

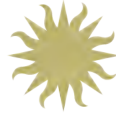
A RIGHT TO THE

COMMUNITY



Smithsonian
Anacostia Community Museum





Smithsonian
Anacostia Community Museum



How Washingtonians have shaped and reshaped
their neighborhoods in extraordinary ways

This exhibition was made possible with support from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. In addition, *A Right to the City* received federal support from the Asian Pacific American Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, and from the Smithsonian Women's Committee.

The Anacostia Community Museum explores social issues impacting diverse populations of the DC metropolitan area to promote mutual understanding and strengthen community bonds.

Director's Statement

As the Anacostia Community Museum celebrates its 50th anniversary, we look forward to all that the future holds. Almost two years ago, we began the challenging and exciting process of revitalizing this museum. Redefining our mission with a hyper-local focus was the first of many important decisions in this undertaking.

Washington, DC has a truly rich history with diverse communities, values, and perspectives, making it ripe for exploring the social, economic, and environmental issues affecting our broader world. Born from these unique circumstances is a strong culture of civic engagement and social activism that animates the city. It was true in 1967 when the Anacostia community rallied for a museum that spoke to their everyday experiences, and it remains so today.

A Right to the City is a timely exhibition and comes at a pivotal moment for the nation's capital as our neighborhoods experience rapid and profound transformations. Developed under the direction of chief curator Dr. Samir Meghelli, the exhibition highlights the stories of six Washington neighborhoods and the unsung heroes who have shaped them. Using our renowned community documentation methods—including recording nearly two hundred new oral histories—and cutting-edge exhibition design, *A Right to the City* transports visitors into moments that made our city's history.

This exhibition gives us an opportunity to reflect upon the evolution of our beloved DC and leaves us with important questions about its future. As a museum of, for and by the people, we are committed to connecting the residents of the greater Washington area, celebrating our differences, and building upon our commonalities. We do this by furthering the Smithsonian mission, *the increase and diffusion of knowledge*, in a way that allows us to learn from and uplift one another. Thank you for joining us on our journey, as we create a more unified and empowered metropolitan community.

Lori D. Yarrish
Director
Anacostia Community Museum
Smithsonian Institution

INTRODUCTION

Do people have a right to a city?

Do they have a right to equal, and not separate, education for their children, and a right to accessible transportation to jobs and schools? Do people have a right to remain in their homes and in their neighborhoods? Do they, along with their neighbors, have a right to decide how their neighborhoods develop and change?

A Right to the City. It is both an idea and an ideal. As long as cities have been a feature of human civilization, they have been the site of ongoing struggles for human rights—to create and maintain healthy community life, to have equal access to resources and opportunities, to exercise self-government.

For the first time in human history, more than half of the world’s population lives in cities, and as the world urbanizes at an unprecedented pace, cities are facing tremendous challenges in achieving sustainable and equitable growth that serves all residents. These transformations are having a profound impact on the nation’s capital, Washington, DC. Long proudly hailed as “Chocolate City,” Washington’s population since 2011 is no longer majority African American.

Denied full self-government since the federal city’s founding, District residents continue a long tradition of fighting to exercise their right to the city.



Construction of Interstate 395 through Southwest DC to Virginia, 1961. To connect downtown DC to Virginia, I-395 cut through the heart of the Southwest DC neighborhood. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 authorized the construction of up to 41,000 miles of highway to connect major U.S. cities and committed federal funds to cover 90 percent of the cost. A boom in highway construction ensued, encouraging the growth of suburbs at the expense of cities and causing displacement and destruction of working-class communities.

DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post

The history of Washington neighborhoods reveals the struggles of DC residents to control—or even participate in—decisions affecting where and how they live. Prior to passage of Home Rule in the 1970s, congressmen, private developers, appointed members of the local government, and even sitting presidents decided the course of the city’s development, often with little or no input from residents.

In the mid-twentieth century, massive federal “urban renewal” projects, school desegregation, and major highways (both proposed and built) spurred civic engagement, protest, alternative proposals for development, and a push for self-government. By 1968, “White men’s roads through black men’s homes” became a rallying cry, pointing to the racism that afflicted the urban and suburban planning of the era.

A Right to the City highlights episodes in the history of six neighborhoods across the city, telling the story of how ordinary Washingtonians have helped shape and reshape their neighborhoods in extraordinary ways: through the fight for quality public education, for healthy and green communities, for equitable development and transit, and for a genuinely democratic approach to city planning.



President Dwight D. Eisenhower (far left) reviews Southwest DC urban renewal plans with real estate developer William Zeckendorf Sr. (center) and John Remon (2nd from right), chairman of the DC Redevelopment Land Agency, 1958.

Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library & Museum



The destruction of urban renewal, with a view of the Washington Monument, from 11th Street and Virginia Avenue SW, 1959.

Garnet W. Jex “Southwest Redevelopment” Slide Collection, Historical Society of Washington, DC

SOUTHWEST DC

Urban Renewal, Urban Removal

Just south of the Capitol Building and the National Mall and east of the Potomac River is Southwest Washington, one of the oldest neighborhoods in the District of Columbia. Isolated from the rest of the city by federal land, rivers, canals, and creeks, residents established a self-sufficient, predominately working-class community with small business districts, schools, and houses of worship. Alley dwellings with small brick and frame structures were home to households of modest means and were built in neighborhoods all across the city, but their prevalence in Southwest—and their proximity to the nation’s halls of power—brought the community heightened attention. In the 1940s and ‘50s a growing belief in the need for “slum clearance” and city “modernization” took hold among politicians and industry titans. Southwest became one of the first and largest neighborhoods in the country to be targeted for this new form of city redevelopment called “urban renewal.”



Rear of houses in Wonder Court SW, c. 1949. In the years following the Civil War, many of the African Americans that flocked to the nation’s capital settled in Southwest. The roots they established there formed the foundation of a tightly-knit community that grew over the next hundred years. Common spaces around houses helped foster close relationships among residents. Anacostia Community Museum Archives, DC Housing Authority Collection

A small but vibrant Orthodox Jewish community developed in Southwest by the end of the nineteenth century. Organized as Talmud Torah, members built a large synagogue at 467 E Street SW in 1900, where they conducted a daily *minyan* (worship) for more than half a century.

DC Public Library, Washingtoniana Division



The old Talmud Torah Synagogue demolished, c. 1959. As Southwest DC's Jewish population declined, Talmud Torah merged with another congregation, Ohev Shalom, and moved to 16th Street NW where they built a new synagogue. The old structure was razed as part of urban renewal.

DC Public Library, Washingtoniana Division

In practice, urban renewal was *urban removal*. National and local figures from James Baldwin to the Reverend Walter Fauntroy described it as “Negro removal” that displaced working-class African American residents. Block by block, people were forced to relocate as wrecking crews demolished homes, shops, churches, and synagogues. Some small business owners sued to stay in their properties, but a landmark 1954 Supreme Court case, *Berman v. Parker*, ruled in favor of the government's eminent domain power. When urban renewal ended in the early 1970s, more than 1,500 businesses and 23,000 residents of Southwest had been displaced. In its wake, longstanding neighborhood institutions fought to maintain a sense of community. As most houses of worship were forced to move, congregations worked hard to re-establish themselves elsewhere and to newly grow their membership. The Southwest Community House provided much-needed social services to displaced and low-income residents. Athletic clubs held reunion picnics and games for decades thereafter. The Southwest Neighborhood Assembly (SWNA) formed in 1963 to unify a divided neighborhood, becoming one of the first racially integrated neighborhood associations in the city.



By the early twentieth century, Southwest was home to over a dozen churches. Mount Moriah Baptist Church, founded in 1885, migrated throughout Southwest to accommodate its growing congregation, one of the community's largest. In 1925, the church moved to its fourth home, at the corner of 3rd and L Streets (left). That church was seized by the DC government through eminent domain and demolished as part of urban renewal (right). On February 2, 1958, a 200-car motorcade of Mount Moriah Baptist Church members drove to their new home on East Capitol Street.

(left) John P. Wymer Photograph Collection, Historical Society of Washington, DC, 1950 (right) Courtesy of Mount Moriah Baptist Church, c. 1958

A symbol of the failures of urban renewal in Southwest, the Waterside Mall shopping and office complex was demolished in 2007, only three decades after it was built. Fourth Street SW, the bustling commercial corridor of the historic neighborhood that had been paved over for construction of the now-demolished mall, is open once again. High-rise condos and office spaces have sprung up at the site, a symbol of the economic development wave that has rushed into almost any empty lot in DC in this new century. Southwest's Buzzard Point area is newly home to a 20,000-seat soccer stadium and PEPCO's largest substation in the city. The mile-long waterfront is undergoing a \$2 billion redevelopment that includes 3 million square feet of residential, retail, office, and hotel space. With longstanding public housing Greenleaf Gardens slated for demolition and conversion from low-income to mixed-income housing, a question looms over the neighborhood like the omnipresent construction crane: is urban removal happening again, only in slower motion as widespread gentrification?



Cranes tower over the Southwest waterfront

during the multibillion dollar development of The Wharf, 2015.

Anacostia Community Museum Archives,
Photograph by Susana Raab



DC Public Library, Washingtoniana Division, 1984



Anacostia Community Museum Archives, 2016

Southwest Community House headquarters (and former home of Rev. James Dent), 1984. Born enslaved in Maryland, Rev. James Dent eventually moved to Southwest DC and served as the second pastor of Mount Moriah Baptist Church. His home was also the headquarters of Southwest Community House from 1978 until its closing in the mid-2000s. In 2010, the James C. Dent House was designated a national historic landmark. The property and its surroundings are now owned by PEPCO, which is redeveloping the site as the largest electrical substation in the city.

ANACOSTIA

Segregation, Desegregation, Resegregation

The local Hillsdales baseball team, 1939.

Anacostia Community Museum Archives,
Dale-Patterson Family Collection



The all-white Anacostia High School baseball team, 1939.

Library of Congress

Sitting immediately east of the Anacostia River, the neighborhood known today as historic downtown Anacostia took shape in the 1850s as a Washington, DC, suburb named Uniontown, a working-class residential community exclusively for whites. Just southwest was an area known as Barry Farm/Hillsdale, established in the aftermath of the Civil War when formerly enslaved African Americans purchased one-acre lots from the Freedmen's Bureau. These two communities—one white and one black—existed side-by-side for nearly a century, occupying their own worlds with segregated schools, recreation facilities, and civic organizations. Then, at the onset of the civil rights movement, a fight for educational equity and equal opportunity began to dismantle the deep-seated segregation that had defined life in Anacostia and ultimately transformed the neighborhood's demographics.



Once called Nichols Avenue, the main commercial thoroughfare of downtown historic Anacostia is known today as Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. Uniontown Bar & Grill now occupies the Bury's Drug Store building.

Library of Congress

A mother leads a protest against school integration through Anacostia with her child's stroller carrying a sign that reads: "Do we have to go to school with *Them?*," 1954.

Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University



Gardner Bishop, a self-employed U Street barber, became the head of the Consolidated Parent Group and helped lead the fight for school desegregation. A petition spearheaded by the organization demanded that the Board of Education "transfer our children to Sousa Junior High which had more than 500 vacant seats on June 1, 1950, and provide adequate, uncrowded and equal facilities for all the pupils."

Moorland-Spingarn Research Center,
Howard University

When John Philip Sousa Junior High opened East of the River in 1950, African American students and parents challenged its whites-only policy. They joined a citywide protest of schools for black children that were run-down, overcrowded, and underfunded. The resulting legal case, *Bolling v. Sharpe*, went to the Supreme Court and ultimately overturned segregated schooling in the District of Columbia in 1954. Although a triumph of justice, the decision provoked "white flight" to the suburbs, while Anacostia's African American population swelled with migrants from surrounding southern states and from the newly demolished Southwest neighborhood. Within a decade, Anacostia-area schools went from segregated to desegregated to resegregated.

Resegregation, a growing population, and economic neglect intensified poverty in the 1960s. To address these pressing issues, the Southeast Neighborhood House used funds from President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty to cultivate transformational neighborhood leadership. Two organizations that had a national impact grew out of these efforts: the Rebels With a Cause, an Anacostia youth organization, and a group of self-proclaimed "welfare mothers" from Barry Farm called the Band of Angels.



Cynthia Ashby, a 16-year-old Rebel With a Cause, shows off one of several Olympic-size swimming pools that the youth group successfully fought to have built in the Anacostia area, 1967.

Courtesy Johnson Publishing Company, LLC. All rights reserved.



Stokely Carmichael (2nd from left) visits Barry Farm with organizers from Southeast Neighborhood House, including Phil Perkins (far left), 1967.

Anacostia Community Museum Archives

The Southeast Neighborhood House rose to national prominence in the 1960s because of its community organizing, especially the creation of the youth-led Rebels With a Cause and a tenants association of self-proclaimed “welfare mothers” living in Barry Farm called the Band of Angels. The Rebels grew to more than 500 members and successfully advocated for new recreation centers and pools, improved roads and traffic lights, and the creation of their own school. The group drew support from renowned entertainer Eartha Kitt who testified before Congress on its behalf, saying: “Being the champions for the youth in the Anacostia area, the Rebels have led the way for action for other youth groups in Washington. The Rebels could act as a model for all urban areas throughout the United States.” The Band of Angels won fights for families receiving public assistance, and one of the leaders, Etta Horn, helped build the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) into a 25,000-member body working for adequate income, dignity, justice, and democratic participation.



Even as rapid development comes East of the River, many projects for historic preservation have stalled, 2016.

Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Photograph by Susana Raab

Separated by a river from the rest of the city and too often stigmatized, Anacostia residents have long had to vigorously advocate for their interests. Much hope for increased accessibility and resources hinged on the opening of a Metro stop when it broke ground in 1985 and debuted in December 1991. The desired community development never came. Today, however, Anacostia and East of the River communities are absorbing the impacts of skyrocketing home prices and land values across the city. Seventy-five years after being built, the Barry Farm Dwellings are being demolished and replaced by mixed-income housing. Major developments are sprouting up along Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue. The redevelopment and division of the historic St. Elizabeths Hospital into both a new headquarters for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and a sports and entertainment arena, as well as the construction of 11th Street Bridge Park, promise greater economic opportunity and connection to the rest of the city, but also heighten fears of unequal access and displacement.

Riders at the Anacostia Metro stop, 2010.

Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Photograph by Susana Raab



SHAW

With the People, By the People, For the People

“Shameful Shaw’ with its old and dilapidated structures, its overcrowded and inadequately equipped classrooms, and its inability to meet the many needs of its pupils is symbolic of conditions in almost every aspect of life for people in the surrounding community.”

— Rev. Walter Fauntroy, in a speech before the National Capital Planning Commission, 1966

Before it had a distinct name and boundaries, the area around the U Street and 7th Street NW corridors was a center of African American life in Washington, DC. In a segregated city, U Street was the “Black Broadway,” a thriving black business and entertainment district where luminaries lived and performed. Only in the late 1960s when the city and federal governments sought to extend urban renewal to a 675-acre site surrounding Robert Gould Shaw Junior High School did the area begin to be known as “Shaw.” To guide the project and prevent the wholesale demolition and displacement inflicted on Southwest, Shaw’s own Reverend Walter Fauntroy founded the Model Inner City Community Organization. MICCO worked to empower residents and small business owners, push for citizen input into the planning process, and bring economic benefits to the neighborhood. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led a parade of thousands through Shaw in March 1967 to build support for MICCO’s plan of “Renewal with the people, by the people, and for the people.” One year later, Dr. King was assassinated and Shaw’s 14th Street and 7th Street corridors erupted in collective shock, sadness, pain, and anger. The civil disturbances left the neighborhood severely damaged.



DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post, 1965

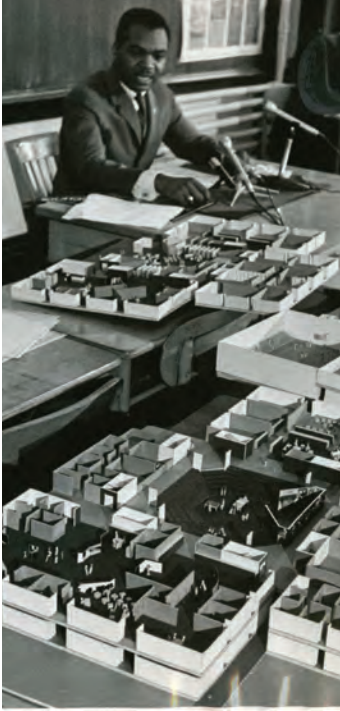


John P. Wymer Photograph Collection, Historical Society of Washington, DC, 1949



DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post, 1965

Robert Gould Shaw Junior High, once a highly-regarded African American school in the city’s segregated system, was in such poor shape by the 1950s that students and local residents referred to it as “Shameful Shaw.” The school became the focal point of the surrounding neighborhood’s federally-funded redevelopment plans, called the Shaw School Urban Renewal Area Plan.



Rev. Walter Fauntroy showcasing MICCO's design model for the "New Shaw" school, 1969.

DC Public Library, Star Collection
© Washington Post

The Shaw School Area Urban Renewal Plan approved by the National Capital Planning Commission and the DC City Council in 1969 was shaped by MICCO's community-driven design for the area. The plan's first two goals were to "rehabilitate as many existing houses as possible" and to "construct new housing, including public housing, primarily for families and individuals of low and moderate income." MICCO collaborated with the predominantly African American Lincoln Temple of Shaw and the predominantly white Westmoreland Congregational Church of Bethesda, Maryland to create affordable housing. Together they constructed the 108-unit Lincoln-Westmoreland Apartments at 7th and R Streets NW. Dedicated in May 1971, it was the first building completed after the 1968 civil disturbances. MICCO offered an important model for citizen-led urban renewal. It assisted longtime Shaw residents with much-needed home repairs, helped local nonprofits build new housing, and enabled the community to participate in the planning, site selection, and design of the replacement for the crumbling Shaw Junior High School.



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers a speech at Cardozo High School in support of citizen-led urban renewal as proposed by Rev. Walter Fauntroy's Model Inner City Community Organization. Dr. King's 1967 speech capped a joyful parade through Shaw in support of MICCO in what was the largest local demonstration since the 1963 March on Washington.

DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post



Construction of Metro's Green Line around U Street forced the closure of some small businesses and also spurred new investment, 1991.

Zinnia "DC Changes" Photograph Collection, Historical Society of Washington, DC

The U Street corridor barely survived the intense disruption of the Green Line Metro construction but has physically recovered from the damage of 1968 to reclaim its role as a center of commerce, entertainment, and nightlife in the city. Yet U Street is no longer the "Black Broadway" of segregated Washington. A new demographic of younger, wealthier residents has made Shaw one of the fastest-gentrifying zip codes in the nation. Between 1970 and 2010, Shaw's African American population dropped dramatically from 90 percent to only 30 percent. While the 1969 Shaw renewal plan was updated in 2011 and remains DC law, real estate market dynamics have overwhelmed its affordable housing goals. Non-profit organizations are using creative approaches to stabilize longtime residents. In 2011, in the city's first-ever Community Benefits Agreement, ONE DC secured affordable units, grants, jobs for DC residents, and locally-run retail space from the developer of Progression Place, a mixed-use property on 7th Street NW between S and T Streets. Most recently, in 2016, the Lincoln-Westmoreland partnership enriched its legacy by adding 56 new affordable housing units next door to its original 1971 development.



The Channing E. Phillips Homes, named after the late civil rights leader, are the newest affordable housing built in Shaw by the historic Lincoln-Westmoreland partnership, 2016.

Anacostia Community Museum Archives,
Photograph by Susana Raab

BROOKLAND

Fight the Freeways

Nestled in a quiet northeast section of Washington just east of the Catholic University of America, the Brookland neighborhood has continually been shaped by developments in transportation infrastructure, from the nineteenth-century B&O Railroad and electric streetcar, to the twentieth-century Metro and twenty-first-century Metropolitan Branch Trail. A historic Catholic enclave that by the 1940s had a small but significant African American middle-class community, Brookland was transformed by “white flight” in the midst of 1950s school desegregation. President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s signing of the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act—which committed federal funding to cover 90% of municipalities’ highway construction costs—spawned massive and hasty freeway projects nationwide. As with urban renewal, working-class African American neighborhoods were often targeted for the new highways, including the proposed North-Central Freeway that put Brookland’s idyllic, tree-lined streets in its crosshairs.



Brooks Mansion, c. 1920s.

Once the home of Colonel Jehiel Brooks (after whom Brookland is named), the mansion was slated for demolition so that Metro could build a commuter parking lot to serve the Brookland stop. Neighborhood residents organized and successfully fought to save the historic property, which is now home to the city-owned television station, DCTV.

General Photograph Collection,
Historical Society of Washington, DC



Franciscan Mission Cloister, 1908.

Library of Congress, National Photo Collection



Reginald Booker (left) and Sam Abbott (right) were arrested when ECTC organized a rally to theatrically break into and renovate some of the homes in Brookland that had been illegally seized by the city government for the planned North-Central Freeway, 1969.

DC Public Library, Star Collection
© Washington Post

To fight the freeway, residents of Brookland and surrounding neighborhoods formed an interracial coalition called the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis. ECTC used creative organizing tactics, in-your-face protest, and coalition-building to wage a decade-long battle against the highway and the prejudiced urban planning behind it. As a young boy, ECTC chairman Reginald H. Booker had witnessed the demolition of his Southwest DC home. “Our family had already been uprooted by something we had no control over. I wasn’t going to let it happen again,” he later recounted. Fliers, posters, and lawn signs designed by ECTC publicity director Sammie Abbott assailed “White Men’s Roads Thru Black Men’s Homes” and urged residents to “save your own home from the bull-dozer.” Booker, Abbott, and a diverse group of men and women not only successfully defeated the freeway plans, but advocated for the alternative: public transportation, including what became Washington’s Metro system.

The Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis

stands up for the anti-freeway cause at a DC City Council meeting, 1969.

DC Public Library, Star Collection
© Washington Post





The 69 homes surrounding 10th and Franklin Streets NE that the Emergency Committee on the Transportation Crisis saved from the proposed North-Central Freeway in 1968 sat vacant for years. Thanks in part to ECTC’s work, Brookland today retains much of its quiet, small-town feel—including its historic commercial corridor on 12th Street NE, but the neighborhood is now experiencing a burst of new construction, rising rents, and increased home prices. The one-million-square-foot mixed-use Monroe Street Market development, the first major transit-oriented development in the neighborhood, opened in 2013 and includes an “arts walk” lined with artist studios, galleries, and arts organizations. In October 2015, a house originally owned by John Diggs—one of the earliest African Americans to purchase property in Brookland—set a new neighborhood record by becoming the first to sell for \$1 million. With more growth on the horizon, tensions will continue to stir the neighborhood that prides itself on its low-density and leafy landscape.

This Brookland mural

was commissioned by the Bozzuto Group for its transit-oriented Monroe Street Market development at the Brookland-CUA Metro stop and was designed by Overall Murals, Inc.

Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Photograph by Susana Raab

Designed by John Jacob Zink in 1937 as the Newton Theater, a longtime Brookland landmark, the building is now occupied by a CVS Pharmacy. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2007.



Emil A. Press Slide Collection, Historical Society of Washington, DC, 1964



Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Photograph by Susana Raab, 2017

CHINATOWN

Preserving Our Place

Ben Fun Lim's Certificate of Identity, 1912. Following the Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882, 1892, and 1902, Chinese immigrants were required to carry at all times a "Certificate of Identity" proving their legal status in the United States. Ben Fun Lim was eventually able to bring his family over from China in 1959, and they settled at 604 H Street NW.

Courtesy of Wendy Lim



Washington's Chinatown first grew as a cluster of laundries, tea houses, and restaurants in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol along Pennsylvania Avenue between Second and Four-and-a-Half Streets NW in the 1880s and '90s. But it was forcibly displaced in 1930, quickly moving to its current location surrounding H and 7th Streets NW. In both locations, DC's Chinatown fought to preserve community in the face of large-scale development. Chinese immigrants came to Washington mostly from western states in search of economic opportunity and to escape the harshest discrimination and violence that occurred around the time of the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred most Chinese immigration and denied the possibility of citizenship for those already here. In 1926, President Calvin Coolidge signed the Public Buildings Act. The law launched the construction of new federal and municipal buildings along Pennsylvania Avenue and required Chinatown's residents to relocate. The project was a precursor to the mid-century urban renewal that targeted "blighted" working-class communities and communities of color for removal.



DC's first Chinatown sat in clear view of the Capitol on Pennsylvania Avenue NW, c. 1891.

DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post

The ritual of lion dancing

is performed at significant moments throughout the year, but most importantly at the Chinese New Year, when the lion chases away evil spirits and brings good fortune for the coming year, 1974.

DC Public Library, Star Collection ©
Washington Post



After identifying a potential new home on H Street NW between 6th and 7th Streets, the influential On Leong Merchants Association—a fraternal organization of small business owners—put down new roots by buying and leasing properties along that corridor. The new Chinatown grew beyond its single block and into side streets, but only slowly, in large part due to Exclusion Act policies that forbade family members from immigrating and that remained in force until 1943. Neighborhood traditions like the annual Chinese New Year Parade and the longstanding Chinese family, business, and recreation organizations—including the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Chinese Youth Club, the On Leong and Hip Sing fraternal organizations, and the Lee and Moy Family Associations—helped build and sustain a vibrant community life. But from the 1960s to the '90s, city planners and officials approved major developments that threatened the existence of Chinatown, including the Gallery Place Metro station, the original Washington Convention Center (1983–2004), and the MCI Center (now called Capitol One Arena).

The Moy Family Association of DC at their newly opened headquarters, c. 1968.

As they settled across the United States, Chinese immigrants formed “family associations” as social, political, and financial networks. The associations served people sharing a common surname (often called a “clan”) or place of origin (usually from a specific district in Southern China)—including, for example, the Lee, Moy, Chin, and Wong families. The DC chapter of the Moy Family Association purchased a building on I Street NW between 5th and 6th Streets where their headquarters still exists today.

Courtesy Moy Family Association



Architect Alfred Liu designed and built the Chinatown Friendship Archway as part of a Sister Cities agreement between Washington, DC, and Beijing.

Courtesy of Harlan Hambright



While the Chinese Archway once stood tall and uninterrupted over the corner of 7th and H Streets NW as it welcomed visitors to the neighborhood, it is today dwarfed by its surroundings: the Gallery Place mall and high-rise condominiums, Capitol One Arena, new restaurants, hotels, a Metro entryway, and a nightscape that lights up as the Times Square of DC. The neighborhood is today only a few blocks long. Although Chinese characters hang from every storefront in the neighborhood, very few Chinese-owned businesses remain. Only about 300 Chinese American residents still live in Chinatown, with the majority living in two affordable housing buildings that face uncertain futures. Where once Chinatown was the center of the social, political, and cultural life of the local community, the DC metropolitan region's growing Chinese American population primarily lives in the suburbs. Some longstanding Chinese American family, business, and recreation organizations have also moved their activities outside the city, but many still hold tightly to the importance of preserving some piece of the historic Chinatown neighborhood.



Construction for the Gallery Place mall and MCI Center

(now Capitol One Arena) leaves a huge hole—literally and figuratively—in the heart of Chinatown, 1996.

DC Public Library, Washingtoniana Division

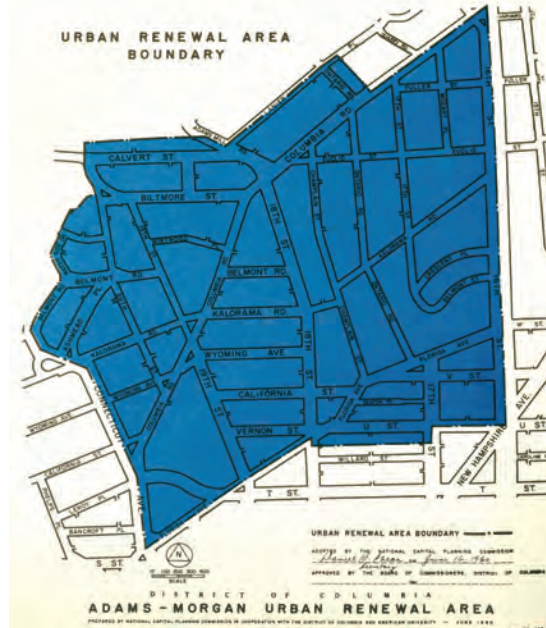
ADAMS MORGAN

The Power of Unity in Diversity

The community surrounding the intersection of 18th Street NW and Columbia Road just south of Rock Creek was home to segregated schools like the rest of the city until the 1954 *Bolling v. Sharpe* decision. Parents and staff at the all-white John Quincy Adams Elementary School and the all-black Thomas P. Morgan Elementary School formed the Adams-Morgan Better Neighborhood Conference to work toward genuine integration. When confronted with the challenge of urban renewal, the community united further under the Adams-Morgan Community Council which advocated for resident input in the process. Urban renewal did not ignite without funding and support, but the historic subdivisions of Lanier Heights, Washington Heights, Meridian Hill, and Kalorama Heights that surrounded the Adams and Morgan Schools fused into one larger neighborhood: “Adams Morgan.”

This 1960 map shows the boundaries of the area that was targeted for urban renewal as “Adams-Morgan.”

National Capital Planning Commission/Office of Urban Renewal, District of Columbia





Bishop Marie Reed, who led the fight for quality public schools and community control in Adams Morgan.

Charles Sumner School Museum & Archives

Morgan Community School

In the mid-1960s, out of frustration with the continued deterioration of the Morgan Elementary School and the lack of progress toward integration, Adams Morgan residents organized one of the very first democratic elections in the city in almost 100 years by voting for a Morgan Community School board.

This locally-elected board successfully fought the court-appointed DC Board of Education in 1967 for community oversight of budget, curriculum, and teacher employment. The school became one of the first community-controlled schools in a growing nationwide movement, as reflected in its new name: Morgan Community School. Topper Carew (far left, in sunglasses) founded The New Thing Art & Architecture Center, which involved the community in developing an alternative site plan for the school's new building that would avoid displacing residents and better serve the community's needs, 1968.

DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Adams Morgan residents formed new, innovative groups that successfully organized for tenant and immigrant rights, educational equity, youth development, access to recreation and green space, and self-governance, paving the way for Home Rule in the District. The neighborhood wrested decision-making power over the Morgan Elementary School from the DC Board of Education in 1967 to become one of the first community-controlled schools in the nation, renaming it the Morgan Community School. Walter Pierce and the Ontario Lakers Youth Organization developed a youth sports and community gardening program in a formerly vacant lot. Topper Carew's The New Thing Art & Architecture Center built youth arts programs and advocated for community-driven development. Garry Garber and the Roving Leaders Program worked with the growing Latino community to establish the Latin American Youth Center. The Adams Morgan Organization (AMO) united many of these efforts to establish an effective system of neighborhood self-government in a city without elected leadership.



In 1976, Adams Morgan residents officially renamed the Morgan Community School after neighborhood hero Bishop Marie Reed who had helped lead the fight for community control. Today, Marie Reed Elementary School occupies a newly renovated multi-purpose building that serves the surrounding neighborhood with a public health clinic, community center, adult education, and childcare center. With fast-rising land values, much of the neighborhood's economic and ethnic diversity is disappearing. The robust network of Spanish-language social services that once dotted the neighborhood has increasingly followed the growing Latino populations to the DC suburbs of Montgomery, Prince George's, and Fairfax Counties. Despite this, the Reed school maintains a commitment to multicultural, multilingual, and equity-centered education, with students coming from all wards of the city and representing more than 30 different languages spoken at home. At the same time, the tenant protections that the Adams Morgan Organization helped achieve in the 1970s continue to offer some hope for affordable housing.

Walter Pierce, longtime Adams Morgan advocate and founder of the Ontario Lakers Youth Organization, 1981
Photograph by Nancy Shia



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Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Walter Pierce Collection

The Ontario Lakers Youth Organization, founded in 1964 by Walter Pierce (above) and his brother Ronald Pierce, took control of a vacant lot and transformed it into a public park where they developed youth-centered community improvement efforts including sports teams and a community garden. For nearly 15 years, they lobbied Congress and the DC City Council to purchase the land from its negligent owner to solidify its status as an official public park, eventually succeeding in 1978. It has since been renamed Walter Pierce Park, in honor of its late founder.

DC Public Library, Star Collection © Washington Post

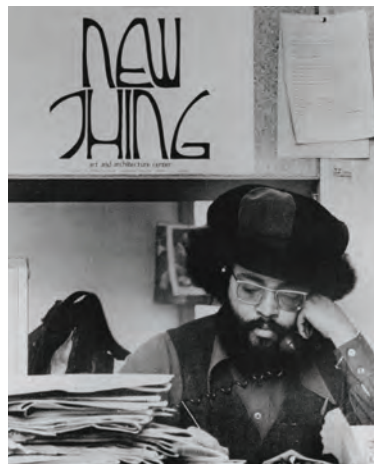
The Adams Morgan Organization (AMO), founded in 1972 by neighborhood advocates Marie Nahikian, Walter Pierce, Topper Carew, Josephine “Jo” Butler, Edward G. Jackson Sr., Charlotte Fillmore, and Milton Kotler, among others, took up the mantle of self-government and community control. Tackling urgent issues like real estate speculation and residential displacement that were beginning to affect the neighborhood, AMO put participatory democracy into practice. It convened regular and well-attended assembly meetings where residents shared an equal vote with AMO’s elected chairperson and 25 representatives. Tenant associations (right) led a march up Columbia Road NW at a time of growing threats of eviction, 1978.

Photograph by Nancy Shia



The New Thing founder Topper Carew at his office, 1972.

© Margaret Thomas/Washington Post



The New Thing Art & Architecture Center, founded by Topper Carew in 1967, served as a community-based architecture and planning organization, as well as a multidisciplinary arts center. Carew assembled an all-star staff of architects, photographers, filmmakers, musicians, visual artists, dancers, and percussionists to teach and empower hundreds of young people in the neighborhood and across the city, 1969.

Photograph by Tom Zetterstrom



As a Roving Leader for the DC Department of Recreation, Garry Garber

devoted his life to mentoring young people. He took them on trips out of the city, led them in neighborhood cleanup efforts, and modeled for them what it meant to be a civically engaged member of the community. His efforts in the late 1960s laid the foundation for the Latin American Youth Center (LAYC), first formally established in 1971 on 18th Street NW, c. 1970.

Courtesy of the Garber Family

CONCLUSION

“Prepare to participate, and you will give to your city and our nation an instructive example of how we can deal with one of the most serious problems confronting us today. That’s the message I want you to carry away from this meeting today. **Prepare to participate!** I want you to tell it wherever you go. Tell it in your homes. Tell it in your schools. Tell it in your playgrounds. Tell it in the marketplace. Tell it in your stores. Tell it in the bars and the poolrooms and theaters and gathering places all over.”

— Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the Shaw neighborhood, 1967

CREATING JUST CITIES

Change is a central ingredient in every city’s dynamism. It is vital to urban growth. But what does a growing, thriving, and also truly just city look like?

For much of the past 10 years, Washington, DC, has been growing by nearly 1,000 new residents every month. Recent projections show that the city’s population is expected to surpass its 1950s peak of 800,000 by 2025 and will likely surpass 1 million residents by 2045. The nation’s capital has been experiencing tremendous economic and population growth over the past two decades, but also growing inequality. How can we work toward a more just future for our neighborhoods, our city, our region?

Rather than large-scale, top-down redevelopment, the kind that wrecked and remade Southwest Washington during urban renewal, can we foster visionary and participatory planning that centers the needs of longtime residents in the way that Shaw’s Model Inner City Community Organization advocated in the 1960s and ‘70s? In the same spirit as the Adams Morgan-based The New Thing Art & Architecture Center and the Ontario Lakers Youth Organization in the 1960s and ‘70s, can we commit robust resources to the intellectual, artistic, and physical well-being of our young people? In the face of today’s often segregated and unequally-resourced public schools, can we commit ourselves to the principles of the Consolidated Parent Group that fought for high-quality education for all children in the 1940s and ‘50s? In each case, a just city demands that we—in the words of Dr. King—“prepare to participate!”

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**“PEOPLE CAN
MAKE A DIFFERENCE;
THEY CAN.
MANY PEOPLE
BELIEVE THEY CAN’T,
BUT THEY CAN.”**

– JOSEPHINE “JO” BUTLER,
founding member of the Adams
Morgan Community Council and
the Adams Morgan Organization
(AMO), chairwoman of the
Morgan Community School
Board, and chairwoman of
the DC Statehood Party



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