Mount Vernon Triangle on the west, was slated for renewal in 1963 and would later come to house the Sursum Corda public housing development. Created by the author.

Residents were organized by the Urban League's Neighborhood Development Center, an anti-poverty agency for the area, and refused to move until they were guaranteed the option to return to affordable new housing. The city agreed to give the area's 800 families and 500 individual residents priority to return once the project was completed. Instead of leveling the

whole area, the RLA agreed to a staged plan, allowing some residents to remain in their homes until new housing became available. An estimated 180 businesses in the renewal area were relocated to make way for housing, most of which were small enterprises providing essential goods and services for the original community (Levy, 1971). Most were family-owned and heavily reliant on local customers; they struggled to survive the temporary loss of clientele during the transition period between relocation, demolition, and new housing construction. By 1971, many old row houses stood vacant and boarded up, awaiting further public intervention.

Only one grocery store—a Safeway at K Street and New Jersey Avenue—remained in the renewal area, and it too was pending demolition, as it stood in the path of the Center Leg Freeway. The city effectively reproduced slum conditions and failed to meet a fundamental goal of urban renewal: the creation of safe, sanitary, and sustainable environments for low-income families. The city's focus on housing production came at the expense of necessary commercial developments, thereby compromising the success of communities.

The fragmentation of the Northwest Urban Renewal area left Mount Vernon Triangle in a precarious and ambiguous position. However, as early as 1961, the neighborhood had ceded from the Northwest Plan, only to be annexed by another plan: the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan. Mount Vernon Triangle assumed a renewed liminal status following its subsumption by the Downtown Urban Renewal Plan.

Shifting Boundaries: Downtown Urban Renewal

At the dawn of the 20th century, the heart of Washington, DC, was a bustling hub of commerce and culture. Bordering Mount Vernon Triangle and located south of Massachusetts Avenue, Downtown Washington was home to a mixture of shops, offices, hotels, theaters, and residences, boasting a diverse urban landscape that vibrated around the clock, embodying the

ideals of a thriving mixed-use urban environment (Hyra, 2017). Even after the enforcement of zoning laws in 1920 that favored commercial activity, the energy of the downtown area persisted.

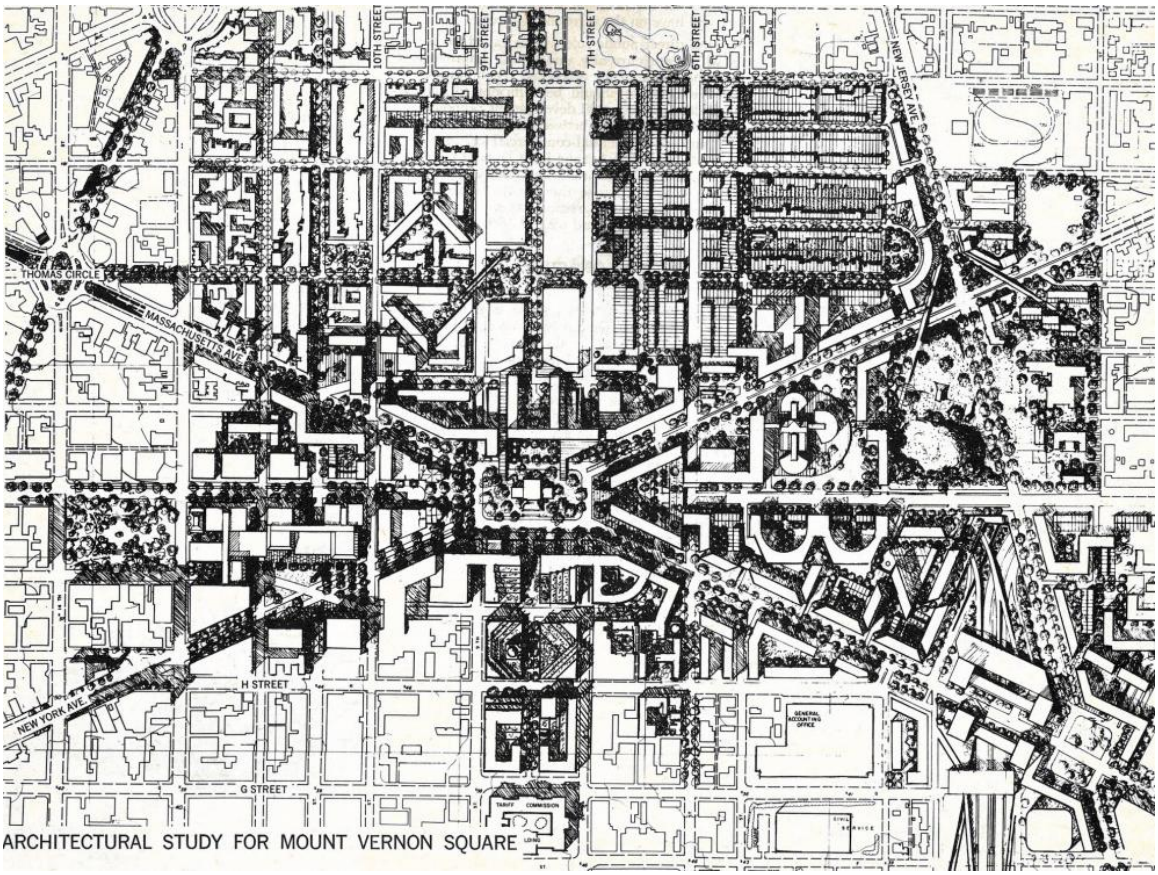
However, in the post-World War II era, decentralization efforts led to a significant decline in urban centers, with middle-class residents migrating to the suburbs taking businesses with them. Retail sales in downtown department stores plummeted 11.6% between 1948 and 1954, while suburban retailers experienced an exponential growth in revenue equivalent to 165% (Eisen, 1959, p. A8). These trends concerned some, including Dorothea Andrews, who wrote an article for *The Washington Post* in 1948, urging planners to consider a more adaptable and forward-thinking zoning approach. She highlighted the area along Massachusetts Avenue from Mount Vernon Square to Union Station, which remained underdeveloped despite its zoning classification for apartment development. Andrews argued that District planners needed to prioritize long-term sustainability and profitability to prevent the deterioration of once-thriving urban spaces (Andrews, 1948).

Initiatives to revive the declining downtown area had been underway since 1959, taking more than two decades to reverse the trend. A group of downtown business owners and civic leaders formed the National Capital Downtown Committee in 1959, aiming to continuously inject new investments into the area. With an annual budget of $200,000—contributed by downtown businesses—the committee spent two years developing a practical plan for urban renewal (Eisen, 1959, p. A1). This involved replacing outdated buildings with modern structures or public facilities. Published in May 1961, "A Policies Plan for the Year 2000" identified areas inhabited by African Americans, particularly around Mount Vernon Square, as experiencing residential deterioration in need of renewal (NCPC, 1961). The document included drawings

such as the "Architectural Study for Mount Vernon Square" (Figure 29), envisioning mass displacement of African American and Asian American communities as part of a long-term ‘beautification’ plan (NCPC, 1961).

Figure 29.

Mount Vernon Square Reimagined



This Architectural Study for Mount Vernon Square was part of the “DC Policies Plan” published in 1961. Image courtesy of the DC Public Library Washingtonia Collection.

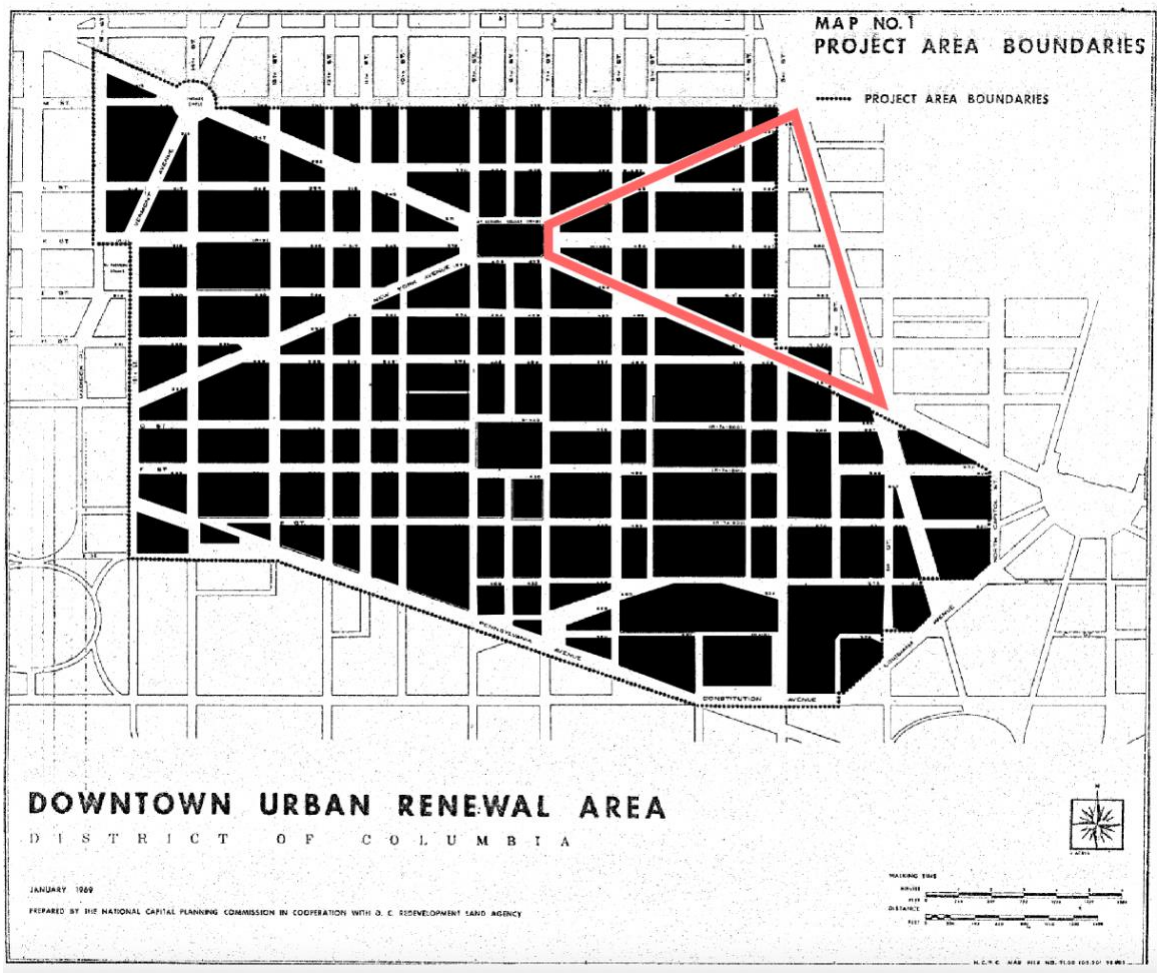
The Downtown Committee’s vision for the 632-acre territory between the Capitol and the White House was first presented to Congress in 1962. However, at that time, the District lacked the authority to condemn non-residential land for renewal. The bill remained in legislative and bureaucratic limbo for another seven years until it was finally approved on January 9, 1969,

alongside another urban renewal plan for the neighboring Shaw area. These plans diverged from previous paradigms calling for wholesale clearance, like those implemented in Southwest Washington. Instead, they proposed a staged approach, emphasizing rehabilitation while minimizing the relocation of businesses and residents unless necessary.

Moreover, the Shaw and Downtown renewal plans were arguably the first among similar plans enacted under the provisions of the Fair Housing Act, signed by President Lyndon Johnson in 1968. Whereas previous laws had required detailed programs to be submitted for entire project scopes—often resulting in the complete halt of any private renewal activities as witnessed in Southwest Washington—the reformed legislation endorsed a more liberal framework, allowing for the adoption of boundaries and general guideline-type plans, with detailed plans to be drafted later. This change in national policy marked a shift in the federal government's approach to urban redevelopment as it sought to regain its authoritative legitimacy and restore its tarnished reputation following years of failed intervention.

Figure 30.

Mount Vernon Triangle Annexed



"Downtown Urban Renewal Area." Prepared by the National Capital Planning Commission, January 9, 1969. Created by the author.

As part of the approved Downtown Renewal Plan (Figure 30), Mount Vernon Triangle was slated for high-density residential development, serving as a buffer zone between the bustling retail core and the low-density residential areas to the north of Massachusetts Avenue (NCPC, 1972). The main action item for the first-year renewal program called for the acquisition of the block containing the New Center Market building at 5th and K Streets, intended for

residential redevelopment. The property was then owned by Leo and Norman Bernstein, who reportedly purchased the building for $500,000 shortly after the 1946 fire incident that destroyed the second floor. The market remained operational until 1963, when competition from supermarkets prompted its closure. It was subsequently repurposed and leased to the National Historical Wax Museum after the construction of the John F. Kennedy Performing Arts Center engendered the museum's displacement from its former site in Foggy Bottom (Figure 31). The eastern portion of the square was mostly cleared by then and temporarily repurposed for surface parking. The American Security and Trust Company held the sizable land in trust following the bankruptcy of its original owner.

Figure 31.

National Historical Wax Museum, Washington, DC

Source: Flickr

The 5.6-acre site was identified as the prime location for housing construction since its mostly vacant and unoccupied state would not engender any displacement. The RLA entered negotiations with the two primary landowners of Square No. 515 immediately after the Downtown Renewal Plan was approved. However, the RLA's efforts were impeded for two years as they could not secure federal funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which declined to facilitate the purchase, deeming the investment excessively costly. As the two governing entities haggled in court over the value of the land, stalling the first-year action plan, the American Security and Trust Company pledged to

construct an eight-story office building on the 119,000-square-foot parking lot it owned, thus undermining public vision.

This discord emphasized a provision in the most recent housing legislation that starkly contrasted with the 1954 federal housing laws under which the initial Northwest Urban Renewal Plan was sought by essentially allowing private development projects to proceed while the renewal plan's details were being figured out, provided they aligned with general landuse plans and current zoning regulations. Because the contested property was within a C-3-B designated zone permitting medium-density developments for various mixed uses, including offices, local planners warned that if office construction proceeded, it could compromise the overall objectives of the Downtown Renewal Plan. However, because the property was within an 'action area' of the renewal plan, landowners were barred from undertaking new construction or improvements or trading their properties in the interim. The two major shareholders filed suit against all government entities involved, claiming that the imposed injunction constituted a taking. They demanded that their properties be purchased at their asking price or omitted from the plan altogether. Faced with a potential $15 million in sought damages, HUD agreed to provide the RLA with funds to acquire the wax museum site from the Bernsteins for their $3.8 million asking price (Meyer, 1971). The purchase, finalized in January 1971, allowed the first-year action program to commence. Meanwhile, the failure to provide housing during this impasse exacerbated the city's dire need for affordable options, particularly affecting those who needed it most.

After the wax museum site was acquired, drama over downtown renewal resumed in Mount Vernon Triangle, with the square south of the museum becoming the center of attention. Amid negotiations to purchase the remainder of the museum square, various community

organizations, including the Urban League, urged the RLA to acquire land in the adjacent square containing Prathers Alley, claiming that such a move was necessary to ensure the longevity and success of the community by allowing ample space for the provision of essential neighborhood amenities such as a grocery store and daycare center ("Averting Another Urban Renewal Scandal," 1972, p. A20). While RLA officials agreed in principle, they rejected this notion, citing legal barriers resulting from recent changes in federal housing policy and a lack of funds for relocating the fifteen families living in the square. The Uniform Relocation Act was passed in 1970 to ensure that persons displaced by federal and federally assisted programs were provided fair and equitable treatment, including assistance with relocation expenses. It mandated that displaced persons receive assistance finding replacement housing and be compensated for moving costs and related expenses. This decision drew harsh criticism from local activist groups, accusing the RLA of shirking its social responsibilities and sacrificing comprehensive community development. In an attempt to resolve the situation, RLA officials agreed to purchase the site of the old Schneider bakery at the square's southeast corner, allowing for apartment construction on the former market square and the bakery site. This enabled the remaining residents to be rehoused without the city being held accountable for their dispossession.

Nevertheless, private interests intervened again, quelling the city's foresight. In September 1971, representatives from a prominent regional developer, the Pomponio Brothers, appeared before the DC Council at a hearing. They announced their acquisition of the old bakery plant site and divulged plans to erect an office building to be subsequently leased to the General Services Administration for federal use. The Pomponio Brothers promised job opportunities for 1,500 people and $200,000 in annual tax contributions. They also revealed their options to buy much of the remaining square, where the fifteen families resided, and pledged to relocate them.

The DC Council welcomed this proposal, and objections from neither the RLA nor the NCPC were raised, effectively eliminating Square No. 516 from the renewal plan. This decision effectively voted to evict the families while sidestepping federal law, as the protections of the Uniform Relocation Act,[3] ratified in 1970, only applied to those displaced by public actions, not by private entities like the Pomponioses.

The situation triggered public controversy. Proponents argued that the office development would bring tax revenue, while opponents contended that residential development was essential for a vibrant downtown landscape. Meanwhile, the Pomponio Brothers acquired most properties along K Street's northeast corner. By January 1971, eviction notices were sent to the tenants of the fifteen remaining households renting units in subdivided three-story townhouses, informing them of a mid-February deadline to vacate the condemned premises. George Boyd, a 68-year-old retiree residing at 420 K Street for over fifteen years, lamented, "It's been so long since I moved that I don't even know where to start" (Scharfenberg, 1972, p. B1). City officials, realizing their approach was erroneous albeit too late, publicly announced that they were "ready to avert the threat of another urban renewal scandal," mandating that the Pomponioses erect housing on the remainder of the site and cover the moving expenses for those who needed to be relocated (“Averting Another Urban Renewal Scandal,” 1972, p. A20). Otherwise, the city was prepared to reverse its decision permitting office building construction. However, after the homes were razed and the site cleared, the Pomponios reported that, from an economic standpoint, they could not afford to build new housing on the square's northeast

3 The Uniform Relocation Act was passed to ensure that persons displaced by federal and federally assisted programs were provided fair and equitable treatment, including assistance with relocation expenses. The need for this legislation arose during the urban renewal era of the 1950s and 1960s when many families, particularly those in low-income and minority communities, were displaced without sufficient compensation or support.

corner, and none of the evictees were provided with alternative housing nor furnished moving costs.

The Zoning Commission intervened in December 1972 by issuing an order to permanently downzone Mount Vernon Triangle and change its previous commercial designation to a high-density residential zone (DCOZ, 1972). Nearly half of the existing uses were rendered non-conforming as a result of the downzoning action, sparking protest from property owners who filed a joint suit against the Zoning Commission seeking an injunction. Although the U.S. District Court denied their appeal and upheld the downzoning decision, private development in Mount Vernon Triangle came to a halt (*Ruppert v. Washington*, 1973).

Around the same time the zoning dispute was settled in 1973, the Pomponio Brothers filed for bankruptcy after facing a federal suit for tax evasion. This led to another private company taking over the under-construction Chester Arthur building. No development occurred on the northeast portion of the square where the displaced families' homes had been leveled. Meanwhile, the site of the former wax museum, designated for high-density residential development, has stood vacant since the city acquired it in 1971. Despite available federal subsidies and relatively low land costs, developers were hesitant to engage in the construction of government-guided inner-city housing due to bureaucratic complications and operational restrictions. They were also reluctant to build middle-class housing in Mount Vernon Triangle, given its proximity to areas considered ‘ghettos,’ like Shaw and Sursum Corda—conditions largely the result of public action, or lack thereof, and years of neglect. By 1970, Washington had already evolved into a predominantly Black city, with African Americans constituting 70% of the total population (Figure 32).

Figure 32.

Chocolate City

These two maps visualize the rise of the capital from 1950 (left) to become a predominantly Black city by 1970 (right). Created by the author.

Despite President Nixon's 1973 national freeze on housing subsidies, HUD pledged to fund more than 3,000 subsidized units in the Washington metropolitan area as a reward for adopting a "fair share" program that dispersed low-income housing across various locations (Lippman, 1974, p. B2). However, this provision came with an expiry date of June 30, 1974. In response, the RLA offered nine parcels in the Shaw and Downtown renewal areas, including the former museum square, at considerably lower values than market price in hopes of attracting private developers. They sought the construction of more than 1,000 housing units in return, half of which were to be subsidized (Lippman, 1974, p. B1). Proposals should “provide to the extent

possible those amenities commonly associated with present-day urban living such as swimming pools, balconies, and tennis courts," stated RLA officials (Lippman, 1974, p. B2). The agency received proposals from fifteen developers committing to construct more than 1,500 apartment units and townhouses around the downtown perimeter, including a bid from none other than James Rouse himself.

In May 1974, the RLA officially transferred ownership of Square No. 515 to the Bush Organization, the sole bidder on the site. Anticipating that younger adults were keen on returning downtown, the Norfolk-based developer agreed to construct a high-rise apartment building containing 1,000 to 1,200 housing units composed of studios, one-and two-bedroom apartments. Of these, 150 units would be subsidized. RLA Director Melvin Mister contended that Washington's old downtown was being repurposed to lure a middle-class gentry back to the center city: "This will not be housing for the poor," he stated, adding that the city had no intention of "rebuilding these areas as they were, as that would only recreate the conditions that led to past riots" (Lippman, 1974, p. A5).

Around its completion in 1978, the Museum Square Apartment building stood at 401 K Street, a lonely landmark in the barren landscape, a testament to the consequences of misaligned public visions and competing private interests (Figure 33). For almost three decades, the 301-unit subsidized complex remained the only sign of residential life in Mount Vernon Triangle, housing a mix of African Americans and elderly Chinese Americans displaced after downtown renewal wiped out much of the historic Chinatown.

Figure 33.

Museum Square Apartments Standing in Isolation

Source: D.C. Office of Zoning archives. Exhibit 34 from Z.C. Case No. 88-30.

Modernist Planning and Queer Modalities

The urban stagnation that enveloped Mount Vernon Triangle gave rise to a dynamic landscape of modern queer spaces. For instance, the District's first gay bathhouse opened in a repurposed warehouse building as early as 1968 at 413 L Street. The Oscars, a DC-based drag group featuring personas like 'Liz Taylor' and 'Judy Garland,' reportedly helped set up and decorate the venue, which showcased a kitschy interior and an expansive Roman-style mural in the main bath area (Rainbow History Project, 2012). The Regency Health Club operated 24/7, and while exclusive to men, it hosted all-women nights on rare occasions. Between 1970 and 1972, the club expanded by acquiring additional space from an adjacent property. According to

its founder and owner, David Harris, the Regency amassed 10,600 members by 1975 despite persistent public scrutiny and police harassment (Harris, 1975, p.6).

In 1972, the Metropole Cinema Club opened next door to the Regency at 411 L Street, becoming Washington's first theater dedicated exclusively to showing gay porn films. Shortly after its inauguration, the Metropole hosted DC's first gay pride festival with special film screenings. The venue operated daily from noon to midnight until its closure in 1975, following the arrest of its owner on obscenity law violations. It was succeeded by Tiffany's Film Club, a short-lived private gay film club that lasted barely a year after its opening in September 1975. Despite being affected by the 1972 downzoning action, which classified these establishments as nonconforming uses, the Regency continued its operations until it was compelled to close in the early 1980s in the context of the AIDS epidemic.

As queer visibilities in Mount Vernon Triangle began to wane, downtown development instigated a shift in the gay nightlife epicenter from 9th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue — dubbed by the *Washington Blade* DC's "liveliest corner"— to 5th and K Streets (*The Washington Blade*, 1979). Since the late 1960s, Louis' complex has served as a landmark in Washington's queer scene. The multi-story building housed a variety of bars catering mainly to a white T-LGBQ clientele, including the Hideaway, a basement leather bar, and the Rogue, renowned for its regular drag shows on the second floor. However, the opening of the FBI headquarters across the street prompted the owner to seek a less conspicuous location to avoid potential scrutiny from federal authorities.

Louis' Rogue continued to host regular drag shows and feature nude male dancers at its new location until about 1989, when another landmark T-LGBQ venue, the Brass Rail, took over the ground floor. Primarily catering to the Black gay community, the Brass Rail had originally

been a basement bar near the old Trailways and Greyhound intercity bus terminal and had evolved into a Western-themed, country-style venue by 1968. Over the years, the bar expanded its offerings, including the introduction of its in-house drag entertainment group, the Railettes. The AIDS crisis in the 1980s led the venue to host fundraising shows for related causes.

By the mid-1980s, the neighborhood surrounding the Brass Rail underwent a significant transformation as construction crews replaced smaller shops and bars with large office buildings (Simpson, 1987, p. DC1). In 1986, the Franklin Square Association, a group of developers and office tenants, spent up to $15,000 on legal fees lobbying for Brass Rail's closure (Pansing, 1993, p. 47). Despite this political pressure, the Alcohol and Beverage Control Board renewed the bar's liquor license. Nonetheless, community actions made it clear to both the Rail's owners and patrons that they were unwelcome, instigating its relocation in 1988. Operating at 476 K Street, the Rail continued hosting drag fundraisers until it permanently closed its doors in 1996, replaced by the short-lived 360 Club. By then, Louis' Rogue had transitioned from a queer identity to a straight one, converting into a *'gentlemen's club.'*

Abject Spatial Formations: Planning Implications

The narrative of renewal in Mount Vernon Triangle is one of liminality and abject spatial formations. Once a thriving working-class urban enclave in the early 20th century, the neighborhood became markedly desolate and obsolete by the century's end. Though slated for urban renewal as early as 1954, interventionist planning in the postwar modernization period led to half a century of stagnation and divestment. The characterization of Mount Vernon Triangle as an abject space—due to its inclusion in the renewal zone—can be traced back to the early 20th century. During this time, maps were often used by progressive social scientists to visualize urban issues and advocate for reform (Shanken, 2018).

In the early 1900s, mapping became a popular tool among social scientists and statisticians for visualizing, albeit simplistically, complex social phenomena. However, these maps were not just passive artifacts but active agents in shaping public thought and policy (Gunder, 2011; Harley, 1989; Scott, 1998). As modern planners began incorporating statistical data into traditional urban representations, they moved beyond mere geographical depictions, endorsing abstract mapping techniques, such as choropleths, that distorted reality into powerful ideologies. Deplorably, these visual strategies often reinforced and amplified public perception of urban blight, further stigmatizing already marginalized communities (Lipsitz, 2007).

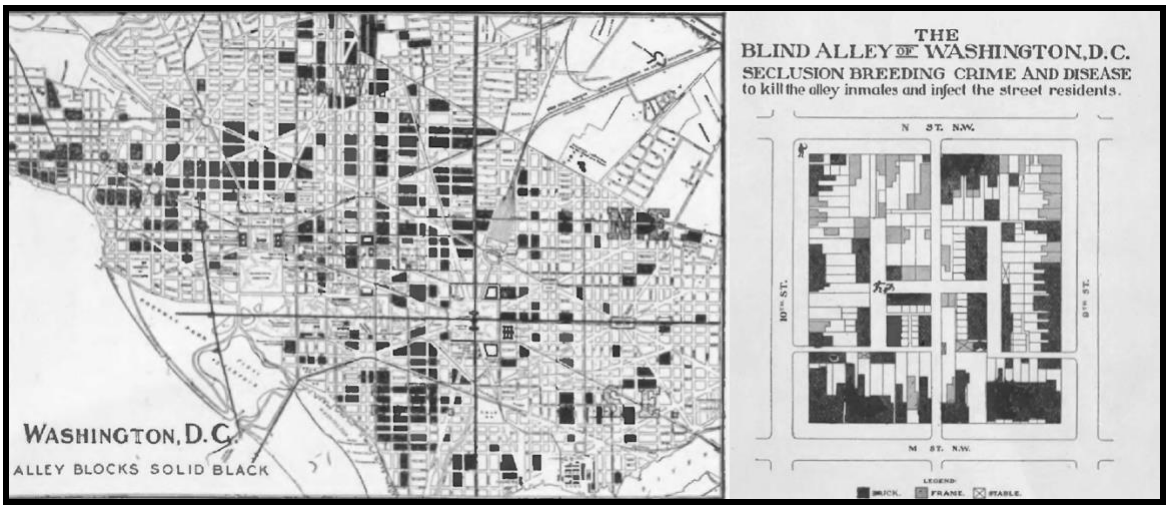
The deployment of visual aids by the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) for scientific persuasion raises serious ethical questions concerning the aesthetics of power (Koepnick, 1999). Maps and other graphical tools have long been essential for urban planning and policymaking. Interestingly, the NCPC's map closely resembles the 1912 "Directory of the Inhabited Alleys of Washington, D.C." in form and content (Jones et al., 1912). This study documented 275 blocks in the nation’s capital containing alley dwellings and found 3,337 such units housing an estimated 16,000 residents. Viewed as catalysts for social problems and risks to public health and safety, the report advocated converting larger alleys into streets and eliminating smaller ones.

The report's impact was amplified by including a city map that vividly depicted the distribution of alley dwellings across the urban landscape. Entire blocks were shaded in a stark black hue, even if they hosted only a single alley dwelling, magnifying their perceived negative impact on the city's well-being (Figure 34). Notably, this visual strategy had disproportionate consequences for areas like Mount Vernon Triangle, where only 51 units existed in an area exceeding 10 acres. Nevertheless, four blocks here were flagged as deeply problematic, feeding

into preexisting stigmas and concerns. This directory, and precisely its cartographic element, arguably played a significant role in shaping public policy, culminating in establishing the Alley Dwelling Authority.

Figure 34.

Abject Spatial Formations: "The Blind Alley of Washington, D.C."



The image on the left indicates blocks containing alley dwellings in Washington, DC, circa 1912, represented in solid black. In contrast, the graphic on the right promotes public fear surrounding the perceived dangers of these concealed public spaces. Images retrieved from the "Directory of the Inhabited Alleys of Washington, D.C.," published in 1912. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

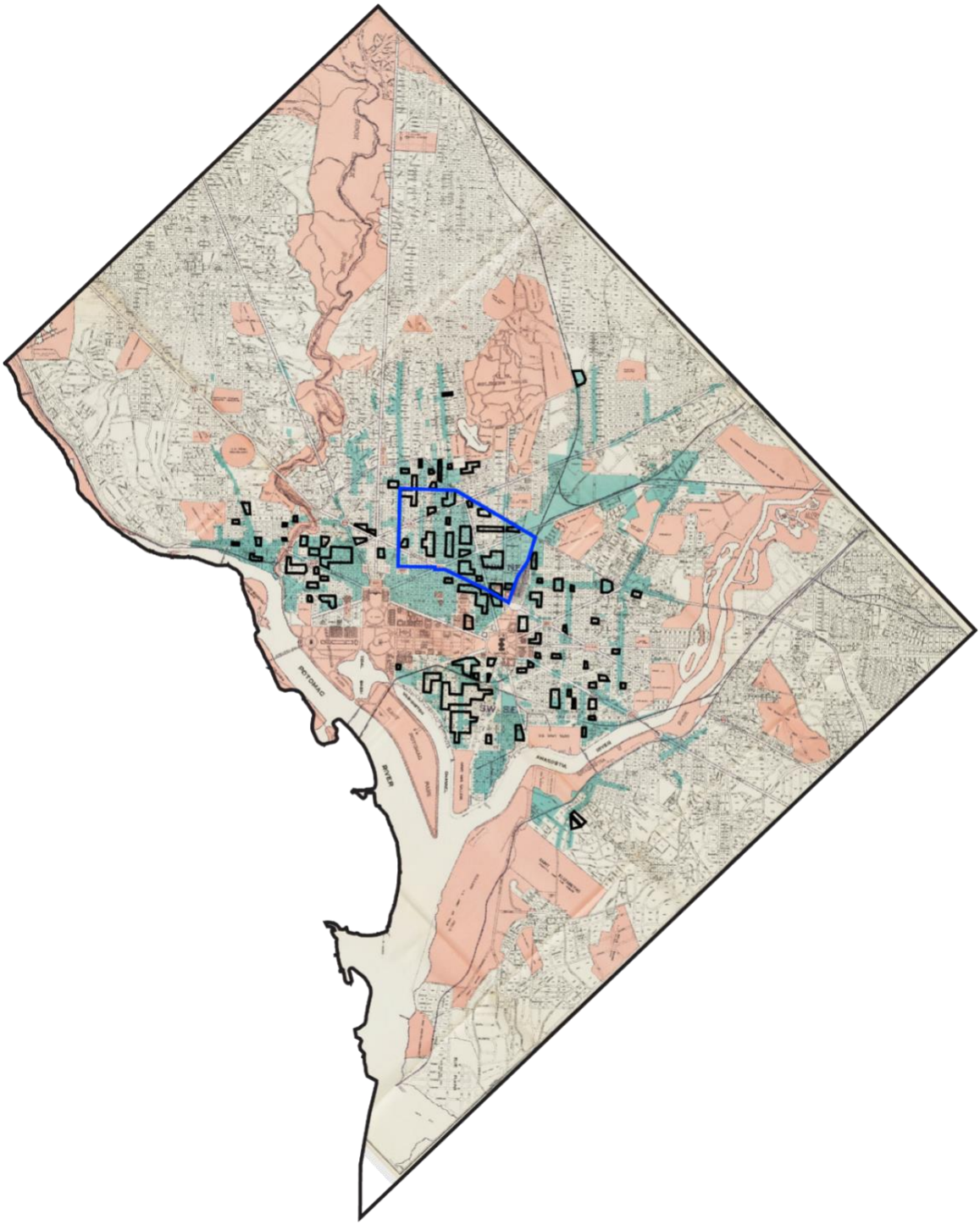
The legacy of these visualizations was apparent in a 1936 map from the District's Surveyor Office, which took its predecessor's approach a step further by grouping neighboring blocks containing alley dwellings inscribed within contiguous territorial zones. The boundaries of these so-called "alley dwelling areas" were superimposed onto a landuse zoning map, as shown in Figure 35. This further entrenched the stigmatization of these areas within dominant public discourse. It served as a precursor to the comprehensive scope of the postwar renewal

plans, effectively magnifying the perceived impact of alley dwellings on their surrounding environment.

Thus, the NCPC map and its 1912 precursor did more than represent social conditions—they helped shape the social and political dialogues surrounding them. In this regard, maps and data visualization were not mere passive tools but active participants in sociopolitical processes with lasting implications for the urban fabric and its inhabitants.

Figure 35.

From Block to Area to Zone



"Base Map of the District of Columbia Showing Public and Zoning Areas." Prepared in the Office of the Surveyor, DC, by direction of the Engineer Commissioner, DC, 1936. The blue line represents the boundary of the Northwest Urban Renewal Area, while the black outlines show alley-dwelling areas. Image retrieved from the Library of Congress. Created by the author.

Chapter Five: Policing, Neoliberalism, and the Unmaking of the *Stroll*

Traditionally rooted in a modernist vision of comprehensive design and social welfare, urban planning underwent significant paradigmatic shifts over the past few decades (Hall, 2014). With the ascendance of neoliberalism, cities worldwide, including Washington, DC, have been reconceptualized as competitive entities within a global market. This reframing steered planning's focus towards market-oriented development and regulatory governance (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Consequently, adopting zoning tools has become less about harmonizing landuse and more about facilitating economic expansion and exerting social control (Hackworth, 2009).

In the clutches of neoliberal governance, urban spaces are continually molded by market-driven ideologies that champion individualism, commodification, and privatization (Harvey, 2005). This ethos is evident in the commodification of spaces and properties and the corporatization of public assets. In this context, cities emerge as key battlegrounds where neoliberalism is concurrently produced and challenged (Smith, 1996). Zoning and policing evolve beyond mere instruments of urban governance, being redefined and utilized as neoliberal mechanisms. Zoning commodifies space, determining its use-value and segmenting the cityscape based on economic significance. Concurrently, policing is recast as "urban sanitization," marking specific activities and individuals as deviant or out-of-place, rationalizing their exclusion or removal (Beckett & Herbert, 2008). Formerly deemed an undesirable location within Washington's urban fabric by mainstream society, Mount Vernon Triangle evolved toward the end of the 20th century into a sanctuary for Black trans women facing a multitude of socio-spatial biases and exclusions. As the new millennium approached, however, this haven would become a battleground as Black trans women fought for their place against the relentless forces of

gentrification and neoliberal urban development. This chapter highlights how the same systems and processes that helped produce and sustain the *Stroll's* liminal geography eventually sought to repossess and repurpose it for an emerging middle-class demographic as the 21st century dawned.

The narrative unfolds via two case studies that spotlight the intertwined forces of 'Not In My Back Yard' (NIMBY) sentiments expounded by an incoming middle-class gentry and aggressive policing measures, such as the enactment of prostitution-free zones. Both represent tangible and symbolic barriers to Black trans women's safety and existence in urban settings. The cumulative impact of these practices paints a troubling story: an inexorable drive pushing these women to the city's margins. An incredibly vivid expression of this tendency is the NIMBY attitude towards sexually oriented businesses (SOBs), underscoring an intensified effort to control sexuality by linking it to urban spatial policies and governance. The rise in NIMBY resistance to sexually oriented establishments indicates a broader shift in urban planning and governance models. Through this perspective, the chapter clarifies how neoliberal urban governance creates complex interconnections between spatial regulation, sexual governance, and citizen engagement. The convergence of zoning and sexuality regulation under the neoliberal umbrella raises urgent questions about social justice, individual autonomy, and the role of the state in shaping both spatial and moral terrains.

United in NIMBYism: A Coalition to Shut Down Fun Fair Video

We will never make progress on this street until this toxic mix of businesses is taken care of.

- *The Washington Post*, September 27, 2007.

As the new millennium dawned, the faded yellow wooden boards of Fun Fair Video contrasted starkly with the evolving facade of Mount Vernon Triangle, evoking memories of a bygone era. Every day, rows of VHS tapes were put on display, while the back of the store

catered to a more mature audience with booths offering pornographic content. This establishment had long been a bone of contention in the city, its presence challenging both legal boundaries and the neighborhood's changing ethos (Silverman, 2007). Nevertheless, the city's initial indifference seemed rooted in the store's marginal status within the urban topography.

However, this complacency began to wane with the gentrification of Mount Vernon Triangle. In September 2007, a cohort of predominantly middle-class newcomers picketed outside 915 5th Street, brandishing placards that read “Not Fun Not Fair” and “Prada Not Porn” (Silverman, 2007, p. B4). They had committed to a forward-looking vision of Mount Vernon Triangle, one that clashed with the existence of a store like Fun Fair. Leading this effort, Cary Silverman publicly accused Fun Fair of harboring a hidden realm of sexual indulgence. Although the city was privy to these claims, bureaucratic and legal impediments stalled prompt intervention. As luxury condominiums started punctuating the District's horizon, their denizens cast disparaging glances at what they perceived as a nuisance. Anecdotes of intimidation, illicit drug transactions, and perceived dangers tied to Fun Fair proliferated. The Fun Fair narrative transcended a singular occurrence; it epitomized the broader discord between the present and an emerging middle-class vision for the future of the District. Persistent community advocacy culminated in the closure of Fun Fair Video in November 2007, signaling the end of an era and igniting dialogues on community identity and the preservation or erasure of historical remnants.

Jose Montiel's initial objective for Fun Fair Video in the mid-90s was unambiguous: to attract a niche clientele keen on sexually explicit content. However, city stipulations threw unexpected curveballs. While Fun Fair Video secured a certificate of occupancy in 1996 to function as a non-sexually oriented video membership outlet, Montiel later contended that this was procured erroneously, asserting the store's genuine identity as a sexually oriented business

(SOB). Opposing Montiel's account, a DC police officer depicted Fun Fair as a nucleus of chaos, raising safety alarms. The District's Board of Zoning Adjustment (BZA) ultimately rebuffed Montiel's appeal, invoking the absence of any "exceptional situation or condition" that would warrant a deviation. Nonetheless, the persistent operation of Fun Fair Video underscored a larger concern: city passivity persisted in the absence of vocal dissent. But as a fresh, outspoken demographic settled in, tolerance for Montiel's enterprise dwindled.

While Mount Vernon Triangle's trajectory may be distinct, it speaks to broader dynamics in Washington, DC's urban chronicle. A discernible trend arose wherein marginalized groups became overshadowed by prevailing forces. This pattern can be traced back to the 1970s, an epoch characterized by sexual emancipation and a pivotal paradigm shift in planning known as the communicative turn (Healey, 1992). As urban centers across the nation navigated these changes, DC witnessed the implementation of the Home Rule Act of 1973, shifting spatial governance from the exclusive domain of the National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) to local authorities, notably the District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP). This legislative act aimed to democratize DC's planning process by engaging its residents. This transition catalyzed the formation of Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) to reinforce community engagement. Nevertheless, this newfound empowerment occasionally magnified existing power imbalances.

Areas previously under federal purview, now shaped by local stakeholders—often bolstered by affluent newcomers—underwent a redefinition of "community" and "decency." This shift frequently marginalized specific businesses and their patrons. A deeper investigation of the District's relationship with SOBs, notably encapsulated in a 1977 zoning text amendment, provides insight into the city's mutable urban mechanics and the delicate equilibrium between

individual freedoms, democratic ideals, and the subtle power dynamics shaping urban environments.

Redefining the Spatial Contours of Morality

The Zoning Act empowers the Commission to promote the community's morals as one of the purposes of zoning. The Commission finds that such businesses would be inappropriately located in or adjacent to residential areas because of the adverse effects such establishments may have on family life and stability.

- D.C. Zoning Commission, *Order No. 77-15*, December 8, 1977

In February of 1977, Art DuFraine and Ted Nicely secured a business license to operate a bookstore at the premises located at 3255 M Street in Georgetown (Cue, 1977). On the surface, the store appeared to offer conventional books and novelty records. However, it covertly carried sexually explicit materials, which were not required to be disclosed during the permitting process at the time. The store's opening in March was met with public backlash, particularly from the traditionally conservative Georgetown community. The business was located in the heart of Georgetown's commercial district and fell within the C-2-A zone, designated by the 1958 Zoning Regulations as a community business center for medium-density commercial ventures, including bookstores (Zoning Regulations, 1958). Nevertheless, the bookstore's presence highlighted the tension between zoning regulations and constitutional rights. DC Councilmember Polly Shackleton, representing Georgetown’s Third Ward, lamented, "There isn't anything that can be done" with current zoning regulations (Cue, 1977, p. C1).

Despite the potential for rezoning, the owners saw a lucrative business opportunity. They posited that their store, inadvertently sparking the 1977 debate on the zoning of sexually oriented businesses, would establish economic dominance if contemporary competitors were kept out of Georgetown (Cue, 1977). However, Georgetown's predominantly affluent, white demographic, led by the Citizens Association of Georgetown and its chairman, Olcott H. Deming, fiercely

opposed the bookstore. The primary argument was that commercial freedoms should not automatically grant unchecked locational rights. Armed with a petition signed by 1,500 Georgetowner residents objecting to the bookstore, Shackelton urged the DC Council to analyze SOBs and assess their potential adverse impacts on residential communities (DCOZ, 77-15).

This local conflict mirrored a national trend in the 1970s, where SOBs proliferated in cities across the U.S. Washington, DC's iconic 14th Street transformed in the early 1970s, becoming the nucleus of the city's red-light district known as "The Strip" (Jaffe & Sherwood, 2014, p.150). Analysts claimed that the post-1968 civil disturbances and the nascent waves of the sexual revolution were instrumental in this shift. The resulting urban decay left the landscape filled with vacant retail spaces, depressed property values, and a middle-class exodus (Knight, 1978).

In May of 1977, the formerly ambivalent Zoning Commission responded to the impassioned pleas of Georgetown residents by enacting a moratorium on establishing new SOBs under the District's Administrative Procedures Act. This provisional measure, with a ceiling of 120 days, restricted SOBs to C-3-B and C-4 zones, pending the BZA's approval. The Commission established strict guidelines that included a minimum distance of 200 feet from residential zones, churches, or schools and a ban on explicit merchandise displays in public. Other requirements focused on ensuring compatibility with local businesses and minimizing disruptions from noise and traffic. The Zoning Commission used this hiatus to gather insights to craft permanent regulations, striving to balance First Amendment protections with the integrity of neighborhood communities via calculated zoning measures.

Taking cues from varying approaches to regulating SOBs in other U.S. cities, including Boston's "Combat Zone" and Detroit's "Anti-Skid Row" ordinance, the Zoning Commission

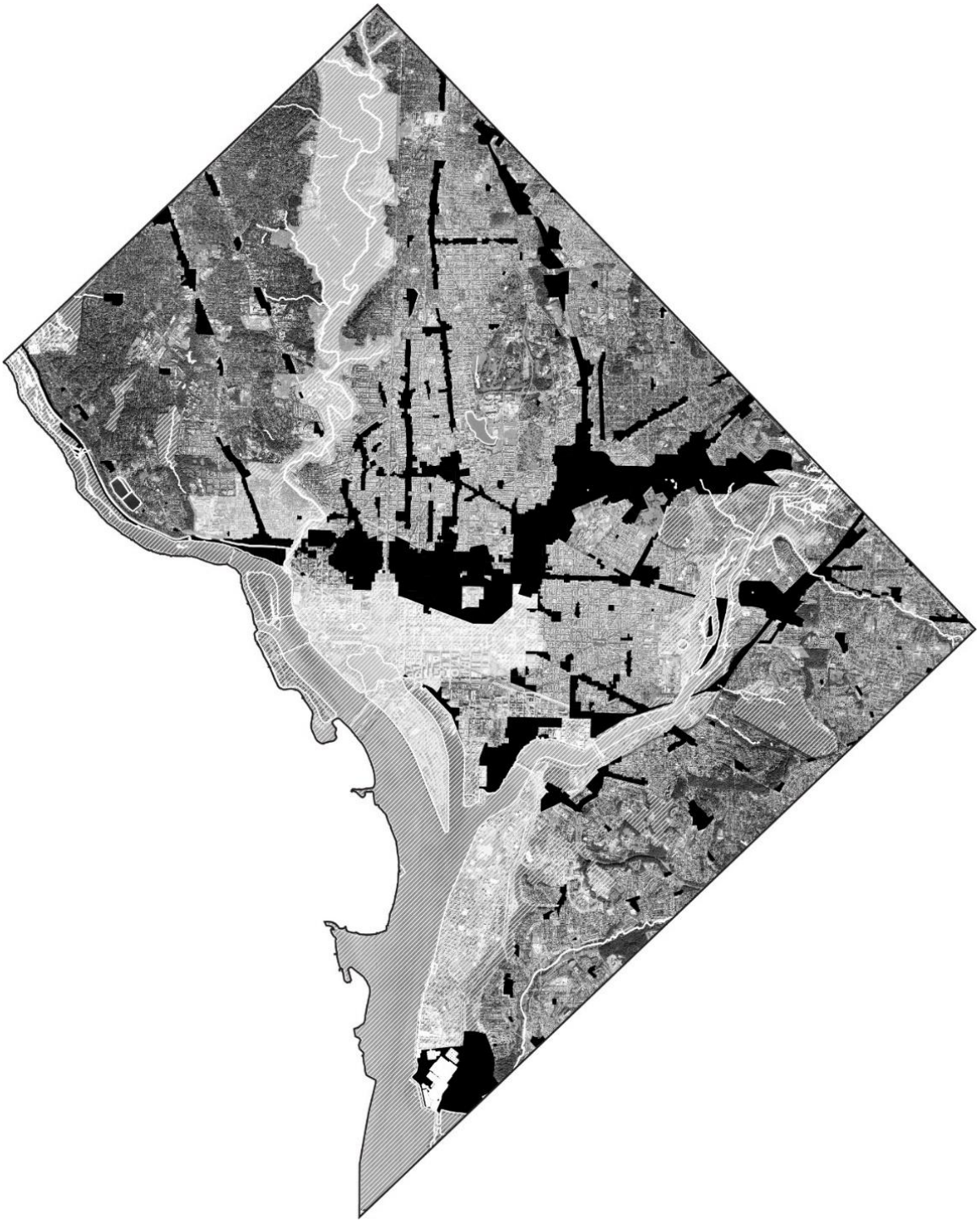
crafted its plan. The "Combat Zone" emerged in the late 1960s due to urban renewal efforts that displaced Boston's red-light district from its former location in Scollay Square. The residents and entertainment venues affected by this move relocated to Washington Street, creating a new hub for adult entertainment. In contrast, in 1972, Detroit decided to disperse SOBs throughout the city to mitigate their perceived negative impact. The Supreme Court's landmark ruling in *Young v. American Mini Theatres* in 1976 upheld Detroit's dispersal tactic, establishing the constitutionality of utilizing zoning authority to regulate SOBs while instituting the secondary effects doctrine.[4]

Inspired by Detroit's court-sanctioned model, Washington's Zoning Commission invoked the secondary effects doctrine, reaffirming its dutiful agency to align community moral standards with zoning guidelines. By the end of 1977, the Commission released a city-wide text amendment targeting SOBs. These revised regulations, enacted on December 8, 1977, brought about significant changes, recalibrating Washington's "moral terrain" (Hubbard, 2000, p. 200). Prior to these regulations, adult bookstores in the District could operate in zones earmarked for commercial, manufacturing, mixed commercial-manufacturing, and waterfront uses. Moreover, no distance buffers existed for specific protected establishments, including schools and religious institutions. The map shown in Figure 36 visualizes this regulatory landscape where SOBs were permitted prior to the promulgation of the 1977 rules.

[4] The Supreme Court's decision in *Young* solidified it as a landmark case as it heralded the introduction of the secondary effects doctrine, permitting a reduction in judicial scrutiny when regulating adult-oriented expression. This doctrine allows municipalities to regulate the locations of establishments that feature adult entertainment based on the adverse secondary effects those establishments are believed to produce (e.g., increased crime or lowered property values) rather than the content of the entertainment itself. Thus, under this doctrine, the government can regulate such establishments not because of disapproval of their expressive content but because of the undesirable side effects of their operation.

Figure 36.

Washington's Moral Contours Prior to 1977



The territories shaded in black represent the geography of Washington, DC, where adult bookstores and similar SOBs were permitted to operate as a matter of right before the promulgation of the 1977 zoning amendment. Created by the author.

In contrast, the 1977 ordinance imposed stringent limitations on potential sites for SOBs within the District's boundaries, effectively eliminating most viable locations. The city relegated SOBs to specific C-3-B and C-4 zones in the downtown area west of Capitol Street, stretching from Massachusetts to Pennsylvania Avenues and extending narrowly northward on Connecticut Avenue past DuPont Circle, as illustrated in Figure 37. The Zoning Commission, in alignment with District planners, deemed these sanctioned zones adequate for the further distribution of SOBs, thus blending Boston’s combat zone approach with Detroit’s dispersal model. Additionally, these businesses could not operate within 600 feet of residential zones, "special purpose" areas, or territories overseen by the Commission of Fine Arts. They also could not be within 600 feet of protected entities like churches, schools, libraries, or playgrounds and had to be at least 300 feet away from other adult-oriented businesses.

Figure 37.

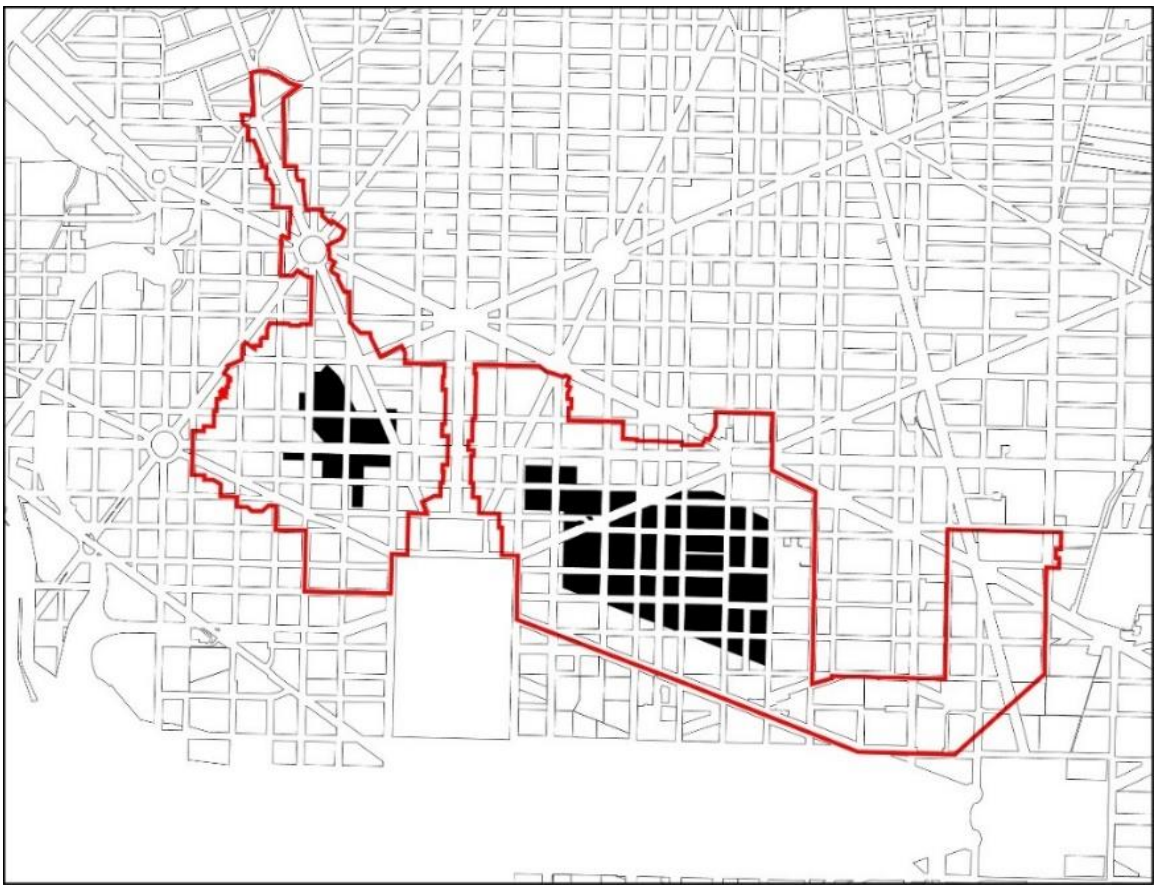
Washington's Moral Contours Post 1977

The territories shaded in black represent C-3-B and C-4 districts, the only two designations permitting SOBs following the 1977 zoning amendment. Created by the author.

These burdensome controls drastically reduced the territory available to SOBs to the extent that the District arguably imposed an outright ban on these constitutionally protected commercial entities. The District's planning director, Ben Gilbert, admitted to the severity of the new zoning regulations, expressing skepticism about the practicality of any downtown locations for new SOBs to operate (Eisen, 1977). The map in Figure 38 portrays this diminished territory. In contrast, the map in Figure 39 elucidates the overall impact when accounting for the 600-foot buffer from protected entities, thus highlighting the engendered spatial extradition of SOBs from the city's jurisdiction.

Figure 38.

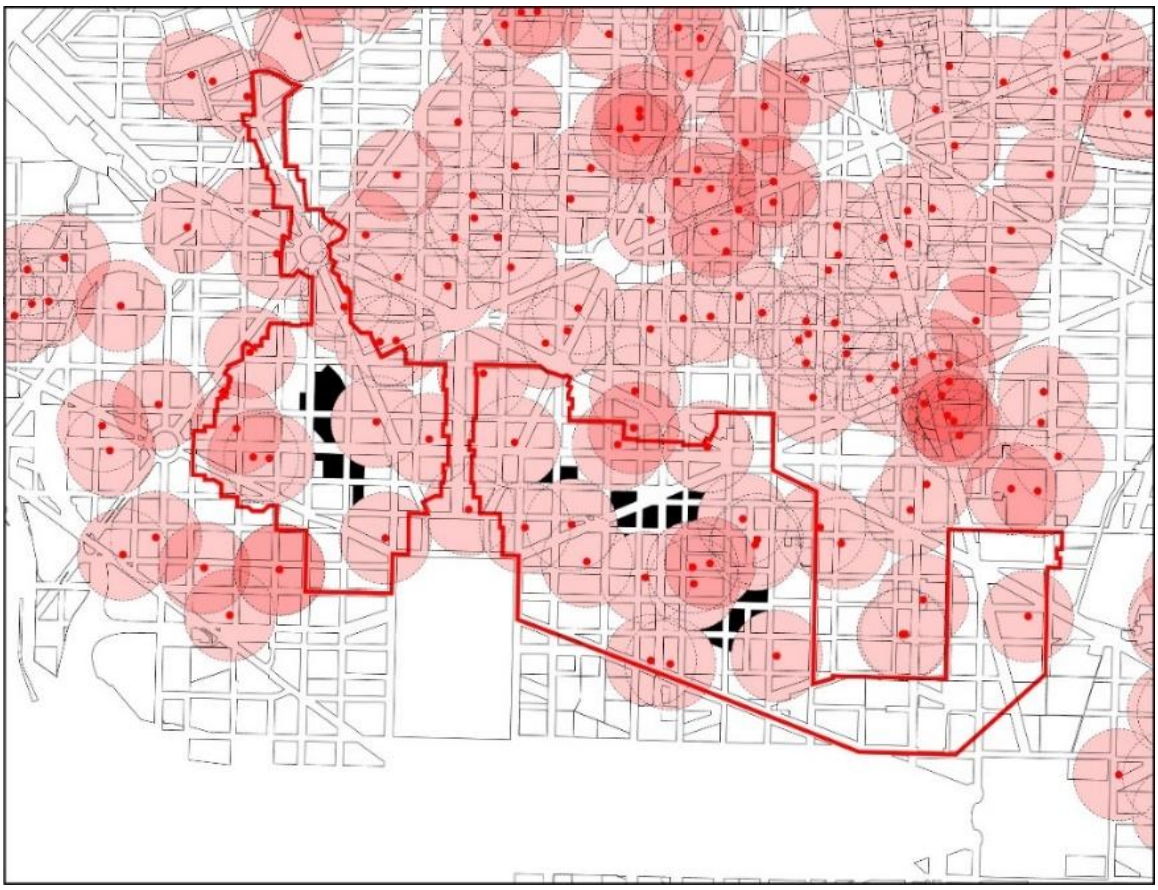
Buffered Zones



This close-up map shows the C-3-B and C-4 zones where SOBs were permitted. The red line delineates the boundary of these zones. However, due to the 600-foot buffer mandated from residential, special purpose zones, and federally governed lands, the blocks and partial blocks filled in black represent the actual territory wherein SOBs can legally operate. Created by the author.

Figure 39.

Permissible Realities



This mapping visualizes the highly diminished geographic realm wherein SOBs could legally operate after factoring in the additional 600-foot distance required from protected entities, including schools, religious institutions, and playgrounds. Created by the author.

The 1977 zoning amendments extended beyond mere geographic considerations, delving into issues of bodily autonomy. While the 1958 regulations defined a sexually oriented business in general terms, the 1977 update offered more detailed descriptions of "specified sexual activities" and "specified anatomical areas."[5] Such vivid definitions underscore the Zoning

[5] According to the District of Columbia Zoning Commission, “specified sexual activities” are defined as: “acts of human masturbation, sexual intercourse, sexual stimulation or arousal, sodomy or bestiality, fondling or other

Commission's expansive reach, rationalized as necessary measures to ensure public health, morality, and welfare. This extensive authority of the zoning regulators to classify and regulate parts of the human body for public oversight indicates the overlap of spatial governance with bodily surveillance.

Citizen activism, combined with local planning and zoning strategies, offers a powerful tool for shaping urban spaces. Particularly in the post-sexual liberation era, planning became a vehicle for communities seeking to assert their vision and values onto local landscapes. For many, SOBs became symbols of a moral struggle, often prompting an aggressive response against what they perceived as degenerative elements. NIMBYism reflects this sentiment. In the case of SOBs, it found a partner in local planning and zoning measures. NIMBY activism against SOBs was not solely about opposition to the businesses themselves but expressed broader concerns about community morals, perceived crime, and threats to local property values.

Leveraging the technicalities of planning regulations and zoning ordinances, local citizen groups discovered that they could effectively curtail the spread and operations of SOBs without directly infringing upon First Amendment rights. This strategy was grounded in the fact that while the U.S. Constitution protected the freedom of expression, it did not guarantee businesses an inherent right to operate anywhere and everywhere. Consequently, local planning and zoning became de facto gatekeepers, wielding the power to shape and reflect community sentiments toward SOBs. For instance, the restrictions imposed by Washington's Zoning Commission in 1977 confined the areas where SOBs could operate, effectively pushing them out of most parts of

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erotic touching of human genitals, pubic region, buttock or breast." Meanwhile, "specified anatomical areas" prohibited from public exposure are defined as: "parts of the human body that are less than completely and opaquely covered, including the genitals or pubic region, buttock, and female breast below a point immediately above the top of the areola; and human genitals in a discernibly turgid state, even is completely and opaquely covered."

the city. This not only achieved the desired reduction in the number of SOBs but also displayed the power dynamics between businesses, citizen groups, and local authorities.

By 1980, DuFraine and Nicely ceased operating their Georgetown bookstore, and the premises was repurposed into a family amusement center. The rezoning in 1977 precipitated a sharp decline in SOBs – dropping from approximately thirty-five establishments in 1977 to a meager four by 1996, even before the rise of the digital revolution. This decline seemed to fulfill a prophecy by Charles Kutz, who had advocated for the introduction of zoning in the U.S. capital nearly six decades earlier in 1920. Addressing the challenges of applying zoning to pre-existing, grandfathered-in uses, Kutz predicted that, over time, zoning would eliminate all inconsistencies. By the mid-1990s, when study participants first discovered the *Stroll* on K Street, Fun Fair Video was one of the few remaining entities in this increasingly moralized landscape.

Contrary to the prevailing belief that SOBs attracted sex workers and, by extension, crime, the *Stroll's* manifestation on K Street had long preceded the disputed video store. The 'Sex Bookstore' featured in Alexis' mental map of the *Stroll*, also recalled by other participants, began its operations in 1996. This was long after Black trans women had already claimed the intersection of 5th and K Streets as their turf, thereby challenging the widely accepted assumptions.

When Jose Montiel opted to launch his adult video enterprise in a location that previously housed a laundromat, he likely did so because of the affordable rent on a well-trafficked route. The routine presence of street-based sex work in the area suggested lenient oversight. Though none of the study participants admitted to frequenting the store, many remembered its fleeting existence there. This challenged the widely held belief that SOBs lured sex workers and, consequently, crime. Nonetheless, Fun Fair Video faced allegations of violating zoning laws and

was eventually forced to shut down. During public hearings, police testimonies falsely claimed that the SOB attracted a significant number of sex workers, particularly "transvestites" (BZA, 1997, p. 2). This insinuated that Fun Fair Video was responsible for bringing trans women to that area initially. The decision to close Fun Fair Video was made after Mayor Anthony Williams introduced the Mount Vernon Triangle Agenda in 2003, signaling the area's transformation over two decades into the upscale middle-class neighborhood it is today.

Nevertheless, the closure of Fun Fair did not dissuade Black trans women from returning to a place that had been integral to their community for almost fifteen years. Their enduring presence propelled District officials to devise new legal strategies to forcibly remove these marginalized individuals deemed ‘abject’ from the vicinity. Their solution? Prostitution Free Zones.

Prostitution-Free Zones and the Unraveling of the *Stroll*

K Street changed drastically as more buildings were put up. Businesses opened at first, and apartment complexes followed. Once people started moving in, I knew the end was near for Fifth and K. Not only that, but the apartment buildings they were constructing looked fancy and expensive. First, I was figuring out if they were office buildings, but then I realized the area was being converted into a residential neighborhood, and that’s when I thought, ‘We’re done.’ Those apartments cost at least $1,200 to rent, and I knew whoever could pay that amount would not want to look outside the window and see the girls in their scanty dresses parading the streets.

- Yazmina Tadesse, *Personal Communication*, February 2, 2021

Amid challenging times for trans individuals in the District, glimmers of progress and advocacy began to emerge, signifying a potential shift in the narrative around trans equality. Just two days before the DC Superior Court was scheduled to hear the city's bid to close Fun Fair Video in October 2007, then Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), Cathy Lanier, issued a groundbreaking directive concerning interactions between officers and the transgender

community. This directive, mandating that MPD officers address transgender individuals according to the gender they identify with and engage with them respectfully, was hailed by the DC Trans Coalition—a local activist organization representing the city's transgender populace—as setting "the highest standard in the nation" (Klein, 2007, p. B4). Upon detaining a transgender individual, police officers were asked to mark "AT RISK" on the arrest form to indicate their potential vulnerability to aggression from fellow detainees, and additional precautionary measures were taken to ensure the safety of transgender detainees by requiring jail officers to house them in separate cells (Klein, 2007, p. B4).

Fast forward to January 2009, as the nation buzzed in anticipation of swearing in its first Black president, the U.S. capital launched an offensive against its Black trans denizens on *K Street*. MPD's Cathy Lanier activated two prostitution-free zones (PFZs) ahead of the inauguration ceremony, both within the geographic confines of the *Stroll*. Framed as a public safety measure, PFZs were the latest innovation in the city's protracted battle against sex work. The ordinance empowered the Chief of Police to temporarily declare prostitution-free zones in areas of the city where the "health or safety of residents is endangered by prostitution or prostitution-related offenses" (Omnibus Public Safety Amendment Act, 2006, p. 7). These zones extended up to 1,000 square feet, wherein two or more people were prohibited from congregating outside, effectively curtailing public life within the zone. These zones could remain in effect for a maximum of 240 hours, during which police officers were given extensive discretionary powers to profile any individual within the declared zone as a potential solicitor. Any two or more people gathering in public risked police orders to vacate the area and a mandate not to return for the duration of the zone; failure to comply could result in arrests, potential fines of

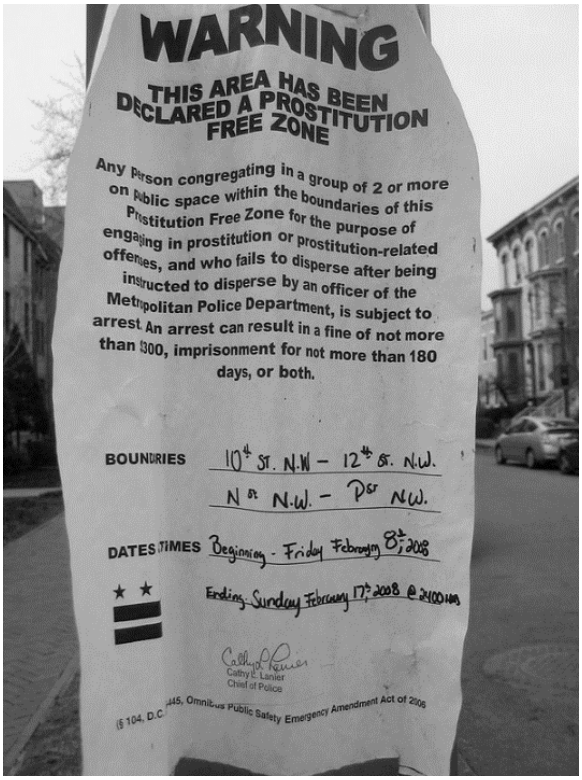
$300, and up to six months in jail. Notably, multiple zones could be declared simultaneously and consecutively.

The concept of prostitution-free zones inverted conventional zoning logic that aimed to regulate certain activities through containment. They introduced spaces of "zero-tolerance" or "zones of exception" (Edelman, 2011, p. 854), testing the limits of policing and surveillance and redefining the boundaries of citizenship (Brunn, 2018). The legislative edifice for PFZs in Washington, DC, rests on a nuanced relationship between criminal law and land use regulations. Enacted under the guise of "public nuisance abatement," these zones harnessed civil ordinances to achieve criminal objectives (Saunders & Kirby, 2010, p. 107). This blending of criminal and civil law aimed to sidestep constitutional protections, creating a legal grey area (Valverde, 2003).

While PFZs were first introduced in 2006, their enforcement in early 2009 felt more targeted and intensive – perceived as a deliberate attack on the *Stroll* and its anchoring community. The first of the two declared zones zeroed in on the epicenter of the *Stroll* at 5th and K Street, covering the entire 400-block area of K Street. Public awareness was facilitated through announcements in local media, while the inconspicuous boundaries of the PFZ were subtly marked with signage, easily mistaken as ordinary traffic indicators (Figure 40). From midnight on January 16th, an augmented police presence patrolled the area, granting officers the discretion to profile, detain, or displace individuals based on mere suspicion of involvement in sex work for a period lasting 240 hours. This 10-day period was sufficient to dismantle a community that heavily depended on the site for safety and economic survival.

Figure 40.

Invisible Demarcations



Source: Flickr.

The MPD justified the establishment of these zones based on high volumes of prostitution-related complaints. According to anonymized MPD records, in the preceding six months, there were thirteen registered complaints concerning prostitution in the area. However, the report lacked clarity on whether these multiple complaints came from one or more individuals. The record also listed other unrelated crimes in the vicinity, including robberies and grand larcenies. By doing so, it conflated sex work with other criminal activities, thus perpetuating the stigmatization of sex workers and advancing the unsubstantiated idea that they catalyze broader criminality. This association not only criminalizes and vilifies sex workers but also underscores the pretextual reasons often invoked to police their actions.

Instituting a prostitution-free zone required the police department to adhere to a specific protocol. This protocol involved sending a particular request form to the city's general counsel, awaiting their verification and approval. Integral to this request was the presentation of substantive evidence elucidating the rationale behind selecting a given location. This evidence was intended to offer clarity and justification for the demarcation. Additionally, an accompanying map delineating the proposed zone's boundaries was mandatory. This map had to comply with the given area constraints. The map (Figure 41) associated with the PFZ declared for the 5th and K Street area in January 2009 notably portrayed an unchanged urban scene, with landmarks like the Museum Square Apartment building and the INS edifice. However, upon delving deeper and employing historical satellite imagery, a critical shift in the urban fabric is evident: the arrival of City Vista (Figure 42) on the former site of the Northern Liberty Market, which had once been earmarked for affordable housing following its acquisition by the city in 1971.

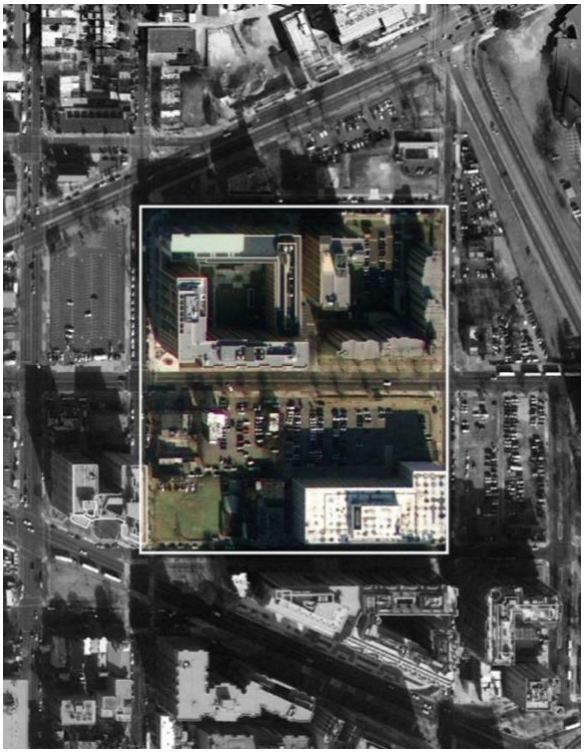
Figure 41.

Zones of Exception

Source: Map obtained from MPD records upon submittal of FOIA request.

Figure 42.

Rival Geographies



This satellite image captured in January 2009 clearly shows the significant City Vista development directly across the street from the *Stroll's* central hub.

The conspicuous omission of such a significant transformation in the urban landscape, particularly the emergence of City Vista, begs the question: What truly motivated the attention towards this area? The juxtaposition of the luxury condominium's arrival with the declaration of the PFZ suggests that the forces driving these police actions might align more with the interests of new, more affluent residents rather than the broader community's well-being. This alignment underscores a concerning implication: that sometimes, urban policing and policy decisions might be more attuned to protecting specific socioeconomic interests than genuinely fostering an inclusive, safe urban environment for all.

Despite the significant strides in the realm of trans rights and clear directives issued by figures like Cathy Lanier, the District's enforcement of PFZs in 2009 presented a stark contradiction. By targeting the *Stroll*, an area closely associated with the Black trans community, the PFZs zeroed in on this demographic with pinpoint precision. Such a rigorous zero-tolerance policy did more than temporarily circumvent Black trans women from freely accessing the public realm of the *Stroll*, effectively obliterating a critical place they had come to rely heavily on for safety and economic support. This abrupt and unyielding crackdown exposed the tension between the lofty aspirations of the political public sphere and the tangible realities of public space. It showcased the discrepancies that often manifest in policymaking—where benevolent decisions in the corridors of power can thwart or nullify grassroots efforts in public arenas, uncovering the intricacies and sometimes unintended consequences of urban governance. Therefore, comprehending urban planning and zoning requires a broader contextual understanding that integrates concepts of policing and power.

From K Street to Eastern Avenue: State-Sanctioned Extraditions

Between 75 and 100 people gathered at the corner of Fifth and K streets, NW, on Friday night, April 28, for a memorial vigil for a 22-year-old transgendered person whom gay and transgender activists say may have been beaten to death as part of a hate crime. The vigil took place at a site where friends of male-to-female transgendered person Tyrone "Tyra" Henderson said Henderson regularly solicited men for sex for money and where the friends fear that an assailant may have targeted Henderson for a hate-related murder.

- *The Washington Blade*, May 5, 2000.

Policing serves as an omnipresent and insidious force, influencing and structuring the environments of Black trans women. It often acts as an invisible hand, subtly steering their lives into predetermined paths. The streets they navigate, the spaces they occupy, and even their selected routes are inexorably shaped by this institutional authority. As expounded in Chapter

Two, Yazmina and Mauna's journey poignantly encapsulates this construct. Their meandering through Shaw's backstreets and dim alleyways represented a conscious strategy borne out of an inherent need for self-preservation. The winding pathways leading to the *Stroll* were a cautious dance of evasion, deliberately avoiding the watchful eyes of law enforcement. This careful choreography speaks volumes about the lengths Black trans women take to find autonomy and safety within their urban domains.

Black trans women inhabit a precarious nexus of overlapping marginalization, positioning them at the deadly crossroads of racism, sexism, and transphobia (National Center for Transgender Equality). These compounded identities subject them to heightened scrutiny, rendering them particularly susceptible to punitive disciplinary mechanisms and overzealous police practices. While comprehensive data sources elucidating the full extent of this discrimination remain scant, available evidence paints a somber picture. A report by the National LGBTQ Task Force found that Black transgender people are up to three times more likely to experience police violence compared to their non-black counterparts (Grant et al., 2011). Moreover, 38% of Black trans individuals have reported facing harassment by law enforcement, a rate significantly higher than their white trans peers (Grant et al., 2011, p. 158). This data resonates with another alarming statistic from the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey indicating that nearly 58% of trans individuals who have interacted with law enforcement officers in the previous year “experienced some form of mistreatment,” which included “being verbally harassed, repeatedly referred to as the wrong gender, physically assaulted, or sexually assaulted, including being forced by officers to engage in sexual activity to avoid arrest” (U.S. Transgender Survey, 2015, p.14). While such statistics hint at systemic discrimination, personal accounts, like Yazmina's, emphasize the profound emotional toll: "The police do not care about us. They only

show up when one of us gets killed," she shared, capturing the profound sense of alienation and mistrust many trans women hold towards law enforcement.

Yazmina's statement transcends mere criticism of individual officers, highlighting broader institutional neglect. This pervasive indifference, evident when police typically engage with trans women only in the aftermath of grave violence, stands as a stark symbol of institutionalized harm. When a system designed for protection consistently overlooks the threats and vulnerabilities faced by a specific group, it tacitly sends a message devaluing their lives. This only empowers wrongdoers, reinforcing an environment where violence against trans women persists, becomes normalized, and often goes unpunished. The state's silent complicity, through non-intervention, amplifies the marginalization and devaluation of Black trans lives.

By the early 2000s, Yazmina had seamlessly woven herself into the fabric of the *Stroll*. Its nightly cadences became second nature with time, her senses attuned to its shifting dynamics. With her astute observations, Yazmina discerned specific patterns—like reduced police patrols between midnight and dawn and the *Stroll's* supply-demand dynamics. While weekends promised more substantial earnings, weekdays required early appearances to maximize dwindling opportunities. However, increased visibility, especially against the backdrop of *K Street*, drew unwelcome scrutiny. Yazmina's strategic adaptability showcased her survival instinct and resilience in navigating systemic prejudice.

Despite the adversities, Yazmina's ingenuity transformed potential risks into protective barriers. She once masqueraded as a lost tourist, using linguistic and social cues to ward off police suspicion. She masterfully balanced the intricate dynamics of race, gender, and class, reflecting her complex identity. Many Black trans women on the *Stroll* also carried alternative clothing and wigs, using performative identities to dodge policing. If confronted by police

suspecting them of sex work, they adapted their appearances to elude recognition, reinforcing the innate fluidity of their identities (Butler, 1990).

As these women evolved their strategies, law enforcement escalated their tactics. Entrapment became a prevalent method. “They hide behind their badges, pretending to care," Yazmina frequently stated, her voice tinged with bitterness. A deceptive proposition led to her arrest, reminding her of the fragility of her existence. Budget hotels like the Days Inn provided vital havens in the broader urban landscape, but even these refuges attracted police attention, elevating risks. "When it comes to hotels, beware of entrapment. I had to learn that the hard way," Yazmina cautioned, recalling an incident where protectors turned into threats, culminating in her arrest and subsequent banishment from *K Street* for 120 days.

In Washington, DC, the enforcement of laws aimed at sex work follows a cyclical ‘boom’ and ‘bust’ pattern, oscillating between phases of liberal attitudes and visibility, then transitioning to periods of rigorous policing and punitive actions. During ‘booms,’ sex work's visibility increased, with more tolerant societal attitudes. These periods were followed by "busts" that witnessed intensified crackdowns. An instance from 1989 saw police displacing women working near Franklin Square. In a highly publicized stunt, they were driven across the Memorial Bridge to Virginia and instructed not to return, a precursor to later PFZs. The late 1990s introduced subtler regulatory measures, including street signs that banned right turns between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. at specific intersections. This cycle ensued in the new millennium, with policies becoming increasingly tacit, albeit equally if not more punitive.

The trajectory of DC's street-based sex work mirrors broader urban trends shaped by the hegemonic undercurrents of neoliberalism. Driven mainly by gentrification and redevelopment forces, this displacement pattern moved eastward. It progressed through a series of strolls: from

14th Street in the 1970s, Franklin Square in the 1980s, K Street in the 1990s, and most recently, Eastern Avenue, straddling the DC/Maryland border, relegating the city's most vulnerable constituents to the extreme margins – both literally and figuratively.

Rival Geographies

Mount Vernon Triangle's transformation is emblematic of the contested nature of urban spaces, presenting a canvas upon which "Rival Geographies" are etched. The previous chapter delved into the realm of modernist planning interventions that rendered the Triangle an 'abject space.' Through the lens of modernism, the space was viewed as a slate to be wiped clean and rewritten, a vision that resulted in a landscape marked by neglect, disenfranchisement, and unintended subversion by marginalized groups (Smith, 1996). However, as spaces evolve, so do the narratives that define them. The neoliberal epoch introduced a contrasting geography that sought not to erase but to reclaim and repurpose. The Triangle was no longer a void awaiting design; it became a lucrative space for repurposing, ripe for the aspirations of an emerging middle-class gentry (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). The area was strategically redefined through the calculative deployment of planning and zoning techniques, catering to a new demographic with distinct socio-spatial preferences.

The term "Rival Geographies" underscores the inherent tensions between these paradigms. One aimed at transformation and dominance, while the other sought reclamation and repurposing. Nevertheless, both geographies were driven by a vision that, in its pursuit, often overlooked the nuances of existing communities, resulting in cycles of displacement and re-inhabitation (Lees et al., 2007). The case of Mount Vernon Triangle testifies to these contradictory spatial visions, both of which have left indelible marks upon its urban fabric. In examining these "Rival Geographies," we are prompted to ask: Whose vision prevails and whose

gets sidelined? Moreover, how can we most imperatively shape urban futures that honor diverse geographies without perpetuating cycles of erasure and exclusion? The ongoing transformation of urban spaces like Mount Vernon Triangle underscores the importance of critically engaging with these questions, drawing lessons for a more inclusive and harmonious urban future (Harvey, 2005).

In this chapter, I employed various methods, including legislative analysis, archival records, and ethnographic accounts, alongside spatial mapping based on obtained records from the Metropolitan Police Department, to shed light on the understudied intersections between planning, policing, and sexuality. It demonstrated how abstract forms of spatial governance, such as regulatory zoning techniques, converged with concrete policing mechanisms to recalibrate the landscape, dictating who belongs and who must be forcibly removed. The two case studies discussed show that these intersections are not benign but have significant implications for marginalized communities, particularly Black trans women (Crenshaw, 1991).

Chapter Six: Planning Liminalities: Centering Black Trans Women in Urban Discourse

Figure 43.

Faces of Hope and Resilience

This photo was taken after a focus group session on September 20, 2021. From the left: Charmaine Garçon, Lazema Mills, Chantal Lee, Kisha Allure, and Shahab Albahar (researcher). Absent from the photo are Alexis Blackmon and Yazmina Tadesse.

As our world becomes increasingly urbanized, the impact of urban planning on people's daily lives becomes more significant. Despite the various perspectives from which this field has been studied, the individual experiences of city dwellers are often overlooked. To address this, an ethnographic approach was used in this study to examine how urban residents navigate and respond to planning interventions. Additionally, planning was approached from the vantage point of marginalized city residents to provide more grounded representations of planning interventions and their impacts on urbanites.

In recent years, storytelling has become an increasingly popular model for planning, both as a way to understand how planning is currently done and how it could be done better (van Hulst, 2012). This study delved into the life narratives and spatial experiences of Black trans women in Washington, DC, reminding us of the fundamental tenet of planning - the commitment to serving the public interest. While postmodernists and poststructuralists have challenged the idea of a singular public interest, recognizing the multifaceted nature of the public, each with distinct voices and interests, there remains a gap between the core objectives of planners and the tangible realities of our built environments, highlighting the ongoing need for equity, sustainability, and inclusivity in planning.

The experiences of Black trans women highlighted in this study reveal how urban planning can fail to address particular issues, exposing gaps that can perpetuate inequalities. This serves as a reminder that planning is not a neutral field but is profoundly influenced by cultural and societal biases. These biases shape our understanding of urban spaces and subsequently impact the policies, interventions, and practices that we implement. Planning, with its inherent normative frameworks, has a significant impact not only on the appearance of our cities but also on who is included and excluded. Even in a city like Washington, DC, where numerous cultural and historical landmarks exist, places like the *Stroll*, which held immense cultural and economic value for the Black trans community, are often overlooked by planners and fall through the cracks of the discipline's normative framework.

This dissertation aims to address this oversight in planning by focusing on the embodied spatialities of Black trans women. As planning shifts its focus towards more human-centric paradigms, including reparative and therapeutic models, ethnographic approaches become increasingly relevant (Erfan, 2015; Williams, 2020). Ethnography and the insights it provides

have the potential to unlock local knowledge that challenges the assumed normativities embedded in traditional planning frameworks, providing opportunities for transformative change. For instance, how liminality has traditionally been perceived in urban planning has often been associated with negative connotations. Liminal spaces have frequently been linked to areas experiencing obsolescence or degradation, awaiting planning's corrective measures for their transformation. However, it was in the liminal spaces of the *Stroll* where the paths of Alexis Blackmon, Chantal Lee, Charmaine Garçon, Kisha Allure, Lazema Mills, and Yazmina Tadesse intersected and where countless Black trans women found community and empowerment.

This ethnographic study sheds light on the experiences of Black trans women and their relationship with the *Stroll*, a space that is often misunderstood. Contrary to popular belief, the *Stroll* is not a symbol of urban decay but rather a vibrant community center and sanctuary. It is a place full of potential, offering a glimpse into alternative urban futures that prioritize inclusivity, diversity, and resilience. Victor Turner once said that liminal spaces and periods are realms of "pure possibility" where new ideas and transformative relations can flourish. This perspective highlights the importance of these spaces and emphasizes the need for more adaptive and inclusive planning practices (Roberts & Matos, 2022).

In today's ever-changing urban landscapes, a rigid approach to planning is no longer sufficient. Urban planners should incorporate uncertainty, ambiguity, and fluidity into their strategies. As Mary Lawhon and Yaffa Truelove (2019) noted, cities are inherently unpredictable. Thus, strictly adhering to predetermined paths leaves us ill-equipped to handle the challenges and opportunities that dynamic settings present. Instead of trying to resolve ambiguity, which is typically the norm in traditional planning, ambiguity should be embraced as an inherent feature of urban spaces. Ambiguity is not just a characteristic of complex urban

issues but can also catalyze innovation, creativity, and adaptability. By recognizing this, planners can move away from inflexible solutions towards flexible, context-sensitive interventions. This adaptability ensures that cities are resilient and responsive to the diverse needs of their inhabitants, aligning solutions with the lived experiences of local communities. Doreen Massey's (2005) concept of fluidity highlights that spaces are not static but continuously shaped by social, economic, and cultural dynamics. Acknowledging this fluidity in planning recognizes cities as living entities with evolving narratives and relationships. By integrating this understanding, planners can foster a more comprehensive view of urban environments.

A significant aspect of this research is forging a dialogue between critical planning theory and trans and queer geographies. Although these disciplines may seem disparate initially, intertwining them has proven beneficial. By placing trans experiences within the broader context of urban planning, we enrich our understanding of urban spaces and bring attention to the nuances of trans lives and histories. This dialogue enables more comprehensive and compassionate planning approaches. At the core of this discourse is Kimberlé Crenshaw's principle of intersectionality. In planning, intersectionality helps us recognize the overlapping identities that individuals navigate daily. For example, for Black trans women, their experiences are not shaped solely by their gender identity but also by their race, class, socioeconomic status, and more. Incorporating intersectionality into planning paradigms allows planners to develop strategies that resonate with the multi-dimensional realities that individuals and communities encounter.

Through "Planning Liminalities," we see planning and trans studies harmonize, unveiling the complexities of urban spaces and the lives within them. This blend pushes planners to look beyond physicality and engage with the vibrant mosaic of identities, histories, and stories

shaping our cities. "Planning Liminalities" serves as a valuable tool, reflecting on the past while indicating the way forward. Given these revelations, there is a pressing need to reconsider stakeholder involvement in urban planning. Historically, the stakeholder perspective has been narrowly defined, often favoring property ownership or economic interests. However, the narratives from this research emphasize broadening this view. Stakeholders include individuals, communities, cultural practitioners, and activists - each with unique stakes in the urban narrative. Recognizing this broader base is essential for fostering cities that genuinely reflect their inhabitants' diverse needs and aspirations. The discoveries of this exploration serve as a call to the planning community to question and interrogate the normative tools of the field while championing inclusivity, equity, and social justice. As cities evolve, the insights from "Planning Liminalities" offer a solid framework guiding planners toward creating cities that are not merely functional and aesthetic but also empathetic and inclusive.

As you view the photograph at the beginning of this chapter (Figure 43), you see not just faces but stories, dreams, and triumphs. The *Stroll*, with its stories, reminds us that our perceptions of liminality need revisiting. The experiences of Black trans women, as depicted in this research, challenge common negative associations with liminality. This dissertation is not an end but a starting point in exploring Black trans women's lived experiences in the U.S. capital and beyond. It underscores the need to ground our understanding in the tangible experiences of communities.

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