GENTRIFICATION IN ADAMS MORGAN
Political and Commercial Consequences
of Neighborhood Change

by
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Introduction

Over the last fifteen years, there has been a concerted effort at this university to focus more teaching and research on the Washington metropolitan area. This monograph is one product of that re-orientation.

As Professor Henig explains in Chapter One, seniors in the urban affairs degree program in the School of Public and International Affairs collected the basic data as part of a collaborative field research assignment. The students who participated in the project were: David Agler, Andrew Arno, Venida Brown, John Carroll III, Sharon Chardak, Risa Fleishman, Linda Giannarelli, Michael Jendrek, William Kalish, Kathryn Kelley, Joel Kolker, Geoffrey Lilja, Andre Mack, Judith Membreg, Greg Moul, Christeena Naser, Tracie Roberts, Ellen Ross, Jacqueline Segall, Karen Singer, and Kenneth Windheim.

Local studies at their best combine a reliability derived from good concrete data and a power of illumination provided by interpretation of those data in a framework of comparative analysis. In that way one can hope to avoid the twin dangers of parochialism and abstraction.

This monograph is intended as a contribution both to our understanding of dramatic changes in a specific Washington neighborhood and to the scholarly literature on the international phenomenon of gentrification of older urban centers. Particular attention is given to the impact of gentrification on community institutions, civic and commercial. Local readers undoubtedly will find their understanding of what actually transpired in Adams Morgan during the last twenty years to be challenged at one or more key points by Professor Henig's analysis. Residents of other cities will have the basis for a comparative perspective on similar developments in their locales. Those responsible for urban policymaking hopefully will gain insight into the meaning of gentrification to those for whom it is an immediate experience and not merely a social trend.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Phenomenon and the Controversy

“Miss Flossie” Bumbray knows that things change. Eighty four years old, she had by 1980 lived for nearly half her life on the same street in Adams Morgan. “When I moved into Willard Street [in 1940] it was colored folks living up and down the street, and on U Street and 18th Street and New Hampshire Avenue. I knew many of them by name. Many have moved now.” She was there during the late 1960s when a city-wide fear of riots made itself felt in Adams Morgan. Some merchants closed their shops, and many residents who could afford to do so left for the apparent security of the suburbs. Now she is witnessing the rediscovery of Washington, D.C., and of the Adams Morgan neighborhood. Younger, wealthier and whiter people, the “gentry,” are moving into Adams Morgan, as they are doing in a number of neighborhoods in many U.S. cities. This process of “gentrification” holds a special irony for Flossie Bumbray. Her own building is to be converted into a condominium, and she fears that she will have to move.

Joseph Laskin knows that neighborhoods change, too. Owner of a liquor store on Columbia Road, in Adams Morgan, he felt trapped and depressed as the neighborhood had deteriorated around him. Before the riots and before the widespread use of air conditioning, he recalls that there were crowds of people on the streets as late as 10 p.m. on a Saturday night. By the end of the 1960s people were afraid: “You could roll a bowling ball down Columbia Road and not hit anybody.” In former days he loved talking to customers about wines, but the people who began coming into his store in the late 1960s had nothing to talk about. “You couldn’t sell up to them. You just put it in the bag.” Now things are more promising. “I’ve never enjoyed the business more than in the last three or four years,” he says. Urban scholars have their ways to measure neighborhood change; Joseph Laskin has his own. Hennessy cognac, he notes, is a very expensive brandy. Until recently he sold very little of it, and then only in the small sizes. Now it is selling briskly and in the large bottles.

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Experts in urban studies also know that cities and neighborhoods change. But, until recently, they tended to think that change went in only one direction. Widely praised and widely accepted models of urban growth suggested that neighborhoods, especially those near the core of a maturing city, could expect to pass through seemingly natural, inevitable, and irreversible stages of decline. As long as land was plentiful and cheap in the suburbs and the development of transportation and communication networks allowed residents and businesses to move outward from the city without isolating themselves from the advantages of the city, the prediction that neighborhoods would deteriorate seemed sound.

By 1950 this fatalistic assessment had undergone a metamorphosis. While analysts held to the notion that urban neighborhoods would decline if natural market forces were allowed to prevail, many came to believe that a sharp public sector
intervention could reverse such a trend. The result was urban renewal: local agencies, subsidized with federal monies, would purchase property (utilizing their powers of eminent domain), relocate businesses and residents, clear the site of outmoded structures, and offer the land to private developers at attractive rates. The result was an uneven legacy. While urban renewal did lead to showcase development in some instances, it did so at a high cost in terms of disruption and trauma to those forced to move. In some cases the locus of deterioration was simply shifted; neighborhoods adjacent to renewal projects suffered accelerated declines as the in-migration of relocatees generated overcrowded conditions and allowed private landlords seeking quick profits to raise rents, subdivide units, and delay repairs without fear that demand for the properties would subside. As often as not, moreover, the renewal sites languished. Private developers proved hesitant to invest in inner city tracts, even when the public sector was willing to underwrite much of the risk. The expectation of inevitable urban decline was very well ingrained.

Some time during the second half of the 1970s, however, this pat image of neighborhood dynamics began to dissolve. In a few neighborhoods, within some of our major cities, signs of reinvestment and resettlement became apparent. Neighborhoods that had been aging, and showing their age, began to stir. These were most often neighborhoods in which once-grand homes had been run down by overcrowding and the combined neglect of tenants, landlords and cautious bankers. Some were ethnic neighborhoods that had aged in place, the first and second generation holding onto the culture that knit the community together while subsequent generations, feeling confined by the traditional mores and looking to assert their assimilation into more mainstream lifestyles, moved on. The Near West Side of Chicago provides an example of the new forces at work in these neighborhoods. The remnants of that city’s fading “little Italy” observed a long-vacant lot claimed by an impressive sign announcing the pending construction of new townhouses for the middle and upper classes. “Suburbia in the City,” the sign proclaimed. The convenience and excitement of city life could be marketed to an upwardly mobile elite if wedded to the symbols of suburban life: tranquility, security, prestige.


In retrospect, we can see now that the revitalization of central city neighborhoods had been going on in a selective manner for years, even before this mid-to-late 1970s surge of attention. Walter Firey’s early analysis of Boston found signs of what we now would probably refer to as gentrification as early as 1905–1929. Firey was an exception among urban commentators, but, as more historical work is done, we may find that Beacon Hill was not so singular as is generally assumed. Dennis Gale’s recent study of historic preservation in Georgetown, for instance, discovered evidence of restoration in the early 1920s, and a more full-scale eruption of preservation activity by the 1940s.

What does seem to be different and significant about the more recent activity is that it shows definite signs of constituting a general trend. Earlier examples of neighborhood revitalization were sporadic and seemingly dependent upon relatively unique attributes of the areas involved. The more recent wave of reinvestment broke in numerous cities at about the same time, suggesting that broader forces were at work. Urban analysts quickly zeroed in on such factors as the energy crisis, the high costs of new and suburban housing, trends toward smaller households, the maturation of the baby boom generation (more people looking for housing), the citifying of the suburbs and changing social values relating to preservation, conser-
vation, and interracial and inter-class living to explain why the reversal of urban decline might be more than an ephemeral, media-inflated event.

While such a reversal in the prospects for urban neighborhoods had been hoped for and worked toward for many years, the full implications of gentrification remain only dimly understood. The celebratory response that first greeted the rumors of neighborhood revival has been tempered with caution and even replaced, in some quarters, by expressions of deep concern. Some impacts are undeniable, and almost certainly welcome. The rehabilitation of crumbling and abandoned housing fits in this class. Other impacts are less certain than initially presumed. The anticipated boost in city tax revenues, for example, may be moderated by the in-movers' lower toleration for local tax burdens, born of their greater capacity to meet their needs through the private sector. Or the gain in revenues may be counterbalanced by a greater and more politically effective demand, on the part of the wealthier in-migrants, for city services and programs that weigh upon the city budget on the debit side. Increasingly, moreover, it has become clear that there is an underside to the neighborhood redevelopment process that had been unanticipated or, if anticipated, had been underappreciated. One such undesirable impact involves the forced displacement of previous residents unable to afford the increased housing costs that gentrification imposes.

Scholars, public officials, and urban residents all have a stake in learning more about the precise nature and implications of this form of neighborhood change: scholars because it will help them revise or enrich theories explicitly or implicitly based on discredited models of urban change; officials, at all levels, because they are faced simultaneously with demands to stimulate and moderate such change; residents because informed response requires that they determine whether and in what fashion their own well-being may be jeopardized.

This monograph explores the nature and implications of gentrification by focusing on its impact on one neighborhood: Adams Morgan. Our orientation differs from that which has characterized most other studies of gentrification to date. Most existing studies have focused either on the newcomers or the displacees. Studies of the newcomers have provided a sharply defined picture of their characteristics. Studies of displacees have been less definitive. Indeed, as we shall see, there remain fundamental disagreements regarding the extent of gentrification-induced displacement and the severity of the costs it imposes on those who must relocate. Both types of studies are useful. However, we shall use them as a starting point rather than seek to replicate them here. Our focus will be on those who remain, particularly on the community institutions that anchor the remaining residents to the community and that must adapt to the changes around them. Such a review is necessary if a comprehensive and accurate assessment of the costs and benefits of gentrification is to be made.

What Do We Mean By Gentrification?

The term gentrification was used in Britain as early as 1963 to describe the resettling process by which working class areas in London were becoming fashionable and expensive. It is a dramatic term, bringing to mind an image of refined and upper-class Englishmen leaving country manor and stables to resettle previously dingy and undesirable inner-city neighborhoods. Some social scientists argue, in fact, that the term is too dramatic, quick to catch the popular fancy, but not appropriate as a description of what is actually going on in either Britain or the United States. Evidence suggests that the neighborhood revitalization going on in this country is not dependent on net in-migration from the suburbs nor is it an enterprise exclusively or even mainly of the very rich. Those who are moving into previously deteriorating neighborhoods and rehabilitating the housing are more likely to be moving within the city than into the city; and they are more likely to be
young and upwardly mobile offspring of the middle class than heirs of any firmly established aristocratic tradition.

We will use the term gentrification to refer to the process through which urban neighborhoods undergo rapid change brought about by the net in-migration of a population of higher socioeconomic status. By focusing on socioeconomic change due to in-migration, we draw a distinction between gentrification and “incumbent upgrading,” the latter of which terms refers to the process through which an existing population brings about physical improvement in a neighborhood’s housing by means of renovation and repair. This definition also has the advantage of detaching the concept of neighborhood gentrification from the more controversial concept of desuburbanization. Most of the nation’s large cities are still losing middle-class and white residents. While the rate of suburbanization is decreasing, the suburban population continues to grow at the central city’s expense. And recently, in an important reversal of longstanding trends, there has been a resurgence of interest in rural living. “Back-to-the-countryside” is a more accurate description for the demographic trends of the 1970s than is the more widely used back-to-the-cities label. Neighborhoods can gentrify, we shall see, even in the context of continued central city decline.

Another facet of our definition of gentrification that bears elaboration is its attention to the rapidity of change. The concept of neighborhood has come to be associated with connotations of stability and security. Neighborhood, so perceived, is a tightly knit network of social, ethnic, and familial ties, anchored in tradition, and providing a haven from the impersonal forces of urbanization and change. We began this study with an image of gentrification as an injection of change into a previously stable environment, but we were impressed progressively with the fact that change is a natural and ongoing part of existence at the neighborhood level. The benchmark against which gentrification is to be judged, therefore, is not fixed, but must incorporate some notion of deviation from “normal change.”

Some analysts have recommended doing away with the term gentrification altogether. They feel it is too symbolic and imprecise, too likely to stir misimpressions and strike raw political nerves. While their concerns are reasonable, it is by no means clear that the alternatives suggested—reinvestment, revitalization, reinvansion—are either less subject to distortion or substantially more precise. The term gentrification, in any event, has quickly gained a currency that makes discussion of possible substitutes beside the point. To introduce new terms at this juncture would simply add to the confusion. We will employ the popular term as modified in the preceding paragraphs.

**Genuine Trend or Media Invention?**

Many public officials at the local and federal levels are not yet ready to acknowledge gentrification as a significant and widespread trend. Officials at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and local redevelopment and planning agencies have spent more than three decades worrying about disinvestment, suburbanization, and the fiscal impact of white and middle-class flight. While recognizing that there are a few neighborhoods in which gentrification clearly has taken place, they hesitate to realign, too precipitously, perceptions and programs that have evolved slowly and in response to undeniable needs. One such official argues that “the spontaneous revitalization of central cities is not yet imminent and that the problems of disinvestment and local fiscal imbalance are likely to persist through the near future.”

The claim that gentrification is a limited and isolated phenomenon is based on more than a reluctance to shed familiar notions. An analysis of migration between central cities and suburbs concluded that “at mid-decade, the post 1970 ‘return to the city’ was small in magnitude and did not represent much of a departure from past tendencies.” Whites continue to leave the city in greater numbers than they
enter, and both whites and blacks who leave the city continue to have higher incomes than those moving in the opposite direction. Howard Sumka believes that the media, in its drive to find or create topics that are exciting and new, may have played a role in inflating the fact of gentrification. "Urban decline has become something of a ho-hum issue," he writes, "and it has lost the newsworthy character it once had." Central city revitalization, in contrast, "is clearly a 'man-bites-dog' story that has received an exceptional amount of coverage."\(^{15}\)

Yet neighborhood groups, tenants' organizations and others vigorously insist that gentrification is occurring, in fact spreading, and displacing existing residents from their homes. While political practicalities may provide incentives for such groups to overstate the nature of the problem, empirical evidence indicative of widespread gentrification in cities across the country is beginning to accumulate.\(^{16}\) Gentrification can be a subtle and elusive process. While the media has surely over-dramatized the phenomenon in some cases, in other instances it has aided residents and officials to recognize and comprehend a process that otherwise might have proceeded unattended to.

The "genuine trend" versus "media hype" positions have hardened with the result that some observers have thrown up their hands and concluded that no additional studies will be persuasive to the advocates of either position. But the stalemate is to some extent illusory. Points of agreement are beginning to emerge. Those who argue that the significance of gentrification has been overstated are correct in asserting that central cities and many older neighborhoods continue to be threatened by abandonment and decline. They are wrong, however, in their unspoken premise that the answer to "what is happening in our cities" must be a choice between either gentrification or decline. In fact, both may and do occur. An analysis of 967 census tracts in nine cities, for example, discovered evidence of gentrification even in cities in which the dominant city-wide trend was one of out-movement and economic stagnation. Gentrifying neighborhoods and deteriorating neighborhoods not only coexisted; in some cases they may have existed side by side.\(^{17}\) There were indications in that study also that gentrification may be increasing.

**Impacts of Gentrification**

Neighborhood gentrification, although it does not spell the reversal of urban decline, is nonetheless a genuine trend of fairly broad scope. To acknowledge that gentrification occurs, however, is not to say that we know what it entails. For policy-makers in particular, it is extremely important to assess the impacts of gentrification: What does it portend for the health and well-being of the city and its residents? Reliable information about the consequences of gentrification is even more difficult to come by than is reliable information regarding its scope and extent. And debate regarding the meaning of the data is just as heated.

Assessing the impacts of gentrification is a prerequisite to determining what, if anything, ought to be done about it. If gentrification leaves everyone better off, or if it benefits some without harming others, it should be encouraged, possibly through public sector action. If, as a result of gentrification, some people are left better off but others are harmed, it becomes necessary to weigh the benefits against the costs, encouraging gentrification only if the total benefits outweigh the total costs, and then, possibly, only if some means of compensating the losers can be devised. If the costs imposed on those who are harmed by gentrification are found to be more substantial than the benefits to others, we might conclude that the public sector should attempt to stop or slow the process. Those who are fundamentally opposed to government involvement in what they see as a private market phenomenon would oppose public intervention even in this last case.

Because gentrification may have several different types of impact (economic,
social, political, cultural) and because these impacts may fall differentially on distinct subgroups (taxpayers, real estate interests, long-term residents of gentrifying neighborhoods, gentrifiers, politicians, those who can afford higher housing prices, those who cannot), any comprehensive assessment of the costs and benefits of neighborhood gentrification must cast a wide net. Much of the debate over whether gentrification should be encouraged or discouraged unfortunately has dealt with a fairly narrow range of possible impacts: those on the city taxpayer (as manifested in discussions of the impact of revitalization on a city’s budget) and those on long-term residents who are displaced.

Fiscal Impacts on the City It has generally been taken for granted that neighborhood gentrification translates into significant benefits for anemic city budgets thus relieving those taxpayers who have been forced to carry the weight of growing expenditures while potential revenues leaked into the suburbs and beyond. One article estimated that the “middle classing” of old neighborhoods might be expected to be associated with increases in property tax assessments from 350 to 450 percent.18 Since the poor usually are presumed to demand more public services than the non-poor, moreover, their replacement by a middle- and upper-income gentry might give budget officials a double dose of good news: a higher tax base coupled with a decreased need to spend.

The facts are not nearly so clear cut. While it is undoubtedly true that the new middle class residents would need less public service, it is not necessarily the case that they would demand and receive less, and it is the amount of services actually delivered that determines what the fiscal impact will be. Some analysts have argued that the so-called gentry comes with high expectations in such areas as police protection, public schools, sanitation, parks, and street improvements.19 A study of gentrifiers in New Orleans did not find much support for the proposition that new homeowners in gentrifying neighborhoods had substantially different service demands than longer-term residents, but it did find evidence of greater political knowledge and involvement on the part of the gentrifiers.20 The sophistication and clout of the gentrifiers may enable them to extract more costly services than could other less mobilized neighborhoods with equal or greater needs.

Nor should it be assumed that the poorer, long-term residents (and their service needs) will disappear or otherwise relinquish their claim on the city’s purse. To the contrary, as explained below, while some residents are likely to be forced out of their homes by gentrification, they are not likely to move far. The displaced will tend to remain in the city, and, due to the disruption of displacement and their new housing needs, they may be forced to call upon even greater public support than before.

Impacts on the Displaced It has been the impact of gentrification on those who are displaced that has received the most attention. Since the beginning of 1979, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has issued three displacement reports in response to Congressional concern about gentrification-induced displacement.21 In February 1981, two major reviews critical of aspects of the HUD interpretation were released.22

Gentrification is believed to bring about displacement of long-term residents because of the incentives it provides to landlords to raise rents or to convert rental units into more costly condominiums or cooperatives. Even homeowners may be subject to displacement as a result of rising tax assessments, community pressures to undertake expensive renovations, or harassment from speculators seeking to purchase their homes. Besides the inconvenience of being forcibly uprooted, it is possible that many of the displaces will find it necessary to relocate in less satisfactory housing or comparable housing at significantly greater cost. Newspaper reports and other anecdotal accounts indicate that displaces frequently must move in with friends or relatives, creating an overcrowded and potentially unhealthy living arrangement. Because displaces have been found to relocate short distances from their previous homes and because gentrification tends to expand outward like a
ripple from a rock thrown in a pond, there also is reason to believe that some families may be displaced several times. For the elderly, in particular, the emotional and physiological impacts of gentrification-induced displacement may be severe. It is very difficult and costly to track down families once they have been displaced; as a result, reliable and systematic studies which have been done have seemed to indicate that the costs imposed on displacees may not be so severe as initially prophesied. While the generalization that displacees encounter higher housing costs seems to hold up, the increases found in the major studies have been relatively small, almost all below ten percent. The handful of studies that have surveyed displacees have indicated that many are satisfied with their new housing and new neighborhoods, some even more so than with that in which they lived before they were displaced. Such findings, however, are tentative and insufficient. The studies done to date have a potentially severe bias. Procedures for tracking displacees rely heavily on phone directories, forwarding addresses, voter lists. Those least able to cope with displacement—those who end up sleeping with friends or on the streets, those who may skip out on the last few months' rent, those who retreat to their hometowns, those who have any number of reasons for wishing not to be found—are less likely to be included in such surveys, most of which indeed have had generally low response rates. HUD's study of condominium and cooperative conversions is the best example of those studies in which the sample of displacees surveyed includes a number who are themselves white, young, and middle class. That such middle class displacees are able to find satisfactory replacement housing is not particularly surprising, nor does it tell us much about the burdens imposed on those who have fewer personal resources to bring to bear.

Those Who Remain: Community Impacts Somewhat overshadowed in discussions of gentrification so far has been the question of what happens to those who remain in the changing areas. This question could be addressed by focusing on the individuals and families who are not displaced. How much do their housing costs rise? How are they affected by the loss of friends and neighbors who are displaced? Do they appreciate and benefit from the class heterogeneity that is (at least temporarily) introduced? Or are resentment and conflict the end result? Alternatively, one might focus on community institutions: the schools, churches, community organizations, small businesses that provide the neighborhood with its semblance of a stable indentity even as the population circulates through the normal processes of mobility and maturation. Such institutions are the cement that holds a neighborhood together. They are the nodes of the social interaction that enable a group of disparate individuals to develop a sense of community and shared interests. They are the symbolic condensation of the neighborhood as it comes to be conceived by outsiders ("Oh, isn't that the area with the stylish French restaurants?" "We live over by Jefferson High."). In many cases they are the channels for service delivery, for information dissemination, for collective political response. Research into the effects of gentrification on these institutions, therefore, would provide indirect insights into the impacts on individuals and families while, at the same time, making it possible to gauge what gentrification might mean for "neighborhood" in the broader and somewhat more abstract sense.

This Study

How does one go about determining the impact of gentrification on community institutions? Because so little research has explicitly addressed this topic, there is neither an elaborated set of hypotheses nor a model methodology with which to begin. While the existing literature fails to provide a ready-made set of hypotheses, it does offer a fairly clear and well-supported picture of the characteristics of those moving into gentrifying neighborhoods. Gentrifiers, to sum up the results of several studies, tend to be young, middle- to upper-middle class, upwardly mobile and
professionally employed. They tend to be single or young married couples without children, or at least without children of school age. In several gentrifying neighborhoods, most notably in San Francisco, it is believed that a significant proportion of the new residents are gay. While information on the life-styles and values of the in-movers is less precise than that on their demographic attributes, there has arisen a fairly distinct picture of what one writer refers to as the "quiche culture." These are people with sound economic futures, minimal family responsibilities, and time and money to spare. The result seems to be the projection of a culture of conspicuous consumption: frequent dining in chic restaurants, active nightlife, expensive clothes. From information such as this, it is possible to infer some possible impacts on businesses, churches, schools, and community organizations. In later chapters we will spell out such inferences and subject the derived predictions to a rough set of tests.

Our method is the single case study. The focal case is the Adams Morgan neighborhood in Washington, D.C. (See map p. 8.) As part of a two-semester class project, graduating seniors from George Washington University's program in Urban Affairs collected the data and conducted the interviews upon which this study is primarily based. Quantitative data regarding demographic, housing and commercial change were collected from the U.S. Census, D.C.'s Municipal Automated Geographic Information System (MAGIS), building permit records, the D.C. Rental Accommodation Office's files on rent increases and condominium conversions, and directories containing information on the sales, owners, and occupants of commercial properties. The interviewees included business owners and operators, community activists, church officials, school officials, and parents. Interviewees were selected, with one broad exception, for their position or their reputation for knowledgeability, rather than through processes of randomization designed to obtain a representative sample. The exception involves the interviews with small businesses where an attempt to achieve representativeness (described later) was made. Some of the interviews were conducted by telephone; most were done face to face. Questions were open-ended and included a set of core questions that were to be asked of all respondents.

A low-budget (effectively no budget), student-implemented study such as this one can neither aspire to nor achieve the methodological sophistication that might otherwise be desirable. Scientific reliability is generally enhanced by standardization. Major projects undertaken by professional research organizations typically labor to ensure that interviewers look the same, ask the same questions in the same manner, perform a recording rather than interpreting function. The interviewers, in this case, were not hired employees, but students who had participated in formulating the research design, who were just learning the art of interviewing, and who were expected to interpret as well as report. Research as a learning process is a richer experience for those undertaking the task, but it is undoubtedly vulnerable, in return, to idiosyncracies, misjudgments, and even mistakes.

Lest we concede too much, however, there are distinct advantages to a study of this type which need to be recognized, too. As thoughtful and informed persons who had undergone extensive and interdisciplinary classwork in urban studies, the students had insights and skills of their own to contribute. Their energy and commitment to the project counterbalanced, in many cases, any lack of experience and professionalism. High turnover and lack of loyalty among the hired staff of professional research projects can introduce sources of misinformation and unreliability into major research projects that are as serious, if less apparent, than those expected here. Furthermore, the flexibility and low cost of a study such as this one can mean that important topics and areas which public and private funding sources find threatening or uninteresting need not be ignored.

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One thing is clear. It makes no sense to look for impacts of gentrification in a
given neighborhood unless it can be established that gentrification is indeed taking place. Establishing this is in itself a serious and nontrivial task in light of the controversy regarding the actual scope and extent of gentrification. In the next two chapters, we review the history of Adams Morgan and present evidence regarding the changes that are underway.

Notes

2Interview. Opinions and quotations from Adams Morgan residents and businesspersons are based on original interviews unless otherwise indicated.
12Bruce London, "Gentrification as Urban Reinvasion: Some Preliminary Definition and Theoretical Considerations," in Laska and Spain, eds., *Back to the City*.
19See Shirley Laska and Daphne Spain, "Anticipating Renovators' Demands: New Orleans," in Laska and Spain, eds., *Back to the City*.
20Laska and Spain, "Anticipating Renovators' Demands."
22See note #16.
26LeGates and Hartman, *Displacement*, p. 47.
CHAPTER TWO

Historical and Sociological Background

Stately Victorian townhouses line the quiet, tree-shaded streets, the homes of Washington’s finest. Congressmen and Senators, retired and future Presidents, high government officials, and an assortment of other dignitaries. . . . There are large estates, equipped with butlers, maids, cooks, and others; and there are luxury “high rises” for the well-heeled single or elderly persons. . . . the broad bustling avenues are lined with shops that cater only to the refined and elegant tastes of the rich.  

Young people of Spanish heritage—perhaps Cuban, Brazilian, Peruvian—sit together in a small triangular park, absorbed in the rhythms of their drums. Africans and other Latinos crowd the Mom and Pop type stores which sell plantains, cassava, goat’s meat and freshly baked bread. Some of the senior citizens of Barney Neighborhood Center enjoy lunch together, while others work at their crafts crocheting, re-upholstering. Conscientiously dressed families as well as those dressed for the playground stop off at Arabic and Spanish restaurants which are inexpensive enough to accommodate a family. Blacks and whites study the offerings of the health food stores for the best buys of the day.  

Adams Morgan has shown different faces. To one observer, “the single outstanding fact is the homogeneous quality of its residents.” To another: “Call it cosmopolitan. Call it dynamic. Call it mixed up.”

The seeming contradictions are, in part, a function of time. Like all neighborhoods, Adams Morgan has undergone change; and like many other dynamic neighborhoods, the swings of change have been wide. In its early history, Adams Morgan was the home of an elite population. Its houses and other structures, though they later suffered due to subdivision and neglect, never lost the architectural mark of the time and social class of their origins. Studies of gentrification in a number of cities have found architectural character and historic significance to be major attractions to the newer urban elite.

Another part of the apparent contradiction among images of Adams Morgan may be attributable to geography or spatial perspective. Adams Morgan is a neighborhood of parts. There are distinct physical and social sub-neighborhoods. A 1958 project decided that there were really three neighborhoods, with 18th Street and Columbia Road as their informal borderlines. Boundaries may have shifted in the interim. Such boundaries are best understood as rough simplifications. But the basic point remains valid: the Adams Morgan that one sees depends in part on where one is standing.

Our primary time focus will be on recent events inasmuch as it is only in the last decade or so that the changes associated with neighborhood revitalization in Adams Morgan are perceived to have taken place. But the earlier history is not the dead past. This analysis will begin with historical background not just to satisfy the curious but because the earlier experience continues to shape the dynamics of Adams Morgan today. Our primary spatial orientation will be toward Adams Morgan as a single neighborhood, although where possible and appropriate we will attempt to gauge the significance of variations among distinct sub-neighborhoods. In many places our choice of time frame and spatial boundaries, however, is dictated by no higher standard than that of data availability. Thus, for example, our discussion of the characteristics of the neighborhood’s population is oriented
around the ten-year census intervals (with only a little information from the 1980 surveys being available at the time this monograph was written). In several places we have employed census tracts 38, 39 and 40 to arrive at an approximation of the neighborhood's characteristics, although those census tract boundaries may not correspond neatly with those that the residents would designate for their neighborhood. We try to deal with these constraints in a realistic and pragmatic fashion, acknowledging the imprecision that may occasionally result and noting any inconsistencies or instances of noncomparability that appear to result from these adjustments.

The thrust of our attention will be directed toward general trends, but we will find it important to draw attention to counter currents and facets of the neighborhood that seem to stand outside the dominant flow of events. Although it is accurate to speak of broad stages in the development of a distinct Adams Morgan neighborhood—of periods of ascendance, decline, and, lately, redevelopment—at no stage was the state wiped clean. This, indeed, will prove to be an important corollary to the conclusions we will offer. During the putative decline, Adams Morgan retained a core of residents whose values and interests remained rooted in the earlier period. While the visibility of this core diminished, its impact did not disappear. Rather than the successive replacement of one class and/or race by another, Adams Morgan's history has been marked by a fairly constant and ongoing tension among classes and racial groupings, a tug-of-war in which one, and then another, has captured the moment, but which no faction has fully won.

**Early History** Topography can tell us a great deal about the history of Adams Morgan. Picture this region in 1790 on the eve of its designation as the future site of the nation's capital. To the north of the river in an area just beyond the perimeter of L'Enfant's planned city rose a gently sloping, forested hill. Elevation meant more than it does today. It meant a superior view; that, of course, is still an attraction. It tended also to mean cooler breezes, a fact of immense appeal in the pre-air-conditioned South. It meant more healthful conditions as well, for the low, swampy lands were popularly associated with diseases. Elevation was a desirable commodity and would prove to be a magnet to the emerging national elite. The area that has come to be known as Adams Morgan had elevation to offer.

The earliest settlements north of the boundary of the Federal City were somewhat to the south and west of what we now know as Adams Morgan. Much of that land had been part of a 600 acre tract called The Widow's Mite. The Widow's Mite was ceded by Charles II to an English settler, John Langworth. The property was later bought by another English settler, Anthony Holmead. Holmead passed the land on to his nephew, of the same name, in 1750. It was this second Anthony Holmead who built the first manor house in the area. This structure later passed through the hands of Gustavus Scott, a District Commissioner, and in 1807 was sold to Joel Barlow, the poet/diplomat, who renamed the estate "Kalorama" or "beautiful view."

Settlement of the southeastern segment of Adams Morgan, which included a portion of the area known as Meridian Hill, is dated to approximately 1816. In that year, Commodore (then captain) David Porter purchased 157 acres, one mile due north of the White House, for $13,000. Porter built an elegant home here which, in 1829, was rented to John Quincy Adams. To the north lay the well-known racing grounds of the Washington Jockey Club. Adams was among the dignitaries reported to have viewed the races on the circular, one-mile track.

In 1822, Columbian College opened on a narrow strip of 48 acres located along the eastern border of Adams Morgan, from Florida Avenue to a little beyond Columbia Road between 14th and 15th Streets. The college, which was later to evolve into George Washington University, boasted only about 30 students during its first year; by the onset of the Civil War there were about 70 students, with another 65 in the associated preparatory school. During the war years the neighborhood was effectively overrun by Union soldiers who claimed parts of the college and the Porter mansion as encampments. Never financially secure at that site, the
college moved downtown around 1873. By then the demand for land in this "suburban" area had increased, and the college was able to subdivide its property, selling it off in stages with the last parcels disposed of in 1883.11

At this time Adams Morgan was still quite sparsely populated, but the population of the city was pushing northward. In 1873, Thomas Morgan bought and enlarged a small Federal house located on a part of the old Widow's Mite.12 This Oak Lawn estate much later became the site of the Washington Hilton, which now anchors the corner of Adams Morgan where it begins to blend into Dupont Circle and Kalorama to its south and west. In 1880 George Brown Goode, a nationally known scientist, built a home in the Lanier Heights area, along the northeastern boundary of present day Adams Morgan. Goode apparently persuaded several of his colleagues from the Smithsonian Institution to purchase the adjacent lots, and a small intellectual community was born.13 Speculators had begun purchasing and subdividing segments of the old Holmead and Barlow estates by 1890.14

For many years, a notable landmark was the "Henderson Castle," built by Senator John B. Henderson in 1888. Henderson was famous for drafting the legislation to abolish slavery, but it was his wife who had the greater influence on the immediate neighborhood. The castle was located at the intersection of Florida Avenue and 16th Street. Mrs. Henderson apparently felt that there was too little dignity in the name of the latter thoroughfare. She favored "Avenue of the Presidents," and she hung signs and used personal stationary proclaiming that address. At one point, Congress, bowing to her social and political influence, went so far as to accede to her wishes by formally renaming the street: the resultant controversy convinced that convincible body to change its mind.15 After the senator's death, Mrs. Henderson built, between 1906 and 1910, nearly a dozen formal houses on her property in the area. Later, she offered one of these houses to then Vice President Calvin Coolidge to be used as an official residence, but Congress felt the house was too grand (and upkeep too expensive). The castle later was converted into a rooming house, and then an after hours club. It was demolished in 1935. In 1977, Beckman Place, a development of expensive new homes opened on the site. This was one of the first inroads of luxury housing in a corner of Adams Morgan that had deteriorated more strikingly than most.

There was a black population in Adams Morgan from its days as a rural district. Topography influenced their history as well. While both whites and blacks lived within the area now known as Adams Morgan, there apparently was considerable segregation. One pocket of black housing was concentrated in an area below the Henderson Castle site which bordered the unhealthy swampy area. As pressure for development increased, initially around the turn of the century and more strikingly after WWI, a dynamic of speculation and displacement not unlike that associated with gentrification today seems to have been touched off. Malakoff reports that "these blacks were subject to the original absentee landlordism—white investors owned their property and rented it to them cheaply while waiting for the area to increase in value as the city spread northward." Even the dead were not immune to displacement if they occupied valuable sites for housing construction. A black cemetery located in a northern section of the neighborhood was moved in the early 1900s to make way for more housing for the city's growing community of middle and upper-class whites employed by the government.

The White Glove Era  By the 1920s Adams Morgan had entered its golden era. The erstwhile rural outpost had developed into an urban neighborhood with a cultural and social identity of its own. It was in 1917, for example, that the Knickerbocker Theater, one of the most elegant of its time, opened its doors at Columbia and 18th Street. The theater held 1,700 people and was an attraction to the city's affluent residents. Four years later tragedy struck when a heavy snowfall caused the roof to collapse, killing nearly one hundred people and injuring many more. By then, however, the area's image as an attractive and somewhat fashionable place to live had been established. Avignon Freres, the cosmopolitan catering firm, opened
in Adams Morgan in 1918. In 1927, while theater-goers throughout the country were flocking to see Al Jolson in the "talkie," the Jazz Singer, Jolson’s parents were living at 1787 Lanier Place. According to residents’ recollections both Admiral Perry and Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes lived for a while in the area, as did Harvey Wiley, the author of The Pure Food and Drug Act, who lived on Ashmead Place. During the 1940s the commercial area received another touch of class with the opening of Gartenhaus Furs: a shopping landmark for those in a position to engage in conspicuous consumption. And during the 1950s the Showboat Lounge offered nightclub entertainment, featuring nationally known guitarist Charlie Byrd. Joseph Laskin has been selling wines and liquor in Adams Morgan long enough to recall this more elegant era. He remembers it as a time of “genteel women” who “came out with white gloves and had tea in the afternoon.”

Directories available for Washington, D.C. during this period provide a sketchy but nonetheless informative picture of the social status and occupational prestige of Adams Morgan residents during this period. We selected a sample of 50 addresses from the 1948 Polk directory and noted, where such information was provided, the occupation of the head of the household located at that address. Because we were interested in determining whether there had been any major shifts in the status of Adams Morgan residents during the 1930s and 1940s, we also examined the 1928 directory to determine the occupations of those living in the same residence 20 years before. Our findings are summarized in Table 2–1. Because this sample is small and the Polk data imprecise it is best to regard the findings as suggestive rather than definitive. Yet a couple of points can be made. The first has to do with the increasing importance of the federal government, a product of broad changes external to the neighborhood itself, most notably a growing military and the New Deal. This federal employer appears to have supplanted a private sector presence that was more apparent in 1928. The second point concerns the occupational diversity in the neighborhood, even during this era which has sometimes been portrayed as if the neighborhood was dominated by a professional and financial elite. At both time periods about one in five of our sampled residents was employed in essentially blue-collar work—laborer, mechanic, delivery, cook, maid. While some residents were professionally employed or occupied private or public sector positions of apparent authority, most were not. Many of those employed in the federal government worked at lower-level clerical posts. The norm appears to be defined by the mid-level bureaucrat; the upper crust that is associated with the neighborhood’s early years appears to have been a thin crust overlaying a predominantly middle-class pie.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2–1</th>
<th>OCCUPATIONS OF A SAMPLE OF ADAMS MORGAN RESIDENTS, 1928 and 1948</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1948 (n = 35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal (non-military)</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue collar</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business Proprietor</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyer/Doctor</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign Embassy</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Interest Group</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector Clerical/Sales</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector Management</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For most of this period between the two world wars, the poor, black population in Adams Morgan remained small. Each morning witnessed a large in-migration of blacks commuting from their homes in Southeast Washington and Virginia to their jobs as servants, maids, laundrenmen and chauffeurs for the dignitaries and other affluent citizens living along 19th Street and Columbia Road. "Poor people couldn't afford to be here, and they weren't unless they were servants," recalls a black woman who began travelling to Adams Morgan in 1915 to sell flowers from a pushcart. She would later become a resident. It was, as she remembers it, the desire of the neighborhood’s white residents to have their domestic help more accessible that finally broke down the cost barriers that were excluding the poor.

They said, would you like to live in town? And you would answer, but the rent's so high I don't know how I could do it. And then they came down here and inspected this section, to see if it was reasonable, and to see if they could help with the payments. And so the rich people bought these houses, [in the southeastern portion of the neighborhood] and one of these big houses went for $3000. And so the help didn't have to travel from out in Anacostia, with all the bad traffic.18

Not long thereafter, however, events on a larger scale were to bring more substantial changes to the composition of the neighborhood.

Decline Washington has undergone its periods of sharpest growth during times of military conflict and economic distress. The decade including the Civil War marked the period of the city's greatest proportional growth. The decade including WWI marked the first ten-year period in which the city grew by over 100,000 persons. The decade including most of the Great Depression marked the largest increase in absolute numbers (over 175,000) in the city’s history. The decade including WWII marked the second largest absolute increase. (It also was the last census to show an increase rather than a population decline for the District of Columbia.)

As the government grew—the military to fight our wars, the regulatory arms of the New Deal to address our social and economic instabilities—the pressure for more intensive land development increased as well. Once considered a distant suburb, the Adams Morgan area was considered close-in and a prime candidate for development due to the expansion of streetcar service and the introduction of the automobile.

Expansion, if channelled and controlled, can bring a neighborhood prosperity, but rapid and uncontrolled change is a potential threat. In Georgetown, at this time, residents had begun to organize to defend their neighborhood against random development. Zoning protections were proposed and passed; plans that would have greatly increased traffic and congestion were successfully fought.20 Adams Morgan was not so protected. Zoning for the area facilitated commercial development and allowed owners to subdivide single family homes or convert them into rooming houses. Density increased and persons of lower incomes could now afford to live in the area.

The resulting scenario is familiar in American cities of the east and upper midwest. Increasing density and the “invasion” of the lower classes provided many of the neighborhood’s wealthier residents with sufficient incentive to leave. The tight housing market made the prospect of selling their property or renting it as a rooming house financially attractive. Other broad societal changes such as the growing use of the automobile, the expansion of the federal highway system, increased availability of financing for home purchase in the suburbs, and court rulings regarding the integration of schools and other public facilities combined to accelerate the so-called “white flight.” By the late 1950s this middle class exodus had left Adams Morgan a different kind of place. It was perhaps not a slum by any reasonable definition, but an area admittedly in the throes of steady decline.

A Plan for Urban Renewal Hope for recovery flared briefly in the period between 1958 and 1962. In February 1958, the D.C. Board of Commissioners contracted with American University to undertake a demonstration project in Adams Morgan. The goal was to “develop and demonstrate the methods and techniques of planning, organizing, managing, and sustaining joint governmental and citizen action in the elimination, control, and prevention of blight in an urban neighborhood
which shows signs of deterioration but which is not designated for redevelopment.”

While not initially presented as a vehicle for the development of a public urban renewal proposal, the demonstration project moved rapidly in that direction. Although the proposal to designate Adams Morgan as an urban renewal area emerged from a citizens’ planning committee and was voted on and approved by twenty-one block groups and area associations, support for the concept of public renewal was by no means without reservation. Organizations in the predominantly black sections of the neighborhood were fearful that urban renewal might entail extensive demolition and forced relocation. Several of those organizations voted in favor of the proposal only after explicitly stipulating the conditions that conservation be emphasized; that demolition be limited; and that those displaced be helped to relocate within the immediate neighborhood. Four organizations in the whiter and wealthier northwestern section of the neighborhood feared that designation as an urban renewal area would stigmatize the area, threaten property values, and deflate efforts already underway to attract private reinvestment into the neighborhood. These organizations—led by the Kalorama Citizens Association and the Kalorama Triangle Restoration Society—refused to support the broad community proposal. They chose instead to favor a more limited urban renewal plan that would exclude their immediate areas.

There were fears and internal conflicts; however, it seems that the renewal proposal also stimulated a period of greater unity, enthusiasm, and community spirit than had reigned previously. A fragile coalition was built around the premise that public funds and comprehensive planning could reverse the decline of Adams Morgan and yet do so in a manner consistent with the needs and interests of those living there at the time. The premise may itself have been faulty; had urban renewal taken place, the result might have been as traumatic and unsatisfying as it was to prove in many other cities and neighborhoods. But the premise was never tested. The lack of unanimity among residents, opposition by owners of industrial properties within the neighborhood, hesitation about recreating some of the disruptions and failures of the District’s first and major renewal project in Southwest D.C., all combined to forestall the plan’s approval. What was perceived as a threat of hope by some residents and business owners was cut. The shock of the civil disturbances in 1968 caused the fabric of the neighborhood to unravel even more. In the aftermath, major businesses, including Ridgwell’s Caterers, Cherners Ford, and Gartenhaus Furs pulled up stakes and relocated. Donald Gartenhaus had been chairman of the Adams Morgan Planning Committee that recommended the urban renewal plan. Adams Morgan, symbolically at least, had hit low ground.

Hispanic Immigration  To many outsiders the most distinctive trait about Adams Morgan is its sizable Hispanic population. In a city bleached bland by the domination of a public bureaucracy to the exclusion of traditional industrial working class and ethnic communities found in other large cities, this provides a romantic gritty appeal. The Hispanic population began to attain visibility during the 1950s. Drawn from various Central American nations, as well as from Mexico, Puerto Rico, and South America, the Adams Morgan Hispanic population is much more heterogeneous in culture and tradition than is the case in most other large cities. This heterogeneity has complicated efforts to mobilize the Hispanic community into a strong and cohesive political force, but if political clout has been attenuated cultural influence has not.

During the 1950s and 60s the impact of the Hispanic community showed first in the evolution of a small network of commercial enterprises oriented toward, and in some cases owned by, Hispanic residents. Even established businesses with predominantly non-Hispanic clientele began to recognize the benefits of attracting this new market; some took to advertising on the Spanish-language radio station that was operating at that time. More recently there has been another type of Hispanic commercialization—one more oriented toward outsiders and non-Hispanics who are attracted by the ethnic charm or perceived chic of the neighborhood’s increasingly expensive Hispanic restaurants.
Estimating the size of the Hispanic population is a difficult and politically explosive task. Preliminary 1980 census figures for census tracts 38, 39, and 40 reveal 2,014 persons of Spanish origin, about 13% of the population. This represents an increase of about 14% since 1970, but it is still far below estimates that Hispanic leaders offer. Because of such factors as language barriers and the presence of illegal immigrants who are hesitant to let themselves be counted, the census certainly undercounts Hispanics, although it is uncertain by what degree. Hispanic leaders, who base their political clout at least in part on the size of their constituency, have their own incentives to overstate the numbers. The most systematically derived estimate, other than that of the census bureau, may be that which is based on a survey undertaken by the D.C. Office of Latino Affairs. That survey estimated that 8,315 persons of Hispanic ancestry—19.4% of the relevant population—lived in Adams Morgan and neighboring Mt. Pleasant. That same survey also concluded that Hispanic households earned only 51% as much as white households in Adams Morgan. Only 31% claimed to speak English “very well” and just 23% had completed high school.

There is some irony in the fact that this growing identification of Adams Morgan as a center of Hispanic culture corresponds with increasing concern among Hispanic leaders that they are already being displaced from the neighborhood. According to one: “Liberal whites like Mexican food and have a year of college Spanish, therefore they feel they can save the world for these poor Latinos.” But the attention they have helped to draw to the neighborhood may simply be fuelling the economic pressures that are forcing the Hispanics out.

Notes

8Malakoff, “Adams Morgan.”
16Malakoff, “Adams Morgan.”
17Every thirtieth housing unit along Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Streets was included. If the unit included in the 1948 sample did not exist in 1928, it simply was dropped from the 1928 sample. If the 1948 unit was vacant in 1928, the nearest unit—usually an adjoining apartment or, where an owner-occupied unit was involved, the house next door—was selected and the occupation of the resident of that unit was included in the 1928 sample.
19Malakoff, p. 53.
CHAPTER THREE

Revitalization

Among those who live or do business in Adams Morgan today there is broad agreement as to the nature of the changes taking place. Asked whether they had seen "any significant changes in the neighborhood," over 90 percent mentioned the rehabilitation of housing, condominium conversions, or the influx of younger, wealthier white households. Only one of about 65 interviewees indicated seeing no changes, another felt changes were exaggerated, and several indicated they had been in the area too short a time to judge. Asked what they thought the neighborhood would be like "20 years from now," fully 23 percent made reference to Georgetown as the model. Another suggested the neighborhood would be "better than" Georgetown. Two specifically indicated Adams Morgan would not be like Georgetown. (One of these said Greenwich Village was a more likely future, the other said residents would not allow "Georgetownization.")

It is more difficult, however, to pin down when the process of neighborhood revitalization and gentrification began. Memories are imprecise and idiosyncratic. While there was broad agreement among our respondents that the changes had begun in the 1970s, estimates of the precise date ranged from 1972 to 1979. For most, awareness seemed to have come gradually over a period of several years. No watershed event burned a consensus in the Adams Morgan collective consciousness that this was the day that gentrification began.

We need to remind ourselves that in stable as well as deteriorating neighborhoods property always is being bought and sold, new residents arrive, buildings are painted and rehabilitated, a wealthier person replaces a poorer person, an elderly widow dies, a young family moves in. In the late 1950s, nearly twenty years before the term "gentrification" entered the lexicon of U.S. urbanologists, private reinvestment was a fact of life in Adams Morgan. This description of changes underway in 1960 in the Kalorama Triangle section sounds much like contemporary accounts of gentrification.

A great deal of work has gone on and the physical appearance of the Triangle ... is vastly improved. Up and down the streets houses are painted in gay pastels, and cleverly trimmed with wrought iron and shutters, tiny formal gardens, green lawns, well-tended shrubs and flowers, attesting to a new spirit.

A survey in the late 1950s of owner-occupants concluded that over half had made major repairs in the last few years.

It is tempting to label these as signs of early gentrification, but time proved them to be sporadic and isolated episodes of reinvestment running against a stronger tide of aggregate decline. Census figures, for example, show that from 1960 through 1970 the income of Adams Morgan residents declined compared to that of other D.C. residents.

By the early 1970s a new ingredient was introduced into the residential composition of Adams Morgan. The anti-war effort had drawn a corps of young, idealistic, and politically radical activists to Washington. Many of them settled in
Adams Morgan or Dupont Circle to its south. These activists were not themselves wealthy, but they did represent an influx of a highly educated cadre, one with its roots in the middle class.

One faction of this group decided to seek to build a localized movement based on principles of participatory democracy and economic self-help. While never a large contingent within Adams Morgan, these activists—by virtue of their education, ability to write and speak clearly, and their political sophistication—came to wield a disproportionate influence on the course of neighborhood events. Their catalytic effect within the community was important, but no more so than their role in redefining Adams Morgan to the outside world. Some of these activists were members of an evolving national network of persons and groups interested in neighborhood issues. Experimental efforts involving neighborhood-based technology and economic self-sufficiency in Adams Morgan were broadcast widely through that network. The Institute for Local Self-Reliance, for example, helped initiate projects involving rooftop gardens and waste recycling. Reported in the media and expounded in books like Neighborhood Power (written by two Adams Morgan residents), these projects were magnified beyond their actual significance. They were made to seem more established and practical than they proved to be in fact. On the positive side, as a result of this polemical publicity, the image that Adams Morgan had begun to develop was superceded by an exciting image of innovation, community spirit, interclass unity, and cultural diversity.

There is irony in the fact that this counter-cultural, anti-bourgeois movement may have helped to set the stage for the gentrification of Adams Morgan: from “counter culture” to the “quiche culture.” If this was the case, the forerunners of the gentrification process were pioneers in a movement the mechanism and social nature of which they heartily condemned. We should be wary, however, of letting irony carry the argument too far. The broad context of urban change in Washington, D.C., which has seen numerous neighborhoods undergo the dynamics associated with gentrification, belies the notion that any such idiosyncratic facet of Adams Morgan’s history could account for the changes that followed. It seems unlikely, too, that the activities of such a radical contingent would have prompted the reassessment of the area by financial institutions and private developers that subsequently did take place. This phase of neighborhood life probably did not bring about the gentrification of Adams Morgan. At most it influenced the particular sociological configuration of change. The neighborhood attracted young middle-class newcomers who were more reformist in political orientation, more toward the fringe of the cultural mainstream, less interested in neighborhood-as-investment and more interested in neighborhood-as-community than those simultaneously migrating into other gentrifying areas like Dupont Circle and Capitol Hill.

By 1975 there are clear signs that gentrification was well under way. A publication in that year, consisting of a series of interviews with neighborhood residents, reveals that both rapidly escalating housing costs and the displacement of lower-income residents were well established as issues of local concern. “They’re asking ridiculous prices. Even the houses on this block [Swann Street] have gone sky-high,” one longtime resident notes. “You have a vacant house and they grab it like wildfire—they’re asking 40 or 50 thousand for a vacant house and that’s ridiculous.” Another resident reported that renovation had started on her street [California] only within the previous few years. “For some reason, renovation was going on on other blocks, but not on this one. Then a couple of real estate agents decided they would work on the people on this block, and the prices soared.” A spokesman for Ayuda, a nonprofit agency providing legal help to Hispanic residents, indicated in the same publication that evictions due to real estate turnovers had been increasing for several years. David Clarke, city council member from Ward One, was quoted as saying that housing speculation “is the major problem” facing Adams Morgan; “the others are miniature in comparison to it.”


*Measuring Gentrification*  Such perceptions by residents themselves provide a sensitive and often reliable instrument for assessing neighborhood changes. Residents can appreciate small variations; they know the history; they can recognize whispers of change. Yet there is a need for more objective, quantitative measures as well. Residents' perceptions provide only an imprecise notion of the timing of gentrification. Those whom we interviewed in early 1981 tended to remember the changes as having begun sometime in the mid or late 1970s; some dated it as late as “the last year or two.” Yet the quotes above suggest that residents interviewed in the mid 1970s felt the phenomenon was already a reality.

Quantitative measures of gentrification, at least in theory, offer two advantages over subjective reports. First, they allow us to separate the idiosyncratic from the genuine trend. A young couple that converts a rooming house into a fashionable single family home may strike a lasting impression in neighbors' minds, even if the aggregate trend continues to be one of neighborhood decline. Quantitative measures can isolate the unusual, put it in perspective by incorporating it into an average or median or some other statistical summary of “the norm.” Similarly, quantitative indicators can broaden our perspective by providing a base for comparison that is drawn from beyond the immediate experiences of the residents themselves.

A second advantage of such quantitative measures is that they may allow us to distinguish more precisely among aspects of neighborhood revitalization that might be generally perceived as an undifferentiated whole. In their surprise at the apparent reversal of decline in some urban neighborhoods, scholars, policy makers, and residents have managed to obscure potentially important distinctions. A neighborhood may be referred to as “revitalizing” or “gentrifying” because the *turnover* in properties has increased, because the *value* of properties has escalated, because the *income* or *social status* of the residents has improved, because the *racial composition* has changed, because the housing stock has undergone physical *rehabilitation*, because rental units have undergone sharp *rent hikes* or *conversion* into condominiums or because a sluggish and dingy retail strip has shown signs of *commercial revitalization*. These various facets of neighborhood change *may* often occur together; it is not inevitable that this will be the case. Where quantitative measures for these distinct dimensions are available, they make it possible to assess empirically the nature of their interrelationships. The stages of neighborhood change can be identified and answers found to the potentially significant question of which comes first.

The theoretical advantages of quantification unfortunately cannot be fully realized in this case. Neighborhood level data is not abundant. The U.S. Census provides information about census tracts (roughly approximate to neighborhood size) but does so only every ten years. Most of the 1980 census tract data is not yet available. Year-by-year accounts of who lived in Adams Morgan simply are not available. Information about housing costs, sales, conversions, and rehabilitation can be pulled together, but it must come from disparate sources using disparate time frames and disparate geographical units. Nonetheless, in the following sections we have drawn upon these various sources to sketch more fully the nature and dynamics of gentrification in Adams Morgan.

*Changes in Population*  Eileen Zietz analyzed census information on the Georgetown, Capitol Hill, and Adams Morgan Neighborhoods during the mid 1970s. She concluded that Adams Morgan was just beginning to show signs of gentrification. Early returns from the 1980 census make it possible to update some of her analyses regarding total population and racial change. Other relevant and important census information regarding the income, profession and education of today's residents is not yet available.

Zietz writes that “as the process of private urban renewal takes place, population within the affected area declines.” This occurs because newcomers to gentrifying areas typically have fewer members in their households and often demand more housing space per person. Stories of multi-family rental buildings being converted
1980 Census Tracts
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Adams Morgan Neighborhood
into housing for a one- or two-person household are common in such neighborhoods. Looking at the three census tracts that roughly approximate the Adams Morgan neighborhood, Zietz found that through 1970 changes in the number of persons living there reflected city-wide trends. Only when she looked at 1975 population estimates made by the D.C. Municipal Planning Office did she find evidences of the type of population decline that was occurring in the other two gentrifying neighborhoods. Table 3–1 extends our information to include preliminary reports from the 1980 census. This data can be considered more reliable than the 1975 estimates and more directly comparable to the totals from the previous years. The table reveals a sharper decline in population in the Adams Morgan tracts in the 1970s than occurred in the rest of the city. This is consistent with the thesis that gentrification began during that decade.

Total population, however, is a crude and indirect measure of gentrification. Population may fall for a number of reasons, some of which may not be associated with gentrification. From 1950 until 1960 population in Adams Morgan dropped almost as sharply as it did during the last decade, and did so in the context of a much milder city-wide decline. Yet the earlier period was associated with a general deterioration of the neighborhood’s socioeconomic status as our narrative has indicated and as some of our data will subsequently show.

A better, although still imperfect indicator of gentrification is racial change. There is nothing inherent in the concept of gentrification to suggest that it must entail black-to-white racial change. Wealthier white in-movers can replace poorer blacks or whites; wealthier black families can replace poorer blacks or whites. In the contemporary national context, in which race and income are so often correlated, however, gentrification often does mean the replacement of black families by whites. This certainly has been charged to be so in the specific case of Adams Morgan. Table 3–2 reveals the patterns of racial change in Adams Morgan from 1940 to 1980. For thirty years, from 1940–1970, Adams Morgan became increasingly black. In tracts #38 and #39 the sharpest increase in black population occurred between 1950 and 1970; in tract #40 the increase started earlier and had moderated by 1960. By 1970 a little over one-half of the population in the three tracts was black, although both tracts #39 and #40 continued to have black populations proportionally smaller than the city as a whole.

The decade between 1970 and 1980 shows a sharp reversal of the established trends. All three tracts showed a “whitening” of the population. This occurred, moreover, while the racial composition of the city as a whole remained virtually stable.

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<th>Table 3–1</th>
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<tr>
<td>POPULATION IN ADAMS MORGAN, 1940–1980</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tract 38</td>
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<td>Tract 39</td>
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<td>Tract 40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Adams Morgan</td>
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<td>D.C.</td>
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</table>

**Sources:** Census of Population and Housing, Census Tracts. 1980 data drawn from “Initial Census Tract Data from 1980 Census,” report by D.C. Office of Planning and Development.
These demographic data constitute fairly hard evidence of one dimension of the gentrification process. Before moving on to consider changes in the characteristic of housing that also were occurring during this period, two observations need to be underscored. The first involves the relative nature of Adams Morgan's racial change and socioeconomic decline. Table 3-3 reveals that from 1940 until 1970, the years in which Adams Morgan was becoming increasingly black, the median education of the neighborhood's residents stagnated while the city's and the nation's made significant gains. From 1940 through 1960, the actual number of Adams Morgan residents with four or more years of college decreased slightly while the national pool of college graduates was growing. At no point, however, did Adams Morgan come close to complete racial turnover; and, even during the period of white middle-class flight, the population of college graduates remained relatively stable in size. Even at its point of greatest decline, as commonly perceived, Adams Morgan retained a sizeable proportion of residents who still matched the racial and social status characteristics associated with the neighborhood when it was in its initial period of ascendance.

Our second qualifying observation is that Adams Morgan's recent reversal in fortune must be considered relative as well. A 1978 publication by the D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development characterizes displacement in Adams Morgan as "nearly complete." However, as the 1980 census figures show, a substantial black population remains. Many of these blacks are middle class, but many also are poor. When 1980 census tract figures on income, education, and occupation become available, we expect they will reveal that even in its state of advanced gentrification and displacement Adams Morgan continues to house a significant number of the so-called underclass.

Residential Housing Turnover and Cost Both the number of sales and the average sale price of residential properties are expected to rise as a result of gentrification. High turnover may reflect the activity of speculators who see a chance to profit from a changing neighborhood's new found marketability. Some analysts consequently suggest that turnover may be one of the earliest signs of gentrification. According to this perspective, speculators themselves create the pressure that starts gentrification on its way. As clever entrepreneurs spot a neighborhood with development potential, they may quietly begin purchasing properties and then seek through various means to advertise the neighborhood's desirability. Others suspect that speculation comes later in the game; most real estate investors may be too cautious to risk their money until the dynamics of gentrification are clearly established. In either event turnover will result sooner or later, but indicators of turnover must be analyzed cautiously. High turnover could reflect a sudden decline in a neighborhood and the widespread disposal of properties rather than a neighborhood renaissance. The combination of turnover with sales price data will be most useful.

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Table 3-3  
EDUCATION 1940–1970

A. MEDIAN SCHOOL YEARS

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<thead>
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<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
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<td>12.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.8</td>
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<td>12.6</td>
<td>12.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>11.7</td>
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B. PERCENT FOUR OR MORE YEARS OF COLLEGE

<table>
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<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>14.0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>23.9</td>
<td>23.1</td>
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<td>Tract 40</td>
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<td>20.8</td>
<td>19.9</td>
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<td>D.C.</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of Population and Housing, Census Tracts, Washington, DC-MD-VA.

Table 3–4 presents information about sales of single-family homes in Adams Morgan and the District. Figures represent the number of sales as a percentage of the total number of 1980 single-family structures; this makes comparison among neighborhoods easier than if we were simply to look at the raw total number of sales (since the number of single family units available to be sold varies markedly from tract to tract). Six points bear emphasis: (1) Sales activity in Adams Morgan has been greater than in the city as a whole. (2) This is the case throughout the whole neighborhood. With only three exceptions (tract #39 in 1970, tract #38 in 1972 and 1973), sales as a proportion of structures was greater in each tract than for the city. (3) The extent to which sales in the neighborhood outstripped those in the city increased steadily from 1970 until 1977. (4) Turnover slowed in 1978 and 1979, perhaps in response to rising interest rates in those years. The slowdown was sharper than that for the city as a whole. (5) There is considerable variation among the tracts. Tract #40, generally the wealthiest of the Adams Morgan tracts, began the decade with the highest proportional turnover, but activity there crept up more slowly, dropping in 1975 and 1976 while tracts #38 and #39 continued to climb. While tract #40 exhibited greater proportional activity than the city each year, it never doubled the city rate, while tract #38 did so three times and tract #39 did so for five years. While tract #40 was stabilizing in 1973, tract #39 was beginning its sharp five-year climb. Tract #38 did not really accelerate in sales activity until 1976; but while both #39 and #40 slowed after 1977, tract 38 held stable during those last two years for which data is available. (6) At the same time, there is also a consistency within the neighborhoods. While year-by-year fluctuations vary, all three tracts started the decade with relatively lower turnover rates and all three peaked in the same year.

Information on the average sale price of single family residences in Adams Morgan is presented in Table 3–5. When the prices are compared with those for the city as a whole, a fairly erratic picture emerges. Prices in tract #38 fluctuated quite
a lot, hovering a bit over 50% of the city mean. The period 1977–1978 witnessed a sharp rise that may be indicative of the kind of relative appreciation in property values expected along with gentrification. In light of the up and down pattern in the past it would be careless to assume that any one year jump indicates the onset of a steady trend, but the increase in 1979 is just as substantial and marks the fourth jump in a row. The pattern in tract #39 is a little clearer. While there is some unsteadiness here, too, the general pattern is one of increasing prices; 1977–78 and 1978–1979 again show a very sharp gain. While houses in tract #38 remained considerably cheaper than most in the city, those in #39 began to mirror the city’s prices in 1974 and then shot up quickly past the city’s standard. Tract #40 sported houses that were 20–30% more expensive than the city mean even at the beginning of the decade when Adams Morgan was theoretically a neighborhood on the skids. It, too, shows dips and surges, but like tract #39 it shows a relatively clear trend of appreciation after 1973 with a sharp upward surge in 1977–79. While the fluctuations are mildly disconcerting, they probably can be attributed to the relatively low number of sales which makes our measure more sensitive to random factors than would be the case with a larger sample size.

Two general conclusions can be offered at this point. First, these data reaffirm our belief that gentrification has not come to all of the different sections of Adams Morgan at the same time or with the same force. Second, there is an overall trend of appreciation. While it is risky to hinge a strong conclusion on the last two years of a time series, the fact that all three tracts show such a striking jump in relative prices in 1977–1979 suggests that a take-off point may have been reached at that time. It is during this last spurt, too, that housing prices in the neighborhood as a whole first began substantially to exceed the city mean.

### Table 3–4

NUMBER OF SALES OF SINGLE FAMILY HOMES AS A PERCENTAGE OF 1980 SINGLE FAMILY STRUCTURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TRACT 38</th>
<th>TRACT 39</th>
<th>TRACT 40</th>
<th>(a) AVERAGE 3 TRACTS</th>
<th>(b) D.C. TOTAL</th>
<th>(a – b) DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADAMS MORGAN &amp; D.C.</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>7.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
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<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>4.2</td>
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<td>9.6</td>
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<td>1973</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>6.4</td>
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<td>9.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
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<td>1975</td>
<td>7.4</td>
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<td>8.0</td>
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<td>48,600</td>
<td>53,392</td>
<td>61,111</td>
<td>95,115</td>
<td>123,096</td>
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<td>42,937</td>
<td>57,532</td>
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<td>82,166</td>
<td>84,721</td>
<td>133,278</td>
<td>170,788</td>
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</table>

Adams Morgan
Total (3 Tracts) | 27,116 | 28,676 | 35,252 | 34,512 | 46,118 | 53,444 | 56,807 | 63,249 | 98,294 | 123,362 |

D.C. | 26,025 | 29,380 | 32,591 | 36,660 | 40,246 | 46,262 | 52,439 | 60,713 | 72,372 | 92,298 |

Ratio Adams Morgan to D.C. | 1.04 | 0.98 | 1.08 | 0.94 | 1.15 | 1.16 | 1.08 | 1.04 | 1.36 | 1.34 |

Source: D.C. Department of Housing and Community Development, Municipal Automated Geographic Information System.

Condominium Conversions One of the more visible and controversial concomitants of neighborhood gentrification has been the conversion of rental units into condominiums or cooperatives. Condominium conversion is a product of the 1970s. Very few conversions took place in this country before 1970 and the rate of conversions accelerated steadily throughout the decade. Between 1970 and 1975 about 86,000 units were converted nationwide, an average of about 14,300 units per year. Between 1976 and the third quarter of 1979 another 260,730 units were converted, an average of 69,500 units per year. This trend has been fed in part by the increase in total households generated by the maturation of the baby boom generation. It is fed also by a national shift toward home ownership: a shift that rests on changing values, perceived status of ownership, tax incentives, and the use of housing as a hedge against inflation.

Most condominium conversions have taken place in large metropolitan areas; seventy-six percent of all conversions occurred in the thirty-seven largest SMSAs and fifty-nine percent took place in just the twelve "hottest" areas. But conversions are not exclusively found in conjunction with gentrification. The Department of Housing and Urban Development’s massive study of the conversion phenomenon stresses that almost half of all conversions (49.3%) have taken place in the suburbs, and that most central city conversions have occurred in neighborhoods that have never deteriorated significantly and thus cannot be considered to be revitalizing now. There is substantial evidence, however, that conversions may be increasingly concentrated in central cities and revitalizing areas. In the last year for which statistics are available over 62% of conversions took place in central cities, and field reports from several cities indicate that, as the supply of suitable high rent buildings is depleted, developers have begun to shift their attention to low rent properties in lower income neighborhoods as targets for their conversion plans.

Condominium conversion is particularly extreme in Washington. The D.C. metropolitan area ranked second only to Chicago in the total number of conversions during the 1970s. The District itself lost 3.3% of its rental stock due to conversions during the first six years of the decade; in the next 2½ years another 3.6% was lost.
Not all those who live in converted buildings are forced to move and not all those who are forced to move find the process to be traumatic or costly. For some of those displaced by condominium conversion, however, the result can be anger, frustration, a deterioration of living conditions, and an increase in housing costs. Nonwhites, the elderly, and the poor were more likely to report difficulty in finding replacement housing and were generally less satisfied with their replacement housing than younger, wealthier, white families that moved because of conversion.12

Table 3-6 reports the number of rental units for which certificates of eligibility for conversion were issued to property owners in Adams Morgan and the District. D.C. law requires owners who wish to convert their buildings to receive such certification at an early stage in their conversion plans. Because the receipt of such a certificate increases the potential value of a rental property, some landlords seek and receive such certificates even when they have no specific plans for immediate conversion. According to a report by the D.C. Rental Accommodations Office: “Although the issuance of a certificate does not indicate the number of units that will be converted during any particular time period, the certificates are an indicator of the rental housing industry’s response to market forces.”13 Thus we could expect the rates of certification to be higher in a gentrifying neighborhood such as Adams Morgan and that fluctuations in the issuance of certificates might correspond in rough measure to the extent of gentrification over time. Although changes in the law regarding the certification requirement make direct comparison of pre- and post-1976 figures problematic, the data in Table 3-6 are consistent with the findings that conversion activity is higher in Adams Morgan than elsewhere in the District and that conversion accelerated at about the same time as did turnover and sales price of single family homes. Adams Morgan, in 1970, contained 4.4% of the District’s rental housing; yet it accounted for 11.7% of the certificate for conversion issued between 1974 and 1978.

Notices to Vacate Information on the extent of displacement due to gentrification is extremely difficult to obtain. It is expensive and generally frustrating to attempt to track down those who have been so displaced (see Chapter One). The Annual Housing Survey conducted by the Census Bureau does ask recent movers why they changed residences, but the formulation of that question has drawn criticism from those who charge that the AHS underestimates the extent of gentrification-induced displacement that is taking place.14 The AHS, in any event, does not tell us about displacement at the neighborhood level; no fully satisfying measure of that exists.

| Table 3-6 |
| CERTIFICATES FOR ELIGIBILITY FOR CONVERSION IN ADAMS MORGAN AND D.C., 1974-1978 |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Tract 39 | 0    | 0    | 14   | 199  | 0    | 405   |
| Tract 40 | 76   | 10   | 205  | 211  | 502  |
| Adams Morgan | 76   | 24   | 404  | 648  | 1,152 |
| D.C.    | 613  | 776  | 1,083 | 2,323 | 5,045 | 9,840 |
| Percent of D.C. | 12.4% | 0% | 2.2% | 17.4% | 12.8% | 11.7% |

Source: D.C. Rental Accommodations Office, “Dislocation in the District of Columbia: A Preliminary Study” (internal document), Appendix A.
D.C. law requires that notices to vacate be sent to the Rental Accommodations Office for all evictions other than those due to nonpayment of rent. These notices must be sent if the tenant is evicted for the purpose of demolition, rehabilitation, or other reasons associated with a landlord's investment decisions or disposal of property. They provide, therefore, a potential indicator of gentrification-induced displacement, though one fraught with problems of interpretation. Demolition, for example, might be due to deterioration of the structure and neighborhood, conditions opposite from those associated with gentrification.

Table 3-7 shows the number of notices to vacate issued in Adams Morgan from 1974 through 1978. Eviction shot up rather dramatically in tract #40 in 1975 and tract #39 in 1976. Evictions have been lower in tract #38, and they did not peak in that section of the neighborhood until 1977. This timing seems consistent with the pattern we expect; our earlier analyses have shown us that revitalization came to the three tracts in that same sequence. It is more difficult to interpret the subsequent decline in evictions in 1977 and 1978. Perhaps evictions typically peak in the early stages of gentrification and then stabilize or fall off. In light of the ambiguity in the measure itself, however, we ought not strain too hard to make sense of the pattern revealed. The internal R.A.O. report concluded after looking at patterns of eviction across all neighborhoods that "data on evictions did not correlate with market activity associated with dislocation; rather evictions were indicators of the location of low income households."15

* * *

Neighborhood gentrification is the result of an accumulation of private market decisions. It is not formally announced, as was public sector urban renewal; neither its beginning nor its boundaries are unambiguously defined. As a result, neighborhood gentrification is an elusive phenomenon, difficult to pin down by means of interviews with residents or the analysis of available statistical sources. Because of these factors, we have not, in this chapter, offered rigid and precise answers to the questions of when, where, and how gentrification has proceeded in Adams Morgan. The nature of the phenomenon resists such facile claims. The weight of the evidence, however, does support the claim that Adams Morgan is undergoing change of the sort associated with gentrification, and that this change has accelerated during recent years. We now move on to our central question: What have been the impacts of this change on the political and commercial life of the neighborhood?

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<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>223</td>
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<td>D.C.</td>
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<td>1,361</td>
<td>1,847</td>
<td>5,226</td>
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<td>Percent of D.C.</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: D.C. Rental Accommodations Office, "Dislocation in the District of Columbia: A Preliminary Study," (internal document), Appendix A.
Notes

4Malakoff, p. 71.
5Malakoff, p. 61.
9*Conversion of Rental Housing*, p. ii.
10*Conversion of Rental Housing*, p. VII–20, footnote.
11*Conversion of Rental Housing*, Appendix 1, Table IV-1.
12*Conversion of Rental Housing*, Appendix 1, Tables IX-5, IX-8, IX-10, IX-16.
13D.C. Rental Accommodations Office, “Dislocation in the District of Columbia: A Preliminary Study,” (internal report)
15D.C. Rental Accommodations Office, “Dislocation.”
Chapter Four

Community Organizations

Community organizations both express and shape the character of a neighborhood. As a neighborhood's population changes due to gentrification, its organizations ought to change accordingly.

Socioeconomic class has been found consistently to correlate with levels of political participation. Based on this fact alone, one would predict that political activity in a gentrifying neighborhood would increase. This increased activity might be channelled into preexisting organizations or it might be reflected in an increase in the number of neighborhood-based groups. Clay found that "organizations emerged quickly as gentrification took off" in many of the fifty-seven gentrifying neighborhoods he investigated.

Relatively little has been written about community organizations in gentrifying areas. What has been written presents a scenario that is straightforward, dramatic, and intuitively believable. Demographic change sparks political change. "Newcomers" are pitted against "old-timers." Newcomers have their own notion of what a neighborhood should aspire to: preservation of architectural heritage, genteel environment, safe streets, urbane lifestyle, appreciation of property values. Old-timers want affordable housing, preservation of ethnic and familial customs, a moderation of change. While there are mutually shared goals, the tensions are inherent. Differences are exacerbated by the racial, class, and cultural cleavages that often coincide with that between new and old. The predicted result is that newcomers will seek to take over, replace, and by-pass or undermine existing community organizations.

We discovered in Adams Morgan something more subtle and complex. There has been a fragmentation of organizational activity in the neighborhood. Entering the period of gentrification most energy and enthusiasm was funnelled into one organization—the Adams Morgan Organization (AMO). AMO today has lost some of its vigor and centrality. Originally the focal point for grassroots tenants' advocacy, the group has mellowed. It continues to align itself with anti-displacement efforts, but does so with greater readiness to accept and work with the forces of change. Residents and businessmen more sympathetic to accelerated redevelopment tried, but seemingly failed, to capture AMO's reins. Blocked there, they have found other channels. Rather than organizational revolution, however, there has been realignment. While there is some evidence that new organizations may be emerging in order to represent the specific interests of the "gentry," the issues and interests expected of an incoming professional class have found their clearest expression not through new organizations but through the reconstitution of long-standing ones. While there are tensions between those who favor development and those who seek to slow it in the name of tenants' rights, the battle lines do not sharply coalesce along black versus white or old versus new. Some of the more substantial changes in the neighborhood's organizational dynamics, moreover, may be attributable to factors other than gentrification.
This chapter considers three aspects of community organizational activity in Adams Morgan in order to assess changes that have taken place since the onset of gentrification and to determine whether those changes are due to gentrification. The three dimensions are: the level of activity, the substance of expressed demands, and political tactics or style. In order to interpret how gentrification may have changed community organizations in Adams Morgan, it is necessary to see matters in historical perspective.

Old Organizational Patterns

During the middle 1970s Adams Morgan gained a reputation as a highly politicized and active community. David Morris and Karl Hess, in their book Neighborhood Power, refer to Adams Morgan as "one of the most developed communities in the country," in terms of the political and economic self-sufficiency that they advocated. This reputation, which extended beyond the D.C. area, was due largely to the dramatic activities of one organization—the Adams Morgan Organization—which began to coalesce in 1972 and elected its first executive council during the summer of 1973.

The area, to be sure, had older civic and citizens organizations. However, not until 1958, when the neighborhood began to push for a community initiated urban renewal plan, does a particular orientation toward collective action and neighborhood control become apparent. Even then it would be misleading to suggest that Adams Morgan was a well-organized community.

This section introduces four of the most substantial organizations that existed prior to the onset of gentrification and continue to exist today. The fact that other organizations are not discussed in this monograph is due only to the fact that their relationship to the gentrification issue is peripheral. The three oldest organizations in Adams Morgan themselves have had erratic histories. This pattern, in which changing conditions stimulate the reemergence of dormant groups rather than the formation of new organizations, has not been generally commented on and yet is central to understanding the continuity-in-change that characterizes neighborhood life.

The Kalorama Citizens Association is the oldest community organization in Adams Morgan, tracing its origins to 1919. During its first thirty years the organization "concentrated on improvements in the physical environment (such as street maintenance, utility regulation, the adequacy of municipal services, school problems) and on fighting for proper zoning and the zoning out of businesses which might become neighborhood nuisances." During this period, the association became "a symbol of a community of permanent residents, united in outlook, fairly homogeneous in background, and concerned with the preservation of the community."

As the white and wealthier residents of Adams Morgan began to emigrate in the late 1940's, KCA's identity came to be more closely linked to the smaller, western portion of the neighborhood where its traditional constituency continued to hold on. From 1949 to 1952 the organization sought to regain its former scope and influence by cooperating with the all-black Midway Civic Association and by considering the possibility of opening its membership to blacks. This idea foundered in the face of a threat by the D.C. Federation of Citizens Associations to expel KCA if its racial restrictions were removed. This incident alienated some of the younger and more liberal members and opened a period of relative decline. From 1952 to 1957 "Membership declined and the participation of the remaining members declined. The association concerned itself with such relatively non-controversial, non-neighborhood activities as a 'save the streetcars' campaign, the status of educational television,' etc. Membership was largely composed of older people."
The period in which the urban renewal proposal was devised and debated marks a fourth stage in KCA’s history. Urban renewal was perceived by many in KCA’s constituency as a potential threat. They feared that designation as a renewal area would stain their neighborhood’s reputation, weaken property values, and deter the private restoration already beginning to take place. Stimulated by threat, the organization mobilized, but its revival was short-lived. KCA helped to create the atmosphere in which the renewal plan languished, but as the changes in the neighborhood continued, KCA, with its traditional image as a mouthpiece for a white, aging, propertied elite, was relegated to the periphery. The center of action, the dynamic element of Adams Morgan had, for the time being shifted elsewhere.

The rhythms of the history of the 18th and Columbia Road Business Association are similar to those of the KCA. Formed at about the same time, the business association entered a period of dormancy as the neighborhood began to decline. After ten years of hibernation, it too was sparked to life by the emerging issue of the urban renewal plan. The new leadership in the business community saw urban renewal as an opportunity to put the leverage of the public sector behind their efforts to improve the community and protect and enhance the value of their own properties. The organization was influential in shaping community support for urban renewal. Some felt the group was too influential, using its symbolic status as spokesperson for the business community to dominate and channel the terms of the debate. The business association’s claim to speak even for the entire business community was strained. “Even though it is a lively, vocal group . . . active participation in the Association is limited to a very small group and the Association lacks participation by leadership of major investors.” After the renewal issue died, the business association again fell into a period of inactivity, not to reemerge as a vital force until gentrification was well under way.

The Midway Civic Organization is the last of the major pre-gentrification organizations which were still functioning when the revitalization of Adams Morgan began. Midway was formed in 1939, at a time when community organizations in D.C. were rigidly segregated: blacks belonged to “civic” associations, whites to “citizen’s” associations. While formal segregation no longer exists, history and geography conspire to keep those traditional racial patterns relatively secure.

As with the last two organizations discussed, Midway’s period of greatest pre-gentrification activity occurred during the controversy surrounding the proposed public urban renewal plan. The group’s decision in 1960 to support urban renewal points to a persistent irony. It was clear that urban renewal would entail the displacement of many of the black families that Midway sought to represent. Yet renewal seemed to be the only way that the organization’s goals of better housing, sanitation, and improved neighborhood conditions could be met. Midway’s leadership sought to walk the sword’s edge: voting to support urban renewal on the conditions that mass demolition be avoided and that those displaced be relocated within Adams Morgan in suitable housing at appropriate rents. Public renewal never took place, but the privately implemented redevelopment of the 1970s again presented Midway with the prospect of neighborhood improvement linked with a displacement threat. The group’s response has not been much different from that of twenty years before.

The election of AMO’s first executive council in 1973 preceded gentrification as most residents and most objective measures date it. But there were a few signs that better educated and wealthier residents had made an appearance, and displacement was already an issue of concern to some.

AMO’s emergence, therefore, may coincide with the first stage of gentrification which, according to Phillip Clay, often “is well under way before it receives any public attention, although even at this early stage the grapevine is spreading the word.” The pioneers who constitute the first stage of gentrification differed in notable ways from those who followed. The pioneers were not drawn to the neighborhood by its investment potential; in the early stages the risks have seemed to
outweigh the potentials for financial gain. They were attracted to the neighborhood by the low cost of its housing and by the racial and ethnic heterogeneity that set it apart from other Washington neighborhoods. Often it seems that these pioneers are drawn from creative occupations (writers, artists, architects) and/or from the social and cultural fringe.

Among AMO's cadre of founders and early supporters, playing significant roles in the articulation of a philosophy and a political strategy, were white, highly educated, long term political activists. Although ideologically aligned with the low income minority residents against the bourgeois values and market dynamism that gentrification represents, they were themselves products of the middle class. These individuals were not old residents of Adams Morgan; some seem to have been drawn to Washington by the anti-war movement. At least a few had connections with the Institute for Policy Studies, a left-progressive think tank located at Dupont Circle. These middle class newcomers were not the sole source of ideas and energy that created AMO; a number of lower income and minority incumbents also played early and important roles. Without these forerunners of the gentry, however, AMO would have taken a different form, if it had emerged at all.

Early documents and minutes of the organization suggest that the intent was to form a multi-issue organization concerned with the broad range of problems that confronted what was still perceived as a low-income and deteriorating neighborhood. Standing committees, during the first year, included committees on Housing, Recreation, Environment, Education, Crime Prevention, Cable T.V., Health, and Cooperative Economics. But the press of events soon drew AMO toward a narrower focus on issues dealing with development, housing, and the displacement threat. One of the group's first major battles, taken on in mid-1973, involved a fight to block the construction of a gas station on a central neighborhood site. Other early activities included a drawn-out effort to prevent the eviction of twenty-six families on Seaton Street, and efforts to force the city to purchase a large tract of land (in which developers were interested) for the purpose of erecting a community park. Each of these battles ended in at least partial victory, adding to AMO's developing reputation and more firmly linking the organization's identity to the redevelopment issue.8

AMO had a reputation for grassroots involvement and unconventional organizational tactics. Community assemblies, held to discuss issues and elect officers, consistently attracted a hundred or more residents from 1973 to 1976. The election for the organization's executive board in 1974 attracted 1,893 voters to nine voting places throughout the community, an incredible turnout for a non-governmental organization. AMO's early exploits were occasionally in the confrontationist mode popularized by Saul Alinsky. AMO members were reported, for instance, to have "vandalized billboards in the area that announce luxury condominiums and stormed city council meetings to present demands."9

In judging today's AMO against its younger days, it is important that we make certain that we are not measuring today's reality against yesterday's myths. Political scientists, such as Harry Brill, have warned that there is a tendency for community organizations in low-income areas to present a facade that is more imposing than the substance behind it.10 Articulate spokesmen may rattle sabres of rhetoric in order to mask the shallowness of their support. Local media may uncritically accept inflated estimates of membership and resources, since to do otherwise would be to undercut the "newsworthiness" of the group and its actions.

It is extremely difficult to devise reliable indicators of a neighborhood organization's true strength, and even more difficult to obtain such measures for a period in the past. One possible indication that the common portrayal of the early AMO may have been overblown is found in the records of attendance at early meetings of the executive council. The executive council presumably comprised its most active and committed members. Yet scattered minutes of those meetings reveal fairly disappointing turnouts:
Flurries of AMO activity may have created a greater impression of achievement than was warranted. In 1975, for instance, considerable energy was invested in a car raffle, intended to raise much-needed funds. Tickets were printed and sold. The treasurer’s report lists an impressive $2,548 in income as a result. Yet the episode was actually a losing proposition, at least as far as the objective of raising revenue is concerned. Once the cost of the car, a payment to the car dealer, and the expense of printing the tickets are taken into account, AMO actually lost $20!

Entering the period of gentrification, AMO was the dominant channel for collective expression of neighborhood interests and demands. Not everyone was happy about this; some property owners clearly felt that their concerns were not given the attention they deserved. But AMO’s central role as spokesman for the neighborhood was recognized inside and outside Adams Morgan. This provided a clarity and orderliness to intraneighborhood conflict resolution and an appearance of solidarity that probably increased the neighborhood’s credibility and clout at the city level. The centrality of AMO as a focal point for participation probably enabled the neighborhood to mobilize so many residents for meetings, elections, and demonstrations when they occurred. With gentrification, however, has come a diffusion of activity along a broader range of groups, some old, some new. While it is difficult to assess the consequences with certainty, it seems that this diffusion has brought with it a lower overall level of community participation as well.

The decline in AMO is most apparent. A political scientist who spent eight weeks studying the organization during the summer of 1977 judged that AMO’s high point had been during the period from 1972–1975. After that, he concluded both the quality and quantity of participation declined. Fewer persons were attending community assemblies, and the turnout at the executive council election in the fall of 1977 was less than half that in the election two years before.11

My own observations, four years later, add to this image of an organization on the wane. It was Saturday, July 18, 1981. Twenty, maybe thirty, men and women were sitting in the park, talking, milling about, and waiting.

This was the Adams Morgan Organization’s community assembly, and the preannounced agenda suggested that, by this time, the introduction, the review of AMO’s history and the reading and approval of minutes and financial reports should have been complete. By noon the various reports were to have begun. Designated spokespersons from the Midway Civic Association, the Kalorama Citizens Association, the Ontario Lakers, the Office of Latino Affairs, the 18th and Columbia Road Businessmen’s Association, the Euclid/Ontario Road Civic Association, the Advisory Neighborhood Commission, and the Adams Morgan Community Development Corporation would be filling in their neighbors on their respective organizations’ activities, as would others, not pre-designated, from the Lanier Heights Civic Association and the Council of Hispanic Agencies. But, so far, there had just been waiting.

By 12:30 it was becoming clear that further waiting would do little good. A few more residents would probably straggle in, but the hope for a post-lunch inundation had been exposed as wishful thinking. It was the summer, and it was a beautiful, crisp day; past assemblies had been held indoors, usually in the fall, and may be these factors helped to explain why so few had turned out. The introduction, the history, and the reading of the minutes, for which one-half hour had been allocated were accomplished in less than half that time. The designated speakers were called on. A few were present. Most, those from the larger more substantial organizations, were not. Ed Jackson, the chairperson and the master of the ceremony, kept his good humor and enthusiasm. "Is Gladys Scott Roberts from the Midway Civic Association here? No? Then how about Larry Karr, from the Kalorama Citizens
Association? Well, maybe he'll be here a little later. So, let's hear from Mr. George Frain, from the 18th and Columbia Road Businessmen's Association.” A few of the organization's earlier activists came by. Some, it seemed, merely out of a sense of loyalty. Some because they were running for city-wide office.

It would be unfair and probably inaccurate to judge the viability of AMO on the basis of that single day or to compare it unthinkingly to the earlier assemblies at which hundreds of residents took part. It is in the overall context of decline that the 1981 meeting takes on significance. Organizations like AMO must husband their resources and their credibility. A thriving organization can shrug off a poorly attended meeting. This is more difficult for a group whose reputation has already begun to erode.

As the other side of this story, both KCA and the 18th and Columbia Road Business Association have become more visible as the star of AMO has begun to fade. In 1960, the impression was that KCA had failed to “keep up with the times.” KCA, though still not a strong force in the neighborhood, has reemerged as a meaningful representative of community sentiment. This reemergence cannot be traced to any substantial change in the group's philosophy or composition. Those remained relatively consistent while the times changed in such a way as to bring the mainstream of neighborhood sentiment closer to that which KCA represents.

Change in the Kalorama section of Adams Morgan has meant one generation replacing another rather than an upper class replacing a lower one. The area has begun to change from elderly white professionals to young white professionals, still middle- or upper-middle class. This is the constituency that KCA most directly serves. A recent president of the organization characterizes KCA's membership as middle-class, highly educated, predominantly white Anglo-saxon and Protestant, with less than ten percent minority members. The generational changes in the neighborhood are only gradually being replicated within the active membership which continues to consist disproportionately of elderly white women. Significantly, however, the infiltration of youth has been from the top down. The last three presidents have been young males. While hardly newcomers—each having lived in the neighborhood about ten years—their roots are not so deep as to reach the experience of a genteel neighborhood threatened by deterioration and decline.

These younger leaders have staked out a more active and aggressive role for KCA. Similar efforts to broaden KCA's links with the surrounding community thirty years before had been aborted; now that theme has been revived. Until recently, KCA saw itself as having little in common with the eastern portion of the neighborhood. This was due in part to the class differences, in part to the radical and class-conflict oriented rhetoric employed by some activists seeking to forge a political base among the neighborhood's minorities and poor. The riots in the late 1960s also contributed to a defensive attitude within the KCA. Now that has all changed; similarities in interests and style outweigh many of the differences that remain. The current president also serves on the AMO executive board, continuing this anti-isolationist trend.

The business association, like KCA, reemerged from a sustained period of inactivity around 1977, just after several of our objective indicators of revitalization suggest that gentrification was at its peak. Like the KCA, the 18th and Columbia Road Business Association provided a ready-made channel through which those anxious to promote private reinvestment could find voice. Like the KCA, it has accommodated relative newcomers while retaining its links with the past. The first president of the revived organization had lived in Adams Morgan for several years before opening her business there. Her store, Plants Etc., offers the type of merchandise and the clever name that others have suggested are typical of gentrifying areas. Joseph Laskin, the current president, has been in business in the neighborhood since well before its initial decline. George Frain, secretary for the association, has lived in Adams Morgan for thirty years and has been an officer of the association since 1966.

While the demographic shifts in the neighborhood have refurbished the tradi-
tional constituencies of KCA and the business association, Midway Civic Association has suffered a slow erosion. The organization survives in the venerable person of its long-time president, a woman who has lived in the area since 1912. The group’s primary constituency—black, middle class—has been shrinking. Displacement has been somewhat responsible, but possibly more important is the aging-in-place of these stable black families. When they die or become unable to manage independently, the younger cohort that replaces them has different roots, less traditional or conservative values, and sometimes a different color skin. The group has about 125 people on the membership rolls, many of them from outside Adams Morgan. According to the president “not over 50” show up at the monthly meetings; often it’s “as low as 20.”

New Organizational Patterns

Two new types of groups in Adams Morgan can be readily attributed to the impacts of gentrification, although they represent distinct constituencies. Block clubs are not generically new to Adams Morgan, but there is evidence that a new set of block clubs is evolving which reflect the specific interests of the incoming gentry. There is also new group formation among tenants threatened with displacement. Fed in part by D.C. regulations that favor tenant purchases of their own buildings, numerous tenant organizations have emerged, drawing on the constituency and energies that previously found expression through AMO.

Block clubs have been a part of the Adams Morgan experience for more than twenty years. When organizers for the Adams Morgan Demonstration Project (see Chapter Two) arrived in the neighborhood in 1958, they found three functioning black clubs: the YOU Street Block Council, a predominantly black organization in the southeastern corner of the neighborhood; and the Biltmore Improvement Group and Mintwood Place Improvement League, both in the whiter and more economically diverse northwest. Efforts to stimulate fifteen new block organizations were generally frustrating: “in spite of great efforts on the part of the project staff, only six of the fifteen groups organized can be considered as soundly functioning organizations which might continue on their own.”

There are signs of a recent resurgence of block club activity. In some cases new block clubs are being formed. In at least one case a new block club and an old block club are competing for supremacy on the same block. While much of this activity is in areas formerly considered to be black and poor, the recent stirrings have come from middle-income and predominantly white newcomers.

Two related factors have combined to stimulate an increase in the rate of formation of tenant associations in D.C. in general and in Adams Morgan in particular. The pressures of gentrification, especially as manifested in the movement to convert rental buildings into condominiums, created in the late 1970s a threat to many D.C. residents. While tenants can almost always benefit from collective unity, it is rare that associations are formed without the presence of such an impending threat. Added to this stimulus was one of legislative origin. The D.C. Rental Housing Act of 1977 provides D.C. tenants with the right of first refusal to purchase their building if the owner announces the intention to sell. In order to take advantage of this provision, tenants must be incorporated or otherwise legally empowered to hold property, and they must have notified the owner of their intent to purchase the property when or if put on the market. Tenants who anticipate the possibility that their landlord may wish to sell have a greater incentive to organize than might otherwise be the case. This is true even if the tenants do not end up buying the building themselves. The simple fact of having incorporated can provide tenants with considerable leverage in dealing with landlords and potential developers. This leverage may be used to obtain sizeable relocation payments or discounts on the purchase of individual units.
Our project interviewed ten tenant representatives from five tenant-owned cooperatives, three tenant associations, and one political action council representing tenants throughout Ward One. The interviewees were randomly selected from a list of tenant associations compiled by the Advisory Neighborhood Commission. Since that list may not have been comprehensive, we are not in a position to claim that the sample is a representative one. The results are suggestive nonetheless. All but one of the organizations were formally constituted in 1978 or 1979. The exception, the 2100 19th Street Cooperative, is over thirty years old. Thus these tenant organizations representing moderate and low income renters, like the block organizations that represent wealthier, homeowning newcomers, seem to be direct offspring of the gentrification era.

It is important to mention one other new group whose formation is clearly attributable to factors external to the neighborhood and whose existence cannot be tied directly to gentrification. On May 5, 1974 voters in the District of Columbia approved a referendum establishing thirty-five Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) throughout the city. ANC are empowered to advise D.C. officials on planning, streets, recreation, social services, education, safety, health, grant applications, comprehensive plans, zoning changes, public improvements, licenses, permits, changes in service delivery, the city budget, and the opening of facilities that affect the ANC area. ANC recommendations for public action are to be “given great weight” by city officials; proposals to officials must be acknowledged and responded to within specified time limits. ANC are provided a small budget from city revenues, but they are restricted from soliciting other federal, local government, or private funds.

If there is any one group that seems to be inheriting AMO’s mantle, it is the local ANC. While participation in AMO has been sliding, turnout in the elections for ANC membership has increased: up 67 percent between 1976 and 1977, holding steady from 1977–1979, and increasing another 60 percent in 1981. The ANC seems to be drawing attention and involvement from residents who previously centered their attention on MO. The first ANC election, in February 1976, was dominated by candidates with an AMO connection. Of the ten members elected, eight served on the 1975-1976 AMO council, and in one of the other two single member districts an AMO officer lost by only twelve votes. Of that eight, three ran again in 1979, but by that time two of them had relinquished their AMO posts. While it looked at first as if the ANC might become simply an adjunct or even subsidiary of AMO, the momentum has shifted to the younger organization which has begun to develop a leadership core and identity of its own. Although gentrification certainly did not cause the establishment of the ANC, the shape of this developing leadership and identity owes something to the context of gentrification into which the organization was introduced.

If we survey the organizational scene at this point, it is evident that gentrification in Adams Morgan has been associated with an apparent decentralization and proliferation of the community organization network. But more organizations do not necessarily translate into more participation by Adams Morgan residents. The proliferation of organization may leave each a little weaker, each with a more attenuated claim to legitimacy as the neighborhood voice.

Estimates of active membership among community organizations are notoriously imprecise, and the apparently high degree of overlapping and multiple memberships among Adams Morgan organizations make it even more improbable that we could accurately gauge changes in the aggregate level of participation over time. There is some evidence, however, that participation may have been diluted as it has been spread over more organizational channels. While KCA and the business association have become more active, their is an elite-dominated activity, reflecting the actions of a small leadership core.

Interviews with business operators in the neighborhood suggest that most know of the 18th and Columbia Road Business Association, but the charge levelled
against the group during the early 1960s, that active participation was limited to a very small group, seems to hold today. About half of the neighborhood businesses do not belong to the association. There are approximately sixty-five paid up members and, according to the group’s treasurer, a “lot of free-loaders.” Most business people seem content to grant two or three recognized leaders a broad proxy, with a few of the new business owners indicating an intent to get more involved sometime soon.

Only the most recent (November 1981) ANC elections show signs of the breadth of community participation that marked AMO in its very early stage. The 1,780 voters in the twelve single-member districts nearly matches the 1974 turnout for AMO’s first elected board. Table 4–1 shows the turnout in ANC elections at the single member district (SMD) level. Each SMD elects one member to the Advisory Neighborhood Commission that represents the neighborhood. As the map reveals, the sharpest increases in participation have been in the eastern section of the neighborhood which comprises the areas that have undergone the most housing and demographic change. One possible explanation would ascribe this increased participation to the involvement of the wealthier newcomers. If correct, this explanation would suggest that with continued gentrification we could expect participation in ANC elections to continue to climb. An alternative explanation, with quite different implications, is also available. That explanation suggests that the higher level of turnout in these rapidly changing sections of the neighborhood is a result not of the simple class characteristics of the newcomers, but of the interaction between the newcomers and the incumbents and the tension and competition such interaction brings about. This explanation, if correct, suggests that the recent high turnout may be more ephemeral, an outgrowth of a temporary state of transition. As the newcomers secure new beachheads, participation in organizational activity and ANC elections may subside.

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*Change 1977–1981
Source: Compiled from files of the D.C. Board of Elections and Ethics.
ADAMS MORGAN ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION

SINGLE MEMBER DISTRICTS (SMDs)
Issues: Constancy Amidst Change

Our research group came into Adams Morgan expecting to find that with gentrification had come a sharp polarization of newcomers and incumbents. We anticipated that newcomers would have less concern for issues of public education and parks. We expected them to be more responsive to appeals for historic preservation and zoning and traffic regulations to reduce congestion, commercialism, demolition and large-scale development. We expected these same newcomers to resist facilities believed to depress property values (such as community mental health facilities, drug abuse clinics, transient hotels) and to demand projects and services that augment values (such as landscaping of public places, brick sidewalks, new streetlights).

Deborah Auger found sharp evidence of polarization and conflict in her study of the politics of revitalization of a gentrifying area in Boston. "The influx of the middle class 'gentry' led the neighborhood populace to be divided not only demographically, but philosophically as well. The gentrification process was marked by the proliferation of opposing interest groups and by deepening division among their nonmobilized constituencies." Philip Clay found reports of "significant conflict between new residents or their organizations and incumbents or their organizations" in one-third of the gentrifying neighborhoods he studied.

While we did find evidence of this so-called "agenda of the gentry," these issues and concerns were not put forward exclusively or even predominantly by newcomers to Adams Morgan. In fact they were issues that had been contended in the neighborhood since well before gentrification began. While we found signs of conflict, we did not find the kind of escalating polarization that Auger reports.

The resurgence of block clubs in the southern sections of Adams Morgan captures more sharply than anything else we discovered the clash of cultures and values that Auger and Clay and others suggest will divide the new resident from the old. In one case, newer residents are trying to start a block club even though a block club of older residents still exists.

At another newly formed block club, discussion ranged over a series of issues that mirrored almost to the point of caricature the agenda of the gentry that we had been led to expect. The meeting was held in a townhouse on the 1700 block of S Street, on February 26, 1981, at 8 p.m. The owners—young, white professionals—were still in the process of renovating. There was plenty of unfinished wood, exposed brick, folk art. An interactive computer terminal sat on the dining room table. Eleven or twelve people attended; some leaving early, some coming late. One person was black. There was some discussion of the disappointing turnout. On Willis Street, someone noted, thirty or forty people show up for block meetings. Perhaps, someone else ventured, that's because eighty percent of the people there are newcomers (more than on S Street). The first issue discussed dealt with the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating the block club. Incorporation will cost money, somebody noted. But, someone else piped up, "There's probably a lawyer on the block." And another added, "At least one." Many of the issues discussed at this meeting were those commonly associated with gentrification. Downzoning and historic district status were considered. Literature on crime prevention was passed out, and the possibility of establishing a block-wide crime watch program debated. They did not like people parking on their street who do not live there; they decided to try to encourage the police to do more ticketing. One man suggested closing the block; they could have parking at the ends, with a park in the middle. Perhaps a traffic light was needed; speed bumps would slow traffic, a concern for several whose children would soon be old enough to play outside alone. There was concern about rats, and about people leaving trash out on the street.

One Adams Morgan activist speaks disparagingly of newcomers such as these. They are "more worried about the dog shit on their front walk" than about the
issues he deals with on the ANC. He was not just speaking metaphorically. The 1700 S Street group did indeed address that issue. It was noted that Willis Street requires dogs to be curbed. Agreement was reached to discuss ways to handle the problem at the next meeting.

It is possible that through block organizations newer residents are finding a vehicle that allows them to address their specific interests without engaging them in the conflicts and interclass tensions that involvement in AMO, or even the ANC, might entail. The inability of these newcomers to ally more closely with old-timers is sometimes intertwined with other, cultural and stylistic, differences. On T Street, new residents want to start their own block club, even though a block club consisting of older residents still exists. The newer residents complain that the members of the old block club only want to talk about who has had to move and who has died. They claim that the older residents have come to accept as inevitable the loitering, dirtiness, and littering that the new guard wants to combat. It is possible that, in time, these new block clubs will discover that the problems they face are more than block-wide in scope, and that they will need to speak with a louder voice if their opinions are to carry political weight at the mayor’s office or city council. If this happens, these groups may turn to AMO or the ANC, providing an infusion of energy and expertise that these neighborhood-wide organizations need. At the same time, the block clubs could serve as a springboard for a broader takeover attempt by the newcomers, who have not yet demonstrated the organization or number necessary to displace the neighborhood leadership cadre that antedated their arrival.

In any event, these new block groups are dealing with many of the same issues that have long concerned Adams Morgan’s oldest community organization, the Kalorama Citizens Association. The specific issues that have occupied KCA and the vitality with which the group could pursue them have ebbed and flowed over the years, but the values represented have been consistent: protection of the neighborhood from sudden change, preference for private restoration rather than public renewal, encouragement of single-family over multi-family housing, distaste for speculators and nonresident investors, a general preference for a manageable, low density, small-scale environment. In seeking to broaden its linkages with the rest of the community, KCA’s newer leaders have not severed the organization’s roots with these traditional concerns. KCA recently opposed the opening of a fast food restaurant, fought for height limitations in the commercial area, and is seeking to rezone an area in which industrial uses are currently permitted. KCA has sponsored a crime awareness meeting and begun to focus on the issue of historic preservation.

KCA’s relationship with the business association continues to reflect longstanding common interests as well as traditional tensions. Like the KCA homeowners, the revived business association maintains its commitment to improving the aesthetic impression of the neighborhood. In both groups this tends to include notions of reducing litter and litterers—the latter conceived as being concentrated among the vagrants and unemployed youth who hover on streetcorners in the commercial strip. There continues to be tension regarding issues of growth and the expansion of the commercial area, but the tension has eased since the two organizations squared off over urban renewal twenty years ago. Today’s generation of business leaders in Adams Morgan still favors growth, but they have adopted a wariness of large scale development, and a sensitivity to the fact that massive reinvestment might overwhelm them. The business association joined with AMO and the ANC to oppose the expansion of the Washington Hilton, for example. The group also resisted a city proposal to establish part of the commercial areas as a “Latin Quarter” to stimulate tourism and investment through exploitation of the neighborhood’s ethnic character.

It would be overly simplistic to suggest that the Midway Civic Association is simply KCA’s black counterpart since its roots in a different racial and class constituency led it to active concern with social issues—unemployment, alcoholism, family
breakdown. On some issues, such as public urban renewal, Midway and KCA squared off on opposite sides of the fence.

Nonetheless, Midway and KCA pursued through their separate histories essentially parallel concerns. Like KCA, Midway often focused on the aesthetic appearance of the neighborhood. The president notes as a goal of the organization, "We like pretty yards and nice homes looking nice." At one time the association awarded prizes for the best kept lawns. Because of these concerns Midway and KCA shared a common enemy as well: speculators and absentee landlords. Midway joined with other groups a few years ago to fight a halfway house that would have been located next to an historic house. There is a potential tension between the group's goals and its constituency. Ironically, given the nature of the housing market in D.C., success in "improving" the neighborhood may increase the threat of displacement for the black families which make up the organization and which, though not poor, do not have the resources to compete for housing with the wealthier professionals riding the gentrification wave. This is the same tension that confronted the group twenty years earlier, when it decided to favor public urban renewal. According to its president, however, the goals of the group have remained "more or less' the same. The organization's commitment to physical improvement and social upgrading binds it in terms of issues, if not political style, with the block clubs that are sprouting in its traditional turf.

The political counterpart to the block clubs would seem to be found in the tenant organizations mentioned earlier. Whereas the block clubs are concerned with beautification and preservation of structures, the tenants groups are concerned with rent control and the preservation of housing in which they can afford to remain. But it would be too simple to characterize the conflicting interests represented here as coalescing around new versus old or rich versus poor.

A fact which is sometimes obscured by rhetoric and preconception is that many of the tenants who seek protection from gentrification-induced displacement are themselves fairly recent arrivals to the neighborhood. Several tenant associations do include large numbers of elderly renters for whom Adams Morgan has long been considered home. But a second sizeable and highly visible group consists of Hispanics, many of whom have come to the neighborhood only with the last four or five years. Here, as elsewhere, we find evidence that the more significant cleavages in this gentrifying neighborhood coalesce less around new versus old than renter versus owner.

Nor are tenant associations constituted only of low-income and minority renters. In Adams Morgan, as elsewhere, condominium developers have been attracted first to buildings that are in a desirable location, architecturally attractive, well maintained, and needing only limited physical rehabilitation. Such buildings minimize the developer's investment and risk while maximizing marketability and profit. Thus, it is often the middle-class and lower-middle-income renters who first are threatened by displacement. Since such individuals are frequently more capable than truly poor tenants of effectively mobilizing to protect their interests, the tenant rights movement in gentrifying areas may take on a broader economic/class foundation than would have been expected.

But the nature of the pressures on them tends to push even these middle income tenants' associations toward a fairly radical political stance. To avoid displacement they must advocate strong public action to limit the private market forces that confront them. Because city officials often would prefer to overlook such demands the tenants must often adopt confrontationist tactics as well.

AMO was once the logical and natural spokesman for disaffected interests such as these. And, although it is not so central and effective as it may once have been, AMO remains oriented toward the interests of the neighborhood's lower income and tenant population. During 1980, for example, VISTA volunteers working on the Adams Morgan Organization Anti-Displacement Project sought to stimulate
tenant organization in at least fourteen building complexes, and the AMO sponsored eight workshops to inform tenants of various aspects of tenants' rights. Such activities were not uniformly successful. "Although the workshops were well publicized and featured knowledgeable speakers and good materials for people to carry away with them," an internal review notes, "they were not attended as well as we hoped for." But neither can their efforts be lightly dismissed.

AMO's relationship to some of the neighborhood's more vocal and aggressive tenant activists seems to have soured. According to one tenant activist—who counts herself among the original founders of AMO—the "downfall" of AMO was due to increasing bureaucratization. Too many by-laws that were too technical and inflexible, she feels, stifled the impulses that once gave the organization life. Some members of the Beverly Courts Cooperative feel betrayed by AMO's leaders; some of whom, they feel, actively resisted their own efforts to buy their building. One active member of that tenants' association believes that AMO is ineffective as an advocate for the poor. The old AMO, she indicates, had "everyone" in it. Now the activists seem to be young, white professionals, and the rest of the community feels left out. It is not so much AMO's concerns and positions that have changed, this seems to suggest, as it is the style with which they are pursued.

**Style: Pragmatism Wins Out**

Rather than injecting new issues into a stable and consensual community agenda, gentrification in Adams Morgan has shifted the balance of power among forces competing across longstanding lines of division. Under certain conditions this shift could have been destabilizing, pushing neighborhood politics out of established patterns and into polarization and conflict. This seems to have been what Auger found in South Boston. In Adams Morgan, however, this centrifugal pressure appears to have been limited by the emergence of a new and more pragmatic political style.

The demographic changes in Adams Morgan shaped a new context, one more amenable to a bargaining style than a protest style. While we can envision a scenario in which a radical and confrontation-oriented clique within AMO would hold rigidly to its established tactics, even at the potential cost of isolating itself from the mainstream of change, this did not occur. Rather than resisting the currents of change, AMO began slowly to move with them.

The choice faced in the mid 1970s, as the forces of gentrification became increasingly apparent, was among three alternatives. AMO could take a firm and absolute stand against change and the private market forces that were bringing it about. Such a course would align AMO solidly behind the low-income black and Hispanic renters most immediately threatened by displacement. Such an "anti-gentrification" stand had natural advocates within the AMO leadership, especially among those young whites who had sought to shape AMO to a leftist, anti-corporate model, and among a handful of younger and more militant blacks.

A strikingly different course would have been to align AMO with the forces of change. Such a "pro-gentrification" stance attracted some commercial and residential property owners who saw private redevelopment as inevitable and ultimately desirable. This faction, it is important to note, did not consist only of newcomers; their pedigrees as members of the community was at least as well-established as those who opposed redevelopment. As property owners, many, in fact, antedated the era of the neighborhood's relative decline.

Somewhere between these positions lay a moderate faction, committed to balancing the twin goals of neighborhood improvement through public and private reinvestment and protection of the legal and moral rights of renters, minorities and the poor. This group was more willing than the anti-gentrificationists to accommodate itself to change. Its leaders were more pragmatic in their choice of issues. They
were willing to settle for that which was achievable. In their choice of styles they were more ready to work within the system.

The three factions that emerged in Adams Morgan parallel those that Auger found in South Boston. There, the moderates, who "retained strong faith in the ethos of cooperation and compromise" ultimately found their position untenable because "the intensity of splintered sentiments left little room for the compromises these moderates sought... in the end this group was forced to throw support to one of the two sides." In Adams Morgan the moderates won.

Two early incidents seem to mark a watershed in AMO's evolution, and to symbolize the relationship between the context of neighborhood gentrification and the reorientation of AMO's political style. In April 1974, a large sign was painted on the wall of an 18th Street building. "Beware Whitey," it read. "Blacks left Southwest, Georgetown and Capitol Hill. It's Your Turn Now Whitey!! Blacks Are Here to Stay." The sign, according to one account, was the work of a young black man, one of the first elected officers of the Adams Morgan Organization. It marked the intense frustration that the early stages of gentrification-induced displacement had sparked, and it indicated the direction of bitter resistance that some elements within AMO and the community were ready to endorse. Marie S. Nahikian, the executive director of AMO, later gave this account:

A lot of people got very upset about that sign. And maybe a lot people didn’t try to figure out what caused the sign to be painted.

But, I think a very special thing happened. About 100 people showed up at the next AMO Executive Council meeting... white women in mink coats, latinos, blacks, young and old. People were upset, emotional. Some said take the sign down! Others believed it should stay. As the discussion continued people cried and left the room... didn’t like to be called racist, didn’t like to be called militant, and some would have liked to see the whole meeting fall apart.

Tensions, previously latent, were brought into the open by the incident, and some residents previously passive seem to have been mobilized. One must be careful not to credit a single incident with too much, but about this time the constellation of influence within AMO began to shift. The more moderate position began to emerge, and its spokespersons ascended to positions of leadership.

The Perpetual issue provided the next indication of the direction that AMO was to take. In early 1976, Perpetual Federal Savings, the largest savings and loan institution in D.C., purchased a plot of land on the corner of 18th Street and Columbia Road with the intention of opening a neighborhood branch. Such an occurrence ordinarily would go unnoticed or meet with a mild welcome. Several factors conspired to bring about a different reaction in this case. The 18th and Columbia intersection is the major commercial area and the symbolic heart of the community. More important was the recent history of the site. Since mid-1973 AMO had been engaged in an off-and-on battle to block the opening of a gas station on that very plot. The battle had been won only the year before, and the effort had created an expectation on the part of some that the land ought to be developed with the specific interests of the community in mind. Moreover, AMO was interested in Perpetual itself. For the first several months of 1976, AMO had been preparing to apply to Perpetual for a loan to finance the purchase of the Seaton Street homes (see above).

Federal law requires that new branch openings by federally regulated savings and loans be approved by the Federal Home Loan Bank Board. Astute members of AMO recognized that these provisions might be exploited by the neighborhood to block or otherwise influence the Perpetual plans. During the spring and summer of 1976 AMO internally debated what, if any, action the organization should take. One faction favored opposing Perpetual at all costs. They felt that Perpetual was too clearly aligned with the forces of change that were threatening to displace low income and minority tenants. Loosely coalesced into a "Perpetual Research Group," they analyzed the institution's lending record and distributed flyers con-
denning the pattern of discriminatory lending that they perceived. Others, those earlier labelled as pro-gentrificationist in their orientation, considered Perpetual’s plan to be a potential boon to the business district and the neighborhood at large. Through spokespersons such as Larry Moyer, then president of the Kalorama Citizens Association, and Paul Tauber, owner of Columbia Station, a restaurant sometimes cited as being the forerunner of commercial gentrification in Adams Morgan, this faction sought to prevent AMO from challenging the branch application. Tauber, in a personal letter to the FHLBB, charged that the opposition to the branch consisted only of two or three individuals who were not representative of the community as a whole. Tauber labelled one Perpetual opponent—Frank Shaffer-Corona, who was later to become a controversial member of the D.C. school board—as “a tenant, a transient, and who is trying to ‘make a name.’” Tauber wrote, further, that: “The middle class property owners need this S&L. We cannot let a radical few dictate the future of the neighborhood.”

The centrist forces formed behind Frank Smith. This group favored utilizing whatever influence AMO could muster to obtain concessions from Perpetual. To rigidly oppose the S&L, they felt, would be to lock AMO into a position that ultimately was doomed to failure. Under certain conditions, moreover these residents felt that a locally responsive S&L might prove to be a desirable neighbor.

In September 1976, the three factions presented their alternative strategies at a public hearing and a referendum was held. The result reveals the divisions within the neighborhood: 161 persons voted for the new branch, 254 voted against, and 181 voted provisional acceptance “if AMO can work out agreements to safeguard the community’s interest.” The result was interpreted as a victory for the moderate faction—a mandate solidified by the election at the same meeting of one of the spokesmen of the moderate faction as AMO’s new chairperson. AMO went on to negotiate a unique agreement with Perpetual. A community board was established to oversee loan approvals and disapprovals made by the new branch, and Perpetual agreed to make funds available for financing cooperative and condominium projects including units for moderate and low income families. This success further added to the credibility of the moderate position and the bargaining tactics that had brought it about.

One former AMO officer, now on the ANC, sees this stylistic reorientation as being responsive to the tastes of the newcomers, and at least partially responsible for the eclipse of AMO and the ascendancy of the ANC. Often the newcomers do not want to “go out in the streets and shout and holler,” he indicates, suggesting that AMO is still inclined toward extreme actions of that kind. The shift in style can be subtle at times. During 1979 and 1980, AMO and the ANC were joined in opposition to plans by the Washington Hilton Hotel to expand into the surrounding residential community. A decision was made in deference to the sensitivities of the wealthier newcomers to refer to the demonstration as a “rally” or “demonstration” being presumed to be too suggestive of a radical style.

Conclusions

Gentrification is abroad in Adams Morgan, and the tensions it has introduced have yet to be resolved. The current configurations in the network of community organizations, therefore, are likely to prove unstable. Nonetheless, certain patterns and nascent trends have been identified. One such change, the shift toward a more pragmatic orientation, was discussed in some detail. While that discussion focussed on the specific case of the Adams Morgan Organization, it should be emphasized that this stylistic and strategic reorientation is discernible across a broader range of organizational activity within the neighborhood.

A second notable change involves the fragmentation and dispersal of power among community groups. As dormant groups stirred and began to reassert them-
selves, as the ANC began to function, and as new tenant and block organizations emerged, the ability of the neighborhood to speak with a single voice was impaired. The result is a heightened potential for exacerbation of what Douglas Yates refers to as “street-fighting pluralism.” By that he means “a political free-for-all, a pattern of unstructured, multilateral conflict in which many different combatants fight continuously with one another in a very great number of permutations and combinations.” A willingness to compromise has so far kept internal splits from erupting into such an anarchic fray in Adams Morgan. So, too, has the perception that there is a shared enemy in the large-scale, extra-neighborhood development interests.

The increasing pragmatism in Adams Morgan community politics appears to be a genuine trend that is likely to be long lasting. Newcomers to the neighborhood are allied with a personally conservative group of longterm homeowners. The natural constituency for a more radical politics is shrinking as the poorer tenants are displaced. Those most desperate in Adams Morgan are probably among the Hispanic community. While some of that community’s spokespersons are bitter, several factors have so far conspired to keep that bitterness from coalescing into a stable collective political force. The vulnerable legal status of some Hispanic immigrants, the diversity in national origin that divides the D.C. Hispanic community, and a learned or cultural hesitancy to challenge authority that some Central Americans carry with them from their own nations all contribute to this situation.

One important question remains. Are these changes properly attributable to gentrification, or might other forces be at work which would have brought them about anyway? Some of the increased signs of pragmatism in Adams Morgan community politics might have occurred even in the absence of gentrification. Political scientists have long noted a general tendency for organizations to bureaucratize and rigidify over time. Theodore J. Lowi refers to this as the “iron law of decadence” or “the tendency of all organizations to maintain themselves at the expense of needed change and innovation.” This suggests that some of the changes observed in AMO might be due to internal dynamics that have little to do with the context of neighborhood redevelopment.

It is also conceivable that citywide changes have encouraged a more pragmatic style of politics. With the implementation of home rule, D.C. community politics lost some of the flavor of “us against them.” Key decisions are being made today by locally elected officials, several of whom came up through the ranks of civil rights and community activism and had championed the rights of tenants and the poor in the past. Some of the impetus to confrontation was stilled.

The fragmentation that we have spoken of is more likely to prove to be a transitional state. New group formation is in part a response to heterogeneity and rapid change. Should gentrification continue, it carries within itself the seeds of a more stable and homogeneous neighborhood. There are indications that the ANC has begun to take on some of the functions and symbolic importance that AMO used to provide. The formal role of the ANC in D.C. decision-making, while less potent than advocates of neighborhood power would like, gives it a standing of first among equals. This is reflected in a movement by some of the other organizations to place their leaders, or other representatives, on the ANC. For the time being, the ANC continues to reflect the concerns and sensitivities of what one respondent referred to as the “old time liberals.” Most members have roots in pre-gentrification Adams Morgan, although there are some who, having lived in the neighborhood since 1975 or 1976, might be counted among the early gentrification pioneers. As the more recent in-movers become known and involved, their role in the ANC is likely to increase. It is possible that they, too, will bring a liberal orientation and a desire to maintain a racially and economically heterogenous neighborhood. But concerns about property values, safety, and aesthetics can be expected to link their interests, on many issues, with the longer term homeowners and commercial property owners who have pursued their political ends through the KCA and 18th and Columbia Business Association in the past. Should this be the case, the increased centrality
of the ANC would be coupled with an increased conservatism on issues related to the retention of housing for the neighborhood’s poor. The presence of the ANC as a vehicle for these interests is clearly not attributable to gentrification per se. In the absence of an Advisory Neighborhood Commission system, recentralization probably would have occurred anyway. In such a case, however, recentralization would have had to take a different form; perhaps in the revival of an increasingly gentrified and more conservative AMO, perhaps in the formation of a new coalition of KCA, the business organization, and the emerging block clubs.

Notes

5Democratic Action, p. 12.
6Democratic Action, p. 29.
7Clay, Neighborhood Renewal, p. 57.
15Clay, Neighborhood Renewal, P. 30.
16This account is based on the field notes of Ms. Linda Giannarelli who attended the meeting on Thursday, February 26.
17From draft report reviewing the activities of the Adams Morgan Organization Anti-Displacement Project, March 5, 1980, AMO files.
19Krasner, "The Political History of the Adams Morgan Organization.”
CHAPTER FIVE

The Commercial Sector

Gentrification is commonly thought of as a residential phenomenon. New people move in. Houses are painted and more extensively rehabilitated. Apartments are converted to condominiums. But these changes in population and housing have implications for neighborhood businesses as well. The in-migrants to a gentrifying neighborhood represent a new market: wealthier and with different values and economic demands than those whom they replace. What does this mean for the small businesses and commercial strips that serve the local community?

Relatively little has been written about the commercial sector in gentrifying neighborhoods, but from the scattered reports that do exist a fairly cohesive picture emerges. "In most cases," writes Peter Salins, "the gentrification of housing is accompanied by a collateral gentrification of local retail areas whereby seedy or marginal stores give way to an assortment of more stylish establishments: boutiques, plant stores, casual 'art galleries', restaurants, pubs, etc., all done up in a precious style of hip nostalgia." Conrad Weiler indicates that "corner stores, ethnic clubs, storefront churches are converted to antique stores or office crowd pubs." Paul Levy and Roman Cybriwsky, reporting on gentrification in Philadelphia's Queens Village and Fairmount neighborhoods, note an increase in "trendy boutiques, fashionable restaurants and night clubs. Queen Village now has 43 restaurants and bars that cater to affluent tastes, 22 of which opened between 1977 and the first half of 1979. Many of these new businesses have replaced the old 'ma and pa' stores and friendly corner taps."

In spite of this apparent consensus, rather little is known about the process of commercial change and its relationship to residential aspects of gentrification. Does commercial revitalization always follow residential gentrification? Do the more visible and dramatic changes—the new boutique, the closing of a favorite neighborhood haunt—distract attention from a basic stability in the retail sectors of gentrifying neighborhoods? How do different types of businesses respond to gentrification? What types are seriously hurt? Do some thrive? In this chapter we will explore the impact of gentrification on businesses in Adams Morgan in order to develop some tentative answers to these and related questions.

The Role of Small Businesses

The functions that small businesses can play in cementing neighborhood ties, establishing neighborhood identity, and undergirding neighborhood economic and social viability are not generally appreciated. There are various reasons why small business has been overlooked by those concerned with the quality of urban life. We can discern these most easily by considering two sets of urban analysts who would have seemed the most likely to give attention to the small business role: those concerned with issues of urban economic development, and those concerned with issues of neighborhood power.
While analysts of urban economic development have brought increased attention to the central role of business and economics in creating the conditions for a viable city, the group’s insights have served primarily to highlight the importance of large-scale business operations and to narrow geographic attention to the central business district core. Large-scale businesses, it is presumed, provide more jobs for residents, more tax dollars for the city, greater stability in the context of national economic fluctuations and technological changes, and more prestige and visibility that the city can exploit to attract even more businesses. Policy responses that have evolved out of this perspective include local efforts to accommodate the needs of larger firms through the use of eminent domain to acquire property for business expansion, through the use of revenue bonds to lower the costs to business of borrowing, through targeted capital investments in roads, sidewalks, bridges, and transportation designed to make location in the given city more convenient and more profitable. Some of these—uses of eminent domain in association with urban renewal provide a useful example—quite often came at the expense of the smaller and sometimes shabbier businesses that previously occupied the most desirable sites.

The second set of analysts provided some of the earliest and most fervent criticisms of this fascination with large-scale and centrally-located facilities which they regarded as direct threats to the values of “neighborhoodism” and decentralization. But ideology and personal experience kept many of the early advocates of neighborhood power from embracing the existing small business communities as allies in their counterattack. The neighborhood movement has often marched closely with the political left; many of the theorists of the neighborhood movement recoiled instinctively from the kind of Main Street capitalism that animates and structures much of the behavior of the neighborhood businessmen themselves. Neighborhood activists who had lived and been organizers in low-income and minority communities in many instances, too, adopted the perspective of those around them. That perspective was skeptical and mistrustful of small merchants who were believed to offer inferior goods at inflated prices. The result was a strong emphasis on establishing new, cooperative enterprises as alternatives to those oriented around profit maximization. This approach cast existing businesses as the enemy (and proved, by and large, economically and politically infeasible).

More recently, urbanists from many perspectives have come to a greater recognition of the positive functions that small businesses can provide to neighborhoods and to cities as a whole. Small businesses actually provide as many jobs as do large businesses. David Birch found that small firms—those with twenty or fewer employees—generate two-thirds of all net new private sector jobs, and an even higher percentage in older more urbanized areas in the Northeast.4

Just as significant as the quantity of jobs may be the type of jobs provided. Small businesses offer the kind of low-skill, part-time jobs that teenagers and working mothers in poor neighborhoods particularly need. And, in addition to jobs, small businesses offer convenience, a critically important commodity in low-income areas in which many residents do not own cars and a disproportionate number are relatively immobile elderly, handicapped, and ill.

There are social as well as economic functions that small businesses often provide. “In some neighborhoods,” writes Philip Schorr, “the taverns and restaurants function as local meeting places for groups of adults, the luncheonettes and candy stores cater to the teenagers, while the grocery stores or ‘bodegas’ extend credit till paydays.”5 Gerald Suttles, based on his study of a low-to-moderate income, ethnically diverse neighborhood on Chicago’s Near West Side, concluded that “most business establishments are not just a way of making a living but also of enjoying an enduring set of social relations where money is only one of the tokens that change hands.”6 These businesses, he found, provide an extensive communication network that may help to maintain the ethnic subgroups, preserving a cultural heritage—although sometimes at the cost of provincialism, insularity, and xenophobia. Small
businesses, moreover, especially those with unconventional hours of operation, can ensure the flow of people on the sidewalks and streets that increases feelings of security and may actually contribute to reduced risks of crime. Finally, in some instances, small businesses can perform the symbolic function of encapsulating a neighborhood's image. Outsiders often "know" a neighborhood by the stores and institutions that are its most visible face. Perceptions of neighborhood boundaries and identity are often oriented around business strips, making the commercial sector the center of the community in concept if not in geography.

A Model of Commercial Gentrification

We can sketch a rough model of the impact of gentrification on small businesses. Figure 5-1 summarizes such a model. Six factors are identified as concomitants of residential gentrification that are likely to affect small business. First is the change in the number of neighborhood residents. This is a change that is believed to be generally associated with gentrification; in Chapter 3 we established that the population has declined in Adams Morgan over the past decade. Fewer people mean, potentially, fewer customers—a possible threat, especially to enterprises that depend on high volume to make up for low prices and low profit margins (such as barber shops, drug stores, secondhand clothing outlets). While demand as measured in the number of persons in the immediate neighborhood is expected to decline, empowered demand, as measured in the ability of those wanting goods to pay for them, presumably will increase. This bodes well for many businesses, especially those that offer expensive goods to a small but selective clientele (such as art dealers, jewelry and antique stores).

But demand for the goods and services provided by small businesses is not necessarily tied to the neighborhood alone. Residents from elsewhere in the city may be drawn to a neighborhood's stores. The increased visibility, attractiveness, and image of security that accompany gentrification may enable neighborhood businesses to expand the scope of the market from which they effectively draw. Mobility of demand, however, is a two-edged sword. Neighborhood residents are not committed to patronize neighborhood businesses. Many in-movers to gentrifying areas are two-worker households in which both earners work outside of the neighborhood and have options to shop elsewhere. Because these households are also more likely to own cars than the lower-income households they have replaced, they can more closely approximate the expected behavior of the rational, informed and mobile shopper, who responds to bargains wherever they occur. Neighborhood establishments may find that the effective scope of competition has increased.

As important as changes in the level of demand are changes in the nature of that demand. In-movers to gentrifying neighborhoods have different needs from those they replace. They tend to be younger, and therefore to need fewer goods and services that cater to the elderly. They tend to have smaller families, and therefore to need fewer goods and services oriented toward childrens' needs. They tend to have more work-saving appliances in their homes, thus requiring fewer laundromats and cleaning services. They tend to have more recreational options, in their homes and through private memberships, thus needing fewer recreation outlets such as gamerooms, bowling alleys, pool halls. And because of their greater mobility, they may have less need for certain types of convenience stores and services, such as dairy stores, check cashing, and the like.

The newcomers may differ in terms of taste as well as needs. In some cases this is the result of cultural and ethnic changes associated with the transition from neighborhood incumbents to in-migrating gentry. In other cases tastes are developed along with the ability to afford them. Demands for certain types of ethnic or religious-oriented goods and services may decline. Demand for gourmet food outlets, expensive restaurants, health food, tennis and jogging equipment, and high fashion clothing may increase.
FIGURE 5-1

Residential Gentrification brings about:  Leading to:

Level of Demand
Decline of population
Increase in per capita purchasing power
Mobility of markets
—attraction to outsiders
—greater options for insiders

Decreasing Patronage for
High volume outlets
Elderly oriented business
Children oriented business
(children's clothes; shoe stores; toy stores; gamerooms)
Laundromats
Convenience stores

Type of Demand
Changing needs
Changing tastes

Increased patronage for
Luxury goods
Gourmet food shops
Wine and cheese stores
Restaurants
Nightspots
Boutiques

Costs
Increase in property taxes
Increased cost of commercial property
Increased rents

Structural changes including
Fewer owner operators
Fewer resident owners
More large-scale owners
More city-wide clientele

The cost of doing business for all establishments is likely to increase. While there has been little empirical analysis of this facet of commercial gentrification, it is generally presumed to be the case that the assessed value of commercial property will increase as the residential neighborhood upgrades around it. Taxes on commercial property owners will rise, as will, in all likelihood, rents for merchants who lease their stores. Higher prices may close the commercial sector to new owners other than those such as major real estate speculators and developers or regional and national chains—with credit or capital resources on a large scale.

This suggests that commercial gentrification might be expected to follow residential gentrification in a fairly direct and dramatic fashion. As the neighborhood changes, the commercial sector will change as well. Turnover in ownership and occupancy will, for a time, accelerate. Small-scale owners may be replaced by larger owners who have the resources to compete in the context of higher costs; resident owned businesses may be replaced by businesses owned by individuals or corporations with no other neighborhood stake. Accessibility may give way to luxury, convenience to chic, as the criteria for customer acceptance. With these changes would come a less neighborhood-oriented, more citywide clientele.

Figure 5-1, however, gives us no sense of the timing of these expected changes. Some transitions undoubtedly would be gradual, involving no traumatic displacement of existing establishments. Attrition among small businesses normally is quite high; establishments more attuned to the needs and tastes of the in-movers may simply step in as the others naturally disappear. But high taxes, property speculation, and the relocation of traditional patrons may force some otherwise viable businesses to close. Others, more flexible, more attuned to marketing techniques, may adjust and thrive.
Commercial Gentrification In Adams Morgan

Background  The business sector in Adams Morgan has taken the same roller coaster ride as the residential sector. At the turn of the century there was no retail area as such, simply a few scattered stores serving the residents' immediate needs. By World War I, however, a core of activity was apparent, focusing then as now around the intersection of 18th Street and Columbia Road. Some of these businesses were essentially neighborhood oriented, drawing their clientele from the immediate area. There was a variety store on 18th Street, for example, and a drug store where the McDonalds is today.8

There were street merchants as well. A Mrs. Hunsburg travelled up from Anacostia everyday to sell flowers from her pushcarts. "I would go up to 18th and Columbia Road which was a great place to sell flowers to the dignitaries of Washington."9 Some of the new businesses drew attention from beyond the neighborhood. The Knickerbocker Theater opened in 1917 (see Chapter 2). Avignon Freres opened in 1918. A longtime resident recalls that the gourmet foods at a little delicatessen near 18th and Columbia "attracted people from miles around."10

During the 40s and 50s the population grew, even as some of the more wealthy residents began to leave. The commercial area grew also during this period, but, like the residential community, it showed a schizophrenic character, blending the ritzy and the rundown. Adams Morgan, between 1940 and 1970, gave birth to several businesses that were later to blossom into regional or national chains: Dart Drug, Toys-R-Us (which began as a bicycle shop), The General Store. By 1958 the retail area had spread down 18th Street which in the 1920s had remained almost entirely residential. There was the glitter of Avignon Freres, the Showboat Lounge, Gartenhaus Furs. "Yet alongside the well known firms are many marginal businesses, tiny stores and food shops. Rummage sales and empty storefronts testifying to the lack of patronage."11

The riots in 1968, although they did not touch Adams Morgan directly, sparked the out-migration of some of the more solid commercial anchors that had continued to hold on while the neighborhood declined. Gartenhaus Furs, Ridgewell Caterers and Cherner Ford all left in the following year. Avignon Freres, which had opened an elegant restaurant in conjunction with its catering operation, survived the riot period, but the restaurant trade fell to about 10% of what it had been. The owner tried changing to a dinner theater, but finally closed the restaurant "because nobody came to the area anymore."12

Revival  By the middle to late 1970s, the commercial section in Adams Morgan showed signs of gentrification. A 1978 article dated the turnaround to 1975, when Paul Tauber, a twelve-year resident of Adams Morgan, opened Columbia Station, a restaurant and bar that soon attracted a young and affluent clientele. Tauber bought the building for $20,000 and sold it two years later for $225,000.13 In 1977 the restaurant portion of Avignon Freres reopened. More people were on the street and the owner felt that things were beginning to change. An Adams Morgan resident, working at a neighborhood leather shop, told a newspaper reporter in 1977 that the residential redevelopment had "certainly helped our business."14 Another resident, that same year, indicated, "I have hopes for the area; I like the little shops and restaurants that have come in. It's safer to be out now."15

Most of the merchants interviewed regarded the changes that they had observed as positive on the whole. Some insisted that no businesses had been or would be hurt. Others were uneasy. One young Korean has owned his small grocery for less than a year. He lacks, therefore, a true historical perspective. He deals in broad generalities and racial stereotypes and the implications worry him. Blacks, he says, like soft drinks and sweets, products he can profitably carry and sell. Whites "seem to care more about what they eat," and that means that they tend to do their food shopping elsewhere. He also worries that vacancies in the stores around his, the result of turnover and high rents rather than commercial disinvestment reduce foot

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traffic on which a small market depends. The black owner of a barber shop, in business in Adams Morgan Morgan since 1946, was more confirmed in his perception that gentrification was hurting his business. "Lately I've had more Puerto Rican customers," he notes, "but I can't speak Spanish and they can't speak English. The new, wealthier people that have moved in don't patronize local businesses—at least not mine." Meanwhile, his taxes have tripled, he indicates, and he has had to subsidize the shop from his savings. But even he does not blame gentrification for all his problems. "It's the economy more than anything," he concludes.

Because memories and impressions of the merchants themselves were often imprecise and sometimes in conflict with one another, it would be helpful if we could refer to an objective source for information on commercial turnover and change. But in the District of Columbia, as in most cities, data on businesses at the neighborhood level is not readily available. The measures we turn to, therefore, are limited. They allow us to assess roughly some aspects of commercial gentrification, but without the detail, precision, and controls that we would prefer. Two data sources supplemented our interviews with neighborhood businessmen. Rufus K. Lusk prepares real estate transaction directories for the District of Columbia; these were systematically examined in order to determine patterns of property turnover and accumulation along the major commercial strips in Adams Morgan. The Lusk guides provide information on the cost of property and the name of the seller and purchaser, but they do not indicate the nature of the commercial tenant or the kinds of goods and services provided. To get some information relevant to the usage of commercial property we turned to the Haines Criss Cross directories which re-shuffle the conventional phonebook format so as to present information according to street address. By examining these directories we could see what retail, service, or professional outlets (with listed phone numbers) existed in these properties and determine approximately when they began their operation and when they closed.

Changes in Ownership Table 5–1 presents information regarding property turnovers in the commercial strips. The area consists of commercially zoned lots on 18th

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Lots Sold</th>
<th>Number Sold By Short Term Owners*</th>
<th>Percentage Sold By Short Term Owners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1980 figures are through August only.
*Short term owners are defined as those holding the property 2 years or less.

SOURCE: Lusk's District of Columbia Real Estate Directory
TABLE 5-2

RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL PROPERTY TURNOVER, 1970–1979
Rate of Turnovers Expressed as Ratio to Base Year 1970

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>SINGLE FAMILY HOMES</th>
<th>COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: D.C. Municipal Automated Geographic Information System; Lusk’s District of Columbia Real Estate Directory

Street, from Florida Avenue up to and including Adams Mill Road, and along Columbia Road between Connecticut Avenue and Ontario Road. In spite of the general impression of change in the Adams Morgan commercial sector, 92 (47%) of the properties included in our analysis remained in the hands of a single owner from 1968 through August 1980; another 58 (30%) turned over only a single time. From 1969 through 1972 sales of commercial lots were relatively low (an average of 8.3 per year). This was followed by four years of higher activity (average of 18.3 sales per year), peaking dramatically in 1976, and then levelling off at a turnover rate still more than twice as great as that in the early 1970s.

Table 5-2 compares the rate of commercial turnover to residential turnover in single-family homes in Adams Morgan during the same period. For ease in comparison figures are standardized, with 1970 as the base year. The figures for residential turnover (as discussed in Chapter 3) show a steady increase during the first part of the decade, a levelling off for two or three years, another surge in 1976–77 that coincides with the end of the national housing recession, and an apparent return in 1977 and 1978 to the mid 70s level. Commercial turnovers closely parallel this, although the drop in turnover, between 1970 and 1971 might indicate that interest in commercial properties came a bit later than that in housing. In both cases, however, the early 70s showed signs of acceleration, followed by a dip in 1975, two very active years in 1976–77, and then a slowing down. On this measure, at least, it would appear that residential and commercial gentrification proceed hand in hand.

Speculation Some accounts of gentrification have suggested that speculative purchases and sales may play a major role in escalating prices and turnover during the early stages of revitalization. Neighborhood organizations have complained of such activities—often linking them to larger scale real estate interests whose activities are guided purely by the profit motive. Columns two and three of Table 5-1 suggest that turnovers of commercial property increasingly are generated by owners who have held their properties for three years or less; a finding consistent with a pattern of speculative purchases and quick resales by investors whose interest is to realize immediate profits.

In a little more than half of the cases, the Lusk’s information allowed a straightforward comparison between the original purchase price and the resale price. This is a crude assessment of profit that does not take into account any improvements in the property that may have been made. The resale prices ranged from a loss of
thirty-five percent in the 1976 case to an increase over the original purchase price of about 210 percent in a 1979 sale. The average profit was just a little under seventy-five percent.

By reviewing the names of purchasers and sellers we can attempt to determine whether this pattern of increased turnover and quick resale is the work of large-scale operators. One must be cautious about such an analysis. Transactions may be made in the name of specialized real estate or development corporations; this can mask the identity of the principals involved, a fact sometimes exploited quite deliberately for that purpose. What we found, however, suggests a somewhat more complex relationship among instability, speculation, and the scale of the operators than expected. The great majority of the quick turnover sales seem to have been made by individuals or corporations that owned only a single commercial property in Adams Morgan. Large-scale operators—defined here as those who bought or held three or more commercial properties in Adams Morgan between 1970 and 1980—have tended to retain their properties rather than offer them for quick resale. The most active identifiable purchaser, for example, was George Dravillas, who is listed as having been the purchaser of nine properties between 1974 and August 1980; only two of those properties are listed as subsequently having been resold. R. Gatti and H. A. Gatti also have been active purchasers; none of the five properties they purchased between 1973 and 1976 had been listed as resold by August 1980.

Three somewhat distinct patterns are evident. The first is the pattern of frenetic change introduced by quick purchase and resale. This pattern seems to emerge from the activities of multiple and independent actors, rather than large-scale operators. While it accounts for as much as forty to fifty percent of all turnovers, it directly affects only a relatively small proportion of all commercial properties (less than 4% of our sample). This high turnover pattern is juxtaposed with a pattern of gradual accumulation, as represented by the Dravillas and Gatti examples, which introduces an element of stability. Coexisting with these is a substructure of underlying stability in which large-scale owners again play a role. As of August 1980 there were six individuals or corporations listed as owning more than five commercial lots in Adams Morgan; four of the six had purchased those properties before 1968.

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**TABLE 5-3**

**A. TENURE OF SMALL BUSINESS IN OUR SAMPLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in the Neighborhood</th>
<th>Less than one year</th>
<th>1–2 years</th>
<th>2–5 years</th>
<th>5–10 years</th>
<th>More than 10 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Sample</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B. RELATIONSHIP OF TENURE TO RENTAL STATUS AND NONNEIGHBORHOOD CLIENTELE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in the Neighborhood</th>
<th>Five Years or Less</th>
<th>Greater than Five Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Renting</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% with substantial</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonneighborhood clientele</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Changes in Composition  It is more difficult to assess changes in the composition of the commercial sector—what types of goods and services are being offered—than it is to assess changes in sales. Empirical studies have found generally that only about fifty percent of new businesses survive their first two years.18

One window into the past can be provided by the investigation of the present. By sampling and interviewing among the current business establishments in the neighborhood, we were able to gain some limited insights into the process of change. This sample was drawn randomly from a list compiled in a door-to-door inventory of businesses in the central commercial area as of November 1980. Several points are noteworthy. As Table 5–3 indicates, most of the twenty-three small business operators in our sample had been in Adams Morgan either a very long time or a very short time. It is possible that this reflects a pattern wherein newer businesses replace or displace relatively transient short-term businesses rather than those that have been in the neighborhood for some time. The latter businesses may be sufficiently stable to maintain themselves in spite of the pressures of gentrification. This finding, if it holds up, may force a modification of some of the more dramatic portrayals of the trauma of commercial gentrification, and the extent to which it threatens the core businesses around which the identity of the neighborhood and the habits and traditions of the resident-customers formed. The proportion of renters in our small sample (78.3) is comparable to that uncovered in our door-to-door inventory of 149 businesses (76.5%), which makes us a bit more confident that our sample may be representative in other important senses as well. It is apparent, from the second part of the table, that renter firms, as expected, have shorter average tenures than do owner-operated businesses. Part B of the table reveals another interesting tendency: newer businesses in Adams Morgan are much more likely to define their clientele as one drawn largely from outside of the immediate neighborhood.

Several of the newer establishments included in our sample offer the types of goods and services, and cater to the types of patrons, that we associated with gentrification in our discussion earlier in this chapter. There is a natural foods cafe and a bar that caters to a gay clientele. The owner of the Spanish restaurant previously had been co-owner of another similar restaurant in the neighborhood. He says that he deliberately targeted his new venture at the wealthier clientele that he believes to be infiltrating Adams Morgan from Georgetown and elsewhere. He estimates that seventy percent of his patrons live within walking distance of the restaurant.

The owner of the framing and art store moved to Adams Morgan, because it was “up and coming.” His customers are mostly white and largely from the local community; he also does work for area embassies and, he says, for some clients from as far away as New York City. The owner of the bookstore describes its clientele as consisting of students and academicians from all over D.C.

The bargain clothes store, in Adams Morgan for less than one year at the time of our interview, clearly does not fit the stereotype; the store window is cluttered rather than chic; the clientele, according to the owner, is predominantly Spanish speaking. Both the art gallery and the recycled clothing store have predominantly black patrons; although the manager of the latter notes an increase in traffic from “Georgetown types” during her Saturday hours, and the gallery draws from a clientele that can afford the authentic black art in which the gallery specializes. Only a couple of the long-term businesses (the florist, the carpet store) offer the types of goods that would seem readily adaptable to a gentrifying market. Others (barbershop, shoe store, appliance store, lock and key, clothes, and dry cleaner) continue in spite of the fact that their products and services would seem to place them among the category of vulnerable establishments. It is possible that the days are numbered for these commercial old-timers. The barber reports that taxes have tripled and that many customers have been forced to move out of the neighborhood. The clothing store found its rents raised by about eighty percent at the end of 1980, and the owner of the property would provide only a month-to-month lease.
Asked about their neighborhood, several merchants mentioned recent turnovers. Most frequently noted was the profusion of new restaurants: at least one half of our interviewees mentioned this item. Four merchants mentioned the opening of new galleries; other recently arrived businesses mentioned include professional offices, boutiques, a pet grooming shop, a new bicycle shop, and a proposed gymnasium and health club. Our respondents were rather unspecific about businesses that had closed or left the neighborhood (they seemed either unable or unwilling to mention names) and there was very little overlap in their replies. Among the businesses mentioned as having closed were small grocery stores, dry cleaners, a fish store, an antique store, a print shop, a T.V. repair shop, and a travel agency. Some respondents emphasized that they believed these store closings were attributable to factors other than gentrification.

While suggestive, these interviews were not plentiful enough to make us confident that we were obtaining a comprehensive picture. Even the most thoughtful and experienced respondents were limited in their ability to chronicle accurately changes of the last ten years. To complement the analysis, therefore, we turned to the Haines Criss Cross directories. Businesses (including professional services such as lawyers and dentists) are marked by an asterisk. This makes it possible to trace the history of commercial tenants—on the condition that they maintained a phone listing. We cannot be certain how significant this last proviso is. Sultes found that many businesses on Chicago's Near West Side had a stable clientele based on personal contact, with no need to advertise and, in fact, no real desire to attract new, and possibly strange, customers; such businesses might have found the cost of a phone prohibitive. This acknowledged, we do not think it likely that any but a very small percentage of commercial establishments in Adams Morgan can be expected to have forgone the convenience of obtaining a publicly listed phone. A more serious problem is limited access to past Haines directories. Haines directories are leased to paying customers; outdated copies are systematically collected by the company each year. The Library of Congress has an extensive collection of past directories, although it, too, is incomplete for Washington, D.C. The D.C. Public Library retains a few past directories. We were able to obtain access to all but four of the volumes between 1968 and 1980. Since each directory lists the year in which a listing first appeared, we can recreate some of the information for the missing years from the later volumes; but some short-lived establishments that appeared and disappeared during the years covered by the missing volumes were lost to our investigation. This limited the types of analysis we could employ. By carefully framing the analyses which we did perform—by selecting “sample” years, by grouping years together, by focusing particularly on the fate of businesses in existence in 1968 and the history of businesses listed in 1980—we believe we have worked around this limitation in a manner that leaves few if any inaccuracies. The analysis focuses only on businesses in the core strip area on Columbia Road (1600–1900), 18th Street (2000–2400) and Adams Mill Road (1800 block).

In 1968 the Adams Morgan commercial area had 164 businesses with listed phones. Fifty-nine of these (36%) were still listed in the 1980 directory. Except for those which fell within our interview sample, we know little about these “survivors” other than that which can be inferred from the name alone. Included are at least nine liquor stores, three hardware or appliance stores, five cleaners or valets, four small groceries, four beauty parlors or barber shops, four drug stores, two gas stations, two restaurants, a 5 & 10, a retail clothes outlet, and an antique store.

One-fourth of the businesses listed in 1968 had disappeared by 1971 and over forty percent were gone by 1974. Most of those that have closed or left the area did so before the period in which gentrification became a significant factor. Our analyses of commercial property turnovers found 1976 to be the year of sharpest acceleration; if this activity was forcing businesses to close, it was apparently not the longstanding establishments that suffered.

Once again, stability and change are closely juxtaposed. That 59 out of 164
TABLE 5-4
WHEN CURRENT [1980] BUSINESS OPENED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1968 or before</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969–1970</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–1973</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974–1976</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977–1980</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Haines Criss Cross Directories

Establishments survived until 1980 is impressive, especially in light of the notoriously high rates of business failures normally associated with the types of small businesses considered here. These 59 survivors made up thirty-seven percent of the 160 business listings in 1980. Yet, in addition to the 105 establishments that were in operation in Adams Morgan in 1968 but gone before 1980, there were numerous others that came and went in short intervals. At least 147 businesses that opened after 1968 had disappeared by 1980. These included eleven dry cleaners or valets, seven beauty parlors or barbershops, two restaurants or carryouts, four small markets, a drugstore, a caterer, a jewelry store, antique shops, two furriers, a retail bargain clothes store, a gift shop, two t.v. sales and service outlets, a dance studio, a paint store, an alternative magazine, a maid service, and an animal hospital. Some of these were operations that lasted several years and had a chance to develop a regular and committed clientele before they closed; others were truly fly-by-night.

Table 5-4 gives us a sense of when the current (1980) establishments first appeared. The bipolar nature of the pattern exhibited is again of interest: over three-quarters of the existing businesses were either long-term survivors (more than twelve years) or recent arrivals (within three years). A review of the names of the forty establishments that opened since the peak of gentrification reveals a number that suggest the type of product or style associated with the presumed affluence and sophisticated tastes of an arriving gentry. These include La Forchette, Café D’Or, The Eurasian Taste, Now and Then Antiques, Country Stuff, Renovators Limited. Others are decidedly “ungentryish,” Standard Drug, Leon Shoe Repair, A&O Autoparts, PS Variety Discount Warehouse. While commercial gentrification is in evidence, apparently it is not (at least not yet) so powerful and pervasive as to totally permeate and restructure the nature of the goods and services that the commercial sector in Adams Morgan provides.

Adjustments Residential gentrification changes the market context in which a neighborhood’s businesses operate. For some businesses this is a direct threat, especially for those that catered to the needs of a lower-income population. For other businesses gentrification may be an opportunity. While discussions of the “boutiqueization” associated with gentrification have focused on new businesses, some of the establishments that flourish in the context of gentrification may not be new at all. Some, like Avignon Freres, may be holdovers from earlier days, businesses that suffered during the neighborhood’s decline but, for reasons of tradition, costs of relocation, lack of alternatives or inertia did not flee and are ready and waiting to capitalize on the return of the class that they originally served. In other cases, alert operators of businesses that traditionally served a lower-income clientele may adjust their inventory, presentation, advertising, or sales approach in order to adjust to the changing structure of demand and competition. If such a pattern of successful adjustment is evident, it may suggest that concerns regarding the forced
displacement of small business are overly stressed. If it is only the inflexible and unimaginative merchant that fails to cope with neighborhood change, we might reasonably conclude that gentrification only accelerates the weeding out of non-competitive and inefficient operations.

In our interviews with merchants in Adams Morgan, we found only limited evidence of self-conscious efforts to adapt to neighborhood change. Ironically, the clearest indications of such adjustments did not come from longstanding businesses but from relatively new businesses that have been doing quite well.

The “recycled” clothing store has made some adjustments over the short period of its stay in Adams Morgan, according to the store’s manager who perceives the product as having appeal to lower-income residents who have a need for inexpensive clothing. The store’s clientele is predominantly black and predominantly, the manager believes, from the immediate neighborhood. On Saturdays, however, “Georgetown types” have been increasingly evident, and because these “young, hip Washington” people are patronizing the store, it has become feasible to stock and sell more expensive merchandise. Although the manager is reluctant to forsake traditional patrons, the store has begun to stock better clothing that is higher priced, and the manager has found herself ordering more things “with flamingos” on them.

The owner of the plant store indicates that her clientele also consisted primarily of local neighborhood people when she first opened in 1976. After five years her business draws from throughout the city. She has adjusted, she says, by upgrading her stock of plants and selling more expensive ceramics and baskets. She has physically expanded her shop every year. While she has always accepted personal checks, only recently has she added payment by major credit cards.

Two businesses that seem to have been suffering due to changes in the neighborhood also indicated that they had made some adjustments; in both cases, however, the adjustments seem to be relatively minor. The clothing store offers clothing for sale, dry cleaning and silk screened T-shirts. Patrons are from the immediate area and are lower to low-middle income. Patronage has fallen off, according to the owner and manager who attributes this to a decline in the neighborhood’s population. The owner has shown no aversion to shifting products and services in the past. He started in business with a shoe shop; later switched to a laundry; began selling clothes in the early 1970s. He now is considering devoting his time more exclusively to his latest interest, silk screening, but his landlord’s refusal to provide more than a month-to-month lease makes it infeasible to make such a major readjustment at this time. One change that has been implemented perhaps in response to the instability that gentrification entails has to do with check cashing policy. While he used to be more lenient in accepting and cashing patrons’ checks, he indicates that he provides this service now only for people whom he knows. The liquor store owner has made a similar change. “In the past I’d accept checks,” he says, but he feels he has been “burned too many times” by the new, wealthier patrons who occasionally come in now. His business, he feels, has suffered as his traditional patrons have been displaced; but he has not made much effort to compensate by appealing to the arriving gentry. He has made, he says, only slight adjustments in his stock, and he has had little benefit from the changes in the residential community. “The rich don’t spend their money,” he says.

Most other businesses, when asked, could think of no significant adjustments at all. This is not surprising for some of the businesses; several in our sample had opened only within the past two or three years. What is surprising, though, is that it is the businesses that pre-date gentrification that seem the least responsive to the notion of altering their operations to meet changing market conditions. What can account for this inertia? Since the longevity of these businesses is testimony to a certain level of flexibility and business acumen, we must be skeptical of any explanation that is based on a simple premise of ineptitude or rigid resistance to change. In two cases a reasonable explanation is readily at hand; one, the carpet store, the other the florist have found that their businesses are thriving in the new environ-
ment. For most of the others, however, the absence of adjustment is coupled with concern about declining patronage or higher costs. In order to understand why these establishments do not more dramatically reorient their offerings it is necessary to move beyond abstract models of microeconomic behavior to some very human constraints on the likelihood of change.

At the neighborhood level we encounter merchants and craftsmen—not entrepreneurs. The entrepreneur is alert to changing conditions and the opportunities and threats they entail. The entrepreneur draws his or her identity from the generalized role of innovator, adapter, adjuster to market demands. The small business operators we encountered at the neighborhood level differ from this model in several respects. They tend not to be so mobile spatially nor so flexible in the products and services they provide. While some small businesses in Adams Morgan may have moved off in pursuit of a displaced clientele, we found little evidence that this was occurring. A review of Haines and conventional phone directories in order to track down businesses that had left the neighborhood and opened elsewhere in D.C. or its suburbs was generally unsuccessful. Of fifty-nine businesses from the neighborhood, only five were found to have relocated with the same name. Of the four of these which we were able to contact, none indicated the displacement of traditional patrons as the reason for their move.

Other studies of the impact of public urban renewal projects on small businesses found that, even when public relocation benefits were made available, many small businesses, especially those with a neighborhood clientele and those appealing to a racial or ethnic subgroup, closed permanently rather than suffer the trauma of relocation.¹⁹ Faced with the uncompensated costs and trauma of relocation from a privately gentrifying neighborhood, even those businesses in Adams Morgan that are clearly suffering may choose slow decline in familiar surroundings. This seems to be the case, certainly, for the owner of the small, black-oriented barbershop who told us that he was subsidizing his operation from his own pocket, trying to hold on just a little longer until he can retire.

The small business operators seem constrained in their product mobility as well as their spatial mobility. These are people, by and large, who have shaped their self-concept around the product they provide; they are barbers or shoe repairers not entrepreneurs who adopted these roles conditionally because market conditions were ripe. Product changes, moreover, imply customer changes, and it is here that personal insecurities—irrational from the perspective of the entrepreneur—may play their greatest role. Those most ready to pitch to the “newcomers” seem to be those who most resemble the newcomers themselves. To some the newcomers seem too distant; there is a resentment but, more significant perhaps, there also seems to be uncertainty regarding how one is to interact with such people. Filtered through these perspectives, neighborhood changes are viewed with a certain fatalism, calling forth endurance rather than response.

Finally, we were struck by the reluctance of several of those interviewed to directly connect neighborhood changes to the ups and downs of their particular economic fate or that of their neighbors. Most, as we have indicated, recognized that changes in the residential community were occurring, but some quite clearly believed that this residential phenomenon was largely independent and insulated from commercial events. Business failures, according to some of these respondents, were attributable to normal turnover and poor business skills. Others seemed alert to a possible connection yet rated gentrification as a peripheral and relatively insignificant market force. Rising rents, higher taxes, pressures from larger developers and speculators, according to this perspective, are attributable to broad economic forces operating on a national rather than neighborhood-specific level. Still others seemed unable to differentiate this one component of their environment from the more generalized phenomenon of rapid and distressing change: “There are too many changes in sixteen years,” one respondent sighed resignedly. Her senses apparently were too numbed to countenance analytical distinctions that would
make it feasible to consider gentrification as something other than one more gust in the winds of change.

It is tempting to portray this failure to perceive the commercial impacts of neighborhood change as a form of "false consciousness." One could hypothesize a perceptual screen that keeps the victims from recognizing the true cause of their problems, obscures its collective aspects, allows those who are coping to dismiss their neighbors' failures as individualistic cases of mismanagement, and leads those who are suffering to attribute their problems to societal changes of such macro proportions that the possibility of effectively challenging them is never explored. But this characterization dismisses too swiftly the legitimacy of the perceptions that the businesspersons themselves have evolved. That gentrification is perceived as peripheral is not attributable to misperception alone.

The environment in which small businesses exist is quite generally a harsh and unpredictable one, swept by broad forces—interest rates, inflation, changes in taste, changes in competition—compared to which demographic shifts may seem slower, more predictable, and somewhat more benign. However, one need not hold to the notion that gentrification is the most important factor affecting businesses in neighborhoods such as Adams Morgan in order to subscribe to the belief that it is a significant factor which merits further consideration. One important distinction between gentrification and some of the other factors bearing upon small business in the neighborhood is that the impacts of gentrification may be addressed and moderated through public policy action. It is to the policy implications that we turn then in our next and concluding chapter.

Notes

17These directories are available at the Library of Congress and at the Martin Luther King Library in the D.C. Public Library system.
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

A cartoon in the New Yorker shows a slightly befuddled looking fellow with a pipe approaching a policeman at a busy intersection. "Excuse me," he says. "I'm an academic. Where am I?"

In its efforts to probe beneath conventional perceptions, academic social science frequently is charged with replacing clarity with confusion. Often the charge is deserved. Simplicity, when all other things are equal, is preferable to complexity, but the biases of academic socialization sometimes encourage obfuscation as a form of ersatz sophistication. Be this as it may, learning, for all but the truly innocent, entails a process of simultaneous unlearning. Unquestioned "truths" must be challenged if knowledge is to intervene.

Many of the important conclusions of this study have to do with such unlearning. Gentrification only recently emerged as an issue of public and analytic interest. As is almost always the case when we confront something new, first impressions were of a single dimension, fixated on distinguishing characteristics. Initial attention to gentrification focused on the reversal of longstanding trends of apparent neighborhood decline. Early models of gentrification overamplified this dimension—portraying the changes as sharper, more uniform, and comprehensive than closer observation might have revealed. A second early focus was on the revelation that revitalization—long the explicit goal of urban policy—imposed hardships on incumbents, especially the poor. Those models portrayed the impact as universally negative, and defined a sharp, class-based conflict of interest between the new and the old.

We found both the process of gentrification and its impacts to be messier and more elusive. Although we employed multiple objective indicators in addition to residents' perceptions, we found it difficult to pinpoint a beginning to gentrification in Adams Morgan. By some measures, gentrification seemed to get underway very early in the 1970s. By other measures there were no sharp changes until 1977 or even 1978. Nor was gentrification, once underway, the smooth and continuous upward curve of revitalization that we had expected to find. Spurts of revitalization were followed by periods of relative stasis; sales accelerated in one part of the neighborhood while declining nearby. The relationship between residential and commercial change, between turnover and price and rehabilitation, were erratic. The outlines of some patterned regularities were discernible, but we have to strain to draw out these connections. Further research may well establish that these patterns are genuine and common to other gentrifying neighborhoods, but the notion of neat, well-defined, and predictable stages of gentrification received as many qualifications as confirmations from the material considered here.

That gentrification was found not to have been uniform throughout the neighborhood should not have been so surprising. Other studies have noted that, especially in its early stages, gentrification may affect very small areas, moving slowly, house by house, block by block. But our consideration of Adams Morgan suggests to us that this spotty character of rehabilitation and demographic change is some-
thing more than a temporary artifact of a transitional period. Throughout most of its history Adams Morgan has witnessed this juxtaposition of upper classes with poorer, white residents with black, construction and rehabilitation with deterioration. The balance and momentum have shifted at various times, but this state of heterogeneity has never been completely resolved in favor of one group or direction of change. Gentrification, therefore, did not mean the introduction of wealth and upper-class values into a neighborhood that was submerged in poverty, resignation, and gloom. Not only was there a core of highly educated, propertied, middle- and upper-income residents still present in pre-gentrification Adams Morgan, this group retained an interest and considerable influence in the shaping of the organizational and commercial dynamics once gentrification was under way.

Most of our expectations about the impacts of gentrification on community organizations and small businesses were derived from the premise of sharp cleavage between new residents and neighborhood incumbents. This cleavage, it was assumed, would encapsulate other cleavages that typically orient coalition and conflict in urban life. On that theory, the newer, wealthier, younger, whiter, less family-oriented homeowners would challenge the low-income, older, black and Hispanic renters who populated the area before it came into vogue in a series of skirmishes intended to redefine the neighborhood's identity.

While we did find evidence of conflicts in political orientation and commercial preferences along the lines anticipated, these conflicts did not neatly coalesce into camps defined by recency of tenure, income, family status, race or age. Middle-income residents, some of whom were tenants in buildings converting into condominiums, were among the mainstays of the organizational efforts to resist gentrification. Moderate-income, homeownering blacks in some instances were among the quiet supporters of rehabilitation, which they interpreted as an upgrading of conditions and a source of eventual relief from crime. We found recent movers to the neighborhood, including many Hispanics, to be among those most directly threatened by gentrification-induced displacement; even as some are displaced from the neighborhood, others, as poor or poorer, continue to move in. We found long-term organizations to be among the most visible articulators of the so-called agenda of the gentry. And we found the leadership of the business community retained by individuals whose presence and involvement preceded the gentrification trend.

Is Adams Morgan "Typical"

Those whose interest is in the general phenomenon of neighborhood change, and not in Adams Morgan for its own sake, may wonder to what extent it is legitimate to draw broad conclusions from this single case. One might argue that Adams Morgan is unique. While generalizability is an important concern for all case studies, the standard that one must establish the case to be "typical" is unrealistic and misinformed. Every neighborhood is in some respects unique; to specify a priori that general knowledge cannot evolve from the investigation of such neighborhoods is to severely limit the scope of knowledge generation. Rather than insist on a standard of typicality, it is necessary to ask in what specific senses is this neighborhood deviant? How extreme is this deviance? How likely is it that this deviant trait will have altered the substance of the particular findings?

One sense in which Adams Morgan may deviate from many other neighborhoods is in the severity of gentrification and gentrification-induced displacement. Washington, D.C., is cited frequently as one of a handful of the most gentrifying cities (Seattle and San Francisco are two other cities often mentioned). The presence of the federal government (until recently a growing direct source of jobs and stimulant for auxiliary white collar employment in lobbying, consulting, research, and the like) may have provided the District with an exceptional foundation for gen-
trification. Within the District, Adams Morgan is included on every list of gentrifying neighborhoods. Together with Georgetown and Capitol Hill, it marks the points of a triangle that maps the outlines of the city’s revitalizing core. If Adams Morgan is an extreme case within an extreme city, the dynamics of community organizational and commercial life may be qualitatively different from what one would encounter elsewhere.

It is important to remember, though, that the set of neighborhoods to which we would like to apply our findings does not consist of the universe of neighborhoods, but simply to other neighborhoods that also are gentrifying. While it is possible that Adams Morgan is an extreme case even in this company, there is no evidence that it is so. Both the District and Adams Morgan are probably less extreme in the actual extent of gentrification than they are in public awareness of and political sensitivity to that which has occurred. The conventional wisdom which has labelled D.C. and Adams Morgan as extreme cases is based on anecdote and media reports, not comparative objective data. The most widely utilized source of cross-city measures of demographic trends, the Annual Housing Survey, does not show the District to be an extreme case on any of the normal indicators of gentrification.

The racial make-up of the city dictates that the displacement of the poor by the wealthy will most frequently entail the displacement of black by white. This ties gentrification to an explosive issue and activates long-simmering sensitivities and resentments. It also makes gentrification more visible in a straightforward sense: color is more readily evident than class. While recently-arrived white, upper-class newcomers might walk inconspicuously through a white, blue-collar neighborhood, their presence would be immediately perceived and commented upon in a predominantly black area. The political history of the District, moreover, has left it with a leadership with roots in activist and civil rights traditions, a leadership that has been quicker than that in most other cities to acknowledge the displacement issue and to perceive it as a threat to their own constituencies.

If the actual extent of gentrification does not set Adams Morgan and the District apart from other gentrifying locales, perhaps self-consciousness of gentrification does. Higher levels of public awareness of neighborhood change may lead to sharper and more evident impacts on community organizations as incumbents increase their political activity in order to keep themselves from being overwhelmed. In such a context of awareness, commercial speculators also may move more rapidly and confidently to exploit changing markets, thereby accelerating pressures on existing merchants. This same consciousness of gentrification may lead respondents to ascribe changes around them to gentrification, when in fact those changes may be attributable to other factors.

This is an important consideration, and it may necessitate adding a corollary to any conclusions. What we encountered in Adams Morgan forced us to recognize that gentrification was only one of many forces acting on the community. This elusiveness of gentrification, the sense in which it may appear to play only an accompanying role in a complex and broadly changing environment might be even more striking were we to have investigated its impacts in a less self-conscious city.

Two further characteristics of Adams Morgan may be relevant to our assessment of the typicality of the neighborhood. Adams Morgan has been noted for, and is proud of, its reputation for unusually high levels of grassroots political activity and for its relatively stable heterogeneity. If, as Morris and Hess and others have suggested, Adams Morgan’s organizations are unusually sophisticated, our findings could be affected in two ways. First, such well-developed neighborhood organizations would probably increase levels of awareness of gentrification. Second, and probably more significant, effective organizations are a resource to be valued. There is a greater incentive for newcomers and incumbents to compete for control of such organizations. In light of the fact that we did not find conflict as intense or polarized as that which Auger describes in Boston (see Chapter Four), however,
another possibility suggests itself. Rather than exacerbating conflict, a history of well-developed organizational activity may have muted internal strife. Traditions of bargaining and coalition may have been responsible for the pragmatic style noted in Chapter Four.

Adams Morgan residents have reified the neighborhood’s reputation for heterogeneity through the slogan “Unity in Diversity” which flies on the neighborhood’s official flag. While that reputation is based on ethnic and racial heterogeneity as well as class diversity, it is the latter that has the most direct relevance to the findings we have offered. We have put particular emphasis on our finding that a pre-gentrification elite continue to play a major role in community life during the gentrification period. Most other accounts of gentrifying neighborhoods have not mentioned such an elite, encouraging the image of the pre-gentrification neighborhood as homogenous in its poverty and physical deterioration. Is Adams Morgan a sharp exception, or have accounts of other neighborhoods simply failed to probe the characteristics of the neighborhood incumbents with care? This question cannot be satisfactorily answered without additional study, but there is reason to suspect that Adams Morgan may not be idiosyncratic in this regard. Most, if not all, of the first generation of gentrifying neighborhoods across the country were, like Adams Morgan, once-fashionable and prestigious neighborhoods. These neighborhoods have much to offer: convenient location, well-constructed housing, attractive architecture, a sense of history, and, in many cases, superior natural settings. Analysts of the contemporary revival of these neighborhoods have been quick to recognize the attraction that such characteristics hold for the in-coming elite, but slow to consider the fact that these qualities might make some of the earlier upper-class residents very reluctant to leave. The working assumption has been that the flight of this earlier elite was complete. In light of the positive attraction that these neighborhoods offer, and in light of the inertia or loyalty that often holds families to their homes even when conditions around them decline, it seems quite likely that in this respect Adams Morgan is not unique. There is at least some empirical support for this supposition. Dennis Gale’s recent study of the history of revitalization in Georgetown suggests that there, too, a stable core of elites remained anchored to the neighborhood during its period of relative decline, waiting to play a role in the revival that came later.1

It is in vogue to move from observations that the world is complex to a broad conclusion that public policy responses ought to be eliminated or restrained. Such a neo-conservative orientation—premised on the notion that public intervention is at best crude, at worst pernicious—has been influential in countering demands that urban reinvestment be regulated so as to limit displacement and other costs imposed by rapid neighborhood change. It has been argued, for example, that the complexity of gentrification is good reason not to devise a comprehensive federal displacement policy.2 At the local level, calls for rent control, condominium conversion regulation, anti-speculation taxes and the like are frequently met with the counter-charge that such actions risk damming up natural sources of reinvestment and rejuvenation upon which healthy cities and healthy neighborhoods rely.

While we found gentrification to be more complex than popular portrayals recognize, and while we found change to be a natural and constant part of neighborhood life, our study is not an endorsement of the position that nothing can or should be done. We found a fragmentation of the community organizational substructure that probably has left the neighborhood, at least for the time being, less able to promote the neighborhood’s interest in the competitive arena of city politics. We found local businesses that were clearly suffering due to market changes associated with gentrification and others whose owners feared this might soon be the case. On the other hand, some long-term businesses are flourishing and there is a stability and pragmatism in community organization politics that prevented sharply defined class conflict. In all cases we found it difficult to disentangle those impacts uniquely
attributable to gentrification from those due to macroeconomics or broad societal changes in family structure and values.

To acknowledge that some are not hurt by gentrification or even that some benefit does not soothe the trauma and uncertainty that others are forced to bear. It is sloppy reasoning, moreover, that carries us from the truism that change is natural to the dictum that specific changes are inevitable. Many of the human costs of gentrification are attributable to the rapidity and force of change. Normal neighborhood change is incremental. It is brought about by such natural occurrences as the maturation of a younger generation, the aging of property owners, shifts in architectural fashion, the erosion of physical infrastructure, obsolescence of housing facilities or transportation modes. Gentrification, as it is occurring in Adams Morgan and many other neighborhoods, is not a simple outgrowth of these natural sources of change. It is change that is speeded by the psychology of speculative investment, the power of media and advertising to channel the perceptions of potential homebuyers, the cautious instincts of the lending community which withholds capital from the residents of deteriorating neighborhoods but opens its doors to outside investors once the image of the neighborhood has been turned around, and the conscious manipulation of public sector improvements and tax policies to encourage targeted reinvestment. Normal change also imposes costs, but these are more manageable and less destructive by virtue of their gradual nature. The merchant confronted with normal change has time to adapt. If s/he fails to do so, the costs are muted. The rapid change associated with gentrification leaves less room for adaptation, turns an instinct for tradition into a self-destructive inefficiency, and creates an atmosphere of uncertainty that aggravates tension even among those who do remain.

Our study was not designed to elicit empirical justification for any specific set of policy responses, but it does provide guideposts that may help to direct whatever policy efforts are made. Policies that are enacted to address the problems induced by gentrification must recognize its complexity and seek to moderate, not eliminate change. Policies that fail, for example, to recognize the economic and social diversity in neighborhoods that are experiencing the first trickles of reinvestment will misread the political context and build in a likelihood of failure. Holdover elites from the pre-gentrification period will not tolerate policy strategies that purchase relief for their poorer neighbors at the cost of relegating their own properties to a destiny of further decline. These elites ought to be acknowledged as a potential resource; their stability and loyalty to the neighborhood, their experience in inter-class living, their social status and political clout make it important for local officials to shape programs that these established residents will be willing to support. Officials must realize that to ignore such existing residents is to increase the threat that those programs they do implement will be co-opted. Programs premised on a uniformly low-income population may be exploited by wealthier incumbents to their advantage at the expense of those in greater need.

Will policies that effectively address the needs of the residents of gentrifying neighborhoods be forthcoming? We conclude with some pessimistic observations on this point. President Reagan’s call for a “New Federalism” signals a belief that problems such as those associated with gentrification should be dealt with at the state or local level. The current administration, moreover, is unlikely to concede that such problems do exist; its chief spokespersons raise Americans’ vague and unarticulated trust in the market system to a firm and unquestioning faith that all outcomes of free market dynamics ultimately will prove to be benign.

Nor should we expect vigorous response at the local level. Mayors and city councils are reluctant to address the gentrification issue head on. They are concerned that precipitous regulatory action might discourage the private investment upon which their cities’ physical and fiscal health might depend. And some hesitate, too, to alienate the development, real estate and financial communities whose political and financial support are integral to their personal political careers.
Action, it would seem, will depend upon the pressures that those directly affected by gentrification can bring to bear. Yet, if Adams Morgan can be taken as an example, such pressure seems to be waning rather than growing in strength. While there are cities and neighborhoods in which the call for tenants' rights remains vital, there seems to be a growing fatalism; in a hostile political and economic climate, the demands of survival in a very personal sense may inhibit impulses to communal action. And the very complexity of gentrification makes it a more elusive issue around which to mobilize.

Gentrification may, then, be relegated for the time being to the political background. But to say this is not to say that the issue will be inessential or lacking in effect. Pressures of rapid change and uncertainty undermine senses of community, loyalty, and commitment. And, overlain as they are with issues of race and class conflict, these pressures of redevelopment may contribute to a heightening of tensions, an acceleration of mistrust, and a slow disentangling of the informal links that make for a viable city life.

Notes

