“Be yourself. Don’t be arrogant. You will grow with the community, and the community will grow with you.”

- Robert Poole
Heal H Street

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Abstract

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Heal H Street

The story of H Street Northeast in Washington, D.C., and the surrounding neighborhoods is rooted in the history of a prosperous black commercial district transformed to a neglected and drug infested crime zone following the 1968 riots. The Assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. prompted a visceral response that devastated H Street. Nearly 40 years later, the neighborhood is returning to past vibrancy. Gentrification is returning H Street to its former glory, but the façade of new construction conceals deeper changes. Racial and income demographics are shifting, the cost of living is rising, and the cultural identity is changing. Long-term residents are forced to adapt, and new comers are learning important lessons about what it means to live in a multi-racial and multi-cultural neighborhood. “Heal H Street tells the personal stories of residents using multi-media, long form essay, a multi-media project website, and a web based photo essay."
To Suzan Corl, Robert Poole, Craig Gilbert, Keith Grannis, Ancille Antoine, and the many others who have contributed to my understanding of race. Your words and example will continue to propel my appreciation and personal growth.
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Preface

Heal H Street is a story of transformation. By definition, transformation means change. When first conceived, this project was motivated by the stories of Washington, D.C., residents who experienced the riots of 1968 following the assassination of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.. The people who experienced and witnessed the riots are aging. I was compelled to tell their stories before they were no longer able to convey their rich experience. Not long into the project I expanded the range of focus to include the decline that followed the riots and the ongoing revitalization occurring in the present.

Enlarging the story to the present day led to a realization that I am a part of H Street history in my role as a gentrifier. This juncture led to a number of truly difficult considerations I needed to face. What role does race and economic status play? How did my upbringing affect my perception of race, poverty, and the contrast with affluent newcomers to the neighborhood? These thoughts led to the inevitable conclusion that as a neighborhood resident, my story was part of the H Street story.

H Street experienced dramatic change beginning with the riots. Similarly, I have evolved along a trajectory that included moments of sudden transformation and periods of incremental, almost imperceptible change. The intersection of parallel emergence lays the foundation for Heal H Street.
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Thesis Statement

This thesis answers the question of how the H Street corridor of Northeast Washington, D.C. evolved in the aftermath of the 1968 riots, how gentrification affected the residents who remained in the neighborhood, and the cultural impacts on newcomers that arrived beginning at the turn of the century. The riots were a visceral response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King that established the setting for decline of the neighborhood and the eventual gentrification that began in 2000 and continues now. The project, which includes a 17 minute documentary film is presented on the project website at www.craigcorl.com/healhstreet.
Introduction

This project seeks to answer the question of how the H Street corridor evolved in the aftermath of the 1968 riots and how gentrification affected the residents who remained in the neighborhood following the riots. The riots were an emotion filled response to the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Widespread rioting, arson, and looting, resulted in hundreds of injuries, twelve deaths and broad swaths of severely damaged buildings – including those on H Street. The story of devastation, neglect, and the personal impacts of cultural change under the pressures of gentrification are told from the firsthand perspective of long-term residents and newcomers using a combination of video, audio and still photography. The timing of this project is critical because the people who either witnessed or participated in the 1968 riots are aging. It is important to hear their stories now, while they are still in a position to provide the community with the benefit of their experience.
Methodology

The methodology for Heal H Street followed the structure typical of long form multimedia journalism. In summary, the methodology involved identification of a relevant and timely subject with compelling characters, research to understand the full depth and breadth of the subject, review of visual precedents that might inform the storytelling approach, constructing the message and narrative arc, conducting interviews to bring the story to life from a deeply personal perspective, capturing visuals to enhance the story, and editing the compilation of resources into a compelling multi-media presentation.

Identifying the subject resulted from years of conversation with my neighbor, Robert “Bobby” Poole. When I moved to the neighborhood I was oblivious to the rich history that surrounded me. Bobby was the professor that led me to the conclusion an important story needed to be told. Although Bobby was a supremely qualified first hand source, understanding the full implications of the riots, decline of the neighborhood, and eventual gentrification required further research. My research led to discovery of data that countered commonly held perceptions, a long trail of action and reaction, and a deeper understanding of critical story elements revealed at the personal level.

The research phase led naturally to questions of how the story of decline and gentrification were told in similar endeavors. This element of the research quickly confirmed my original idea of telling the story from the perspective of personal impact. The dominant model of storytelling related to gentrification and the racial conflict that comes with it, is one of the rich and privileged displacing the poor. My intent was to add a new dimension to the conversation, which meant breaking the mold of precedent works.
However, many of the visual approaches used in prior stories of gentrification provided models to emulate.

The prior components of the methodology provided the basis to construct the narrative, identify the types of interviews I would need, and create a production shot list. The remaining elements of the methodology included production (interviews, b-roll shooting, and collection of archival images and video) followed by postproduction. Postproduction included editing the video, peer review at a number of stages of production, and presentation to the affected community in the form of a public screening and launching of a project driven website (www.craigcorl.com/healhstreet).
Chapter 1: Thesis Research

Heal H Street: The Fall and Rise of the H Street Northeast Neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

The modern day story of multi-racial H Street and the surrounding neighborhoods traces a cycle from prosperous black commercial district of the 1950s and 60s, to the depths of despair after the 1968 riots prompted by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and eventual rebirth with waves of newcomers in the 2000s and beyond. The riots devastated the corridor and left the neighborhood with scars that remain today. Mending the scars and revitalizing the corridor comes at a price. While gentrification\(^1\) is returning H Street to its former glory, the new physical appearance is a façade that conceals deeper changes. And change can be difficult. Racial and income demographics are shifting, the cost of living is rising, the cultural identity is changing, the social infrastructure is altering. Not everyone benefits. The trauma of the riots, the demise that followed, and the impacts of gentrification all contribute to the yet evolving story of H Street.

\(^1\) Gentrification is generally recognized as the process of investment leading to restoration or improvement of blighted urban business districts and neighborhoods that have fallen from a prior state of prosperity (Maurrasse and Bliss). Gentrification is often associated with displacement of low-income and racial minority residents as more affluent groups take up residence.
The neighborhood is generally recognized as the several blocks north and south of H Street between 3rd and 15th Streets Northeast. Today’s H Street is one street with two identities shifting between day and night. During the day the street is filled with blacks who live in the neighborhood or who have moved but maintain ties. After dusk, the street changes. New residents and people from across the city populate the evening incarnation of H Street – going to restaurants, clubs, and bars. The average person in the evening crowd is a young urban professional, and white. The demographic data show a natural evolution of a revitalizing neighborhood as affluent newcomers inhabit previously vacant properties. However, low-income black residents most deeply impacted feel unwelcome economic pressures and an undesirable cultural shift. A shift that contrasts like night and day.

For those benefiting from the transformation, the paybacks are clear: improved security, new restaurants, better transportation, and a more attractive streetscape, for example. For the businesses and residents experiencing negative impacts, a number of questions remain. Is anyone “responsible” for displacement, and if so, who? Who defines the vision of the future for a community? How is this expressed? How are the voices of community groups and the under-represented accounted for during the process of gentrification? Are they assimilated or excluded? What is the role of public policy with regard to not only the principal impacts of gentrification, but second and third order effects including unintended consequences such as cultural conflict?

H Street was a thriving business district in the early 1960s with department stores, a car dealership, restaurants, clubs, grocery stores and a breadth of businesses catering to the local community. It was known amongst the black community as their downtown
shopping district (Poole). Locals relied on H Street businesses for all their needs (Gamble; Mason; Murphy; Poole; Saleem). According to longtime resident Robert Poole, the area was a significant commercial center that served not only the immediate neighborhood, but attracted people from other parts of the city (Gamble; Mason; Murphy; Poole; Saleem).

But H Street was already beginning to feel the impacts of the 1956 Federal Highway Act that established a national system of interstate freeways greatly increasing mobility throughout the country (“Eisenhower Interstate Highway System Home Page”).Urban residents retreated from cities to the suburbs as highway access improved (Woody; Smith; Pitrof). Residents who were not lured to the green lawns and two car garages of suburbia patronized local businesses, owned principally by Eastern European immigrants (Delaney).

The 1960s were the peak of the Civil Rights Movement. The H Street neighborhood was a multi-racial middle class neighborhood that coexisted peacefully in contrast to tensions permeating other large cities. Business owners and residents alike were proud of their peaceful and prosperous business district (Gamble; Jackson; Mason; Murphy; Poole). In the midst of growing racial tensions, the H Street neighborhood found a way to remain tranquil while race riots were commonplace in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, San Francisco, and Watts (Thorpe, Smith Kelso and Nista; Jackson).

Everything changed in the spring of 1968. On March 31st, Martin Luther King Jr. gave his last sermon at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. (Hall). During this sermon, King said, “I don’t like to predict violence, but if nothing is done between now
and June to raise ghetto hope, I feel this summer will not only be as bad but worse than last year” (Wills).

At 7:12pm on Thursday April 4th, radio broadcasts in Washington delivered news that Martin Luther King had been shot at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. By 8:30pm civil rights activist and emerging leader of the Black Power movement, Stokely Carmichael, approached businesses near the intersection of 14th and U streets Northwest asking them to close as a show of respect for Dr. King (Thorpe, Smith Kelso and Nista; Jackson). Carmichael was accompanied by a group of students from the offices of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Council as a show of solidarity with his demands to the business owners. By 9:18pm, most of the businesses agreed to close, but some in Carmichael’s group who did not agree with the peaceful approach began to break windows. At 10:50pm two cars were burned at the Pat and Addison Chevrolet dealership on 14th street. Other fires were soon set. By 11:16pm the police had gathered sufficient numbers to contain the riots to 14th street and finally cleared the area by 4:30am. The first night of rioting claimed one life and left the shelves of 150 looted stores empty. Two hundred people were arrested.

The morning of April 5th started somberly with a Howard University memorial for Martin Luther King (Thorpe, Smith Kelso and Nista; Jackson). At an 11am press conference, Carmichael said, “white America has declared war on black people, and today the final showdown is coming” (Thorpe, Smith Kelso and Nista). Following the memorial service at Howard University, a rally featured speakers including Carmichael condemning whites for genocide and claiming the strategy of non-violence was ineffective. By noon, the 14th Street fires started anew, and rioters returned to the streets.
At the same time, rioters spread to 7th Street Northwest and H Street Northeast, which was fully ablaze by 3pm.

13,600 National Guard troops began patrolling the streets at 4:40pm on the 5th. (Thorpe, Smith Kelso and Nista; Jackson; Poole). The troops were positioned along 14th Street, 7th Street, H Street, the Whitehouse and the Capitol. Extra police were called in and Mayor Walter Washington established a 5:30pm curfew (Wills; Gamble; Mason; Poole).

The D.C. Police and the National Guard troops were not trained in riot control. As in other cities experiencing riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Mayor Washington decided to let the riots play out without direct confrontation (Jackson). He feared an escalation of violence and additional casualties would result from the actions of police and troops ill prepared for riot control. By allowing the looters to continue without direct clashes, Mayor Washington bet that a nonaggressive approach would lessen the loss of life (Bean; Marx; Wenger; Feagan and Hahn, 187-89; Methvin, 470-89; Gilje, 161).

The story of one merchant is typical of what many businesses experienced. “...[T]he doors had been busted down, the shelves were practically 100 per cent empty, and there were three policemen in the store with shotguns” (Bean; Gilbert 185). With over 20 people in the store, the owner asked the police what they were going to do about the looters. The police responded, “We can’t do a thing” (Bean; Gilbert 185).

By the morning of April 6th, the riots were waning and police regaining control. The strategy was to set up roadblocks, control access, disperse crowds, and search cars leaving the city for looted merchandise. However, a number of looters continued to roam
and set 334 new fires (Thorpe, Smith Kelso and Nista). A summary of the damage is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Structural Damage from the riots (Thorpe, Smith Kelso and Nista).

By April 7th, the riots were over. “The city smoldered on Sunday, but the worst was over. More than 800 fires had been started. Twelve people were dead and more than 1,000 injured. Rubble and charred buildings filled what had been vibrant neighborhoods…” (Wills). Over 6,100 rioters and looters were arrested, and the damage extended to over 1,200 burned buildings, with an impact estimated at $27 million ($175 million in today’s dollars) (Tucker).²

The 1968 riots were devastating. H Street was physically and emotionally scarred. The physical impacts were immediate, and in plain view. The emotional and economic

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² According to the Areppim AG calculator, $27 million 1968 dollars equates to $139 million in 2013 dollars when using a gross domestic product deflator, or $180 million if using a consumer price index deflator.
impacts quickly materialized as residents found themselves jobless and with nowhere to spend their money – if they had it. One of the most successful retail districts in D.C. was destroyed (Woody). In an interview with the *Washingtonian*, novelist George Pelecanos recalled the impacts of the riots on H Street:

The people who lost the most were the people who lived in those neighborhoods. H Street was black Washington’s shopping corridor. You had Sears, Morton’s, Woolworth, and they employed thousands of black Washingtonians. All those jobs were gone, and people had no place to shop. It virtually ended the downtown shopping experience. Nobody went downtown anymore. They were afraid. (Wills)

Over half of the lost jobs belonged to black residents. Poverty set in. Crime followed poverty. And crime pushed out businesses and residents. Business owners found it difficult to hire and retain employees who feared working in such a high-risk environment (Bean 175). Insurance for crime and fire increased and was unaffordable for many merchants. The tragic confluence of events accelerated the loss of business.

The population of Washington declined by more than 118,000 in the 1970s (Franke-Ruta). Although the post-riot 70s accounted for most of the decline, there were other factors. Ineffective security, a declining economy, growth of the suburbs resulting from improved mobility, white flight following desegregation, crack and other drug epidemics, and the city's ongoing mismanagement and financial problems all contributed (Franke-Ruta).

The 1970s, 80s and 90s were the dark ages for H Street. The appearance of degeneration crested as D.C. won the title of murder capitol in the late 1980s, with a peak of 491 fatalities in 1991 (DC Metropolitan Police Department). The picture of decline was amplified by the drug related arrest of Mayor Marion Barry in 1990. Gerry Widdicombe writes in his 2010 *SPUR* article on “The Rise and Fall of Downtown DC”
that, the confluence of events left the “perception of a risky investment environment.” Widdicombe describes the final blow as the recession of the early 1990s, which further depressed an already struggling economy. The tax base was collapsing. Exacerbating this was the fact that the Federal government owned 40 percent of the land in D.C. and paid no taxes (Widdicombe).

In their book *Dream City Race, Power and the Decline of Washington D.C.*, Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood describe Washington in the 1980s and early 1990s as one of the most depressing cities in the nation:

The crime rate is among the highest in the country, and the [municipal] government remains exceptionally inefficient. The infant mortality rate remains among the highest in the nation. The wait for public housing is years and for drug treatment is months. In 1993, the 80,000-student school system was ranked among the worst in the country, with more money per pupil than virtually any other jurisdiction (Jaffe and Sherwood 187).

Jaffe and Sherwood describe this period in terms of exceptionally high murder rates, corrupt police and power hungry government officials, self-serving bureaucrats, warring drug gangs, high levels of drug addiction, and the precipitous fall of a once peaceful city (Jaffe and Sherwood 94).

Early indicators of the District’s comeback and eventual path of gentrification arrived in the early 2000s. Washington’s population fell to approximately 572,000 in 2000, down from its peak of 802,178 in 1950 (US Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau, Resident Population of the 50 States, the District of Columbia and Puerto: April 1, 2000 and April 1, 1990”). Figure 2 shows the path of D.C. resident population between 1950 and 2012 including a steady decline up to 2000 at which point the population began to grow. The reversal of decline began in 2000 at the onset of gentrification and a renewed interest in urban living.
Figure 2. Resident Population and Jobs in D.C. 1950 to 2012 (Brown-Robertson et al.)

The proportion of African Americans in the city is declining while the overall population of D.C. continues to rise. This is a common consequence of gentrification that is more economically based than racial although the two cannot be separated; the demographics are a reflection of groups with sufficient income to invest in the community. The peak black population occurred in 1970 at 70 percent. It dropped to 62.3 percent in 1998 while the white share of the population grew to 28.5 and the Hispanic reached 7.2 percent (US Census Bureau, “1990 to 1998 Annual Time Series of State Population Estimates By Race and Hispanic Origin, Population Estimates Program, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau”; Kennedy and Leonard). During the 2000s, the population shifted dramatically. The black population dipped by 11 percent while whites increased in number by 31 percent (Tavernise). According to Tavernise, The hallmarks of
cities in decline that proceed to gentrification include shifting demographics, residents with higher incomes, advanced education, and an increasing white population.

In a 2013 *Washington Journal BIZBEAT* article, Michael Neibauer analyzes 18 of the gentrifying D.C. Neighborhoods. The gentrification in these neighborhoods appears to be more closely tied to higher incomes and buying power rather than shifting racial demographics. While the demographics are turning white in many of the resurgent D.C. neighborhoods, others such as Barry Farms, Marshall Heights and Deanwood are on the rise without change in racial demographics:

> My immediate takeaway from this list [of 18 transitioning neighborhoods]: how little race plays a role in gentrification. We know Petworth, Columbia Heights and Trinidad have transitioned over the past decade as a younger, diverse set has moved in. And yes, many of those new residents are white. But Barry Farms? Marshall Heights? Deanwood? Those east of the river communities were 90-plus percent black in 2000, and they’re 90-plus percent black today. (Neibauer)

The important trends that can be seen from these demographics include a steady decline in population from 1950 to 1998 with the most precipitous fall following the 1968 riots through 1980 then again from 1990 to 2000. The period of decline (1950 – 2000) included parallel rates of waning population among black and white residents. Beginning in 2000 the population began to grow with a higher influx among whites, Asians, and Hispanics. Although the black population grew, it proceeded at a rate lower than other groups. Gentrification meant that a variety of races re-inhabited the city, and it was driven by family income rather than race.

One conclusion that can be drawn is that gentrification does not necessarily mean displacement of existing residents. In the case of Washington as a whole, it appears to be
a matter of a growing population driven by an influx of young, working class residents while other groups are growing at a slower rate.

During the period of gentrification, the median sale price of a home in the H Street neighborhood grew from $161,000 in 1995 to $588,000 in 2012 ("D.C. 2012 Ward Profile - Housing - NeighborhoodInfo D.C."). The question that remains is whether there is a relationship between shifting demographics and home values. Did black residents leverage the value of their homes and move elsewhere? Were they compelled to leave due to an escalating tax burden and foreclosures? Or did the shifting culture make them feel unwelcome?

Several statistics suggest the transition in home ownership demographics is not dominated by race or income. During this period, the percentage of people who owned the same house five years prior remained flat at approximately 50% ("D.C. 2012 Ward Profile - Housing - NeighborhoodInfo D.C."). Similarly, the number of annual home sales remained within a steady range of 400 to 900 per year with no noteworthy trends within the range. Further, the number of occupied housing units increased from 32,714 in 1990 to 37,704 in 2010 % ("D.C. 2012 Ward Profile - Housing - NeighborhoodInfo D.C."). In other words, the housing statistics indicate normal levels of activity while increasing the number of occupied housing units as people move into abandoned or vacant buildings – a conclusion that runs contrary to many perceptions of people being forced out by gentrification.

Robert Poole cited one particular street in the H Street Neighborhood as an example. In 2007, the block that included 9th Street between F Street and G Street included seven vacant homes – nearly one quarter of the homes on the block. By 2010
there were no remaining vacancies and only three of the 27 houses were rental properties (Poole). All of the new residents were white.

Upper Marlboro Attorney Eugene Pitrof does not see the connection between the 1968 riots or gentrification with the decline of black residents in D.C. According to Pitrof, who opened his Upper Marlboro law practice in the late 1950s, there was a steady flow from D.C. to Prince George’s county beginning in the early 1960s. Pitrof attributes the shift to the growth of the Federal Government during the Kennedy administration, affordable housing, an effective police force, better schools, and access to health care in Prince George’s County (Pitrof). “Prince George’s county offered all these things, fostered policies encouraging growth, and welcomed the growing black population” (Pitrof). In contrast, other counties in Maryland and Virginia were generally too expensive for middle and lower middle class families moving from D.C.

Dennis Smith, Mayor of Glenarden, Maryland, echoes the perceptions of Pitrof. “The population of Prince George’s county has grown steadily since the 1960s. The demographics have changed dramatically during this period of growth” (Smith). Smith said blacks accounted for about 15% of the population in the county in 1960. The black population has since grown to 62%. Smith sees no connection to the 1968 riots or gentrification but rather a natural result of the countrywide move to the suburbs since the 1960s: “There may have been people who moved because of security concerns or economic hard times, but my sense is that they came here for the opportunities and better government services.” Smith also noted that D.C. was not the only contributor to Prince George’s county growing black population. They also came from other metropolitan
areas and knew they could live in friendly communities with other middle class black families.

Not everyone left the H Street neighborhood. However, the reasons they stayed are not clear. Jacques Washington and Robert Poole suggest one reason – they owned their homes (Poole; Washington). Washington’s family has owned their home for three generations. Poole now lives in the home his parents purchased in the early 1960s. Both Poole and Washington say close ties to the neighborhood kept them in the same homes, but place more emphasis on the price of moving. Poole said, “We couldn’t afford to move.” Washington reinforced this when he said “We just didn’t have the option. It was a tough time, but it was tough for everyone.”

In his 2005 Urban Affairs article, Lance Freeman offers two points that run counter to common assumptions about displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods: 1) Many older and declining neighborhoods turnover half their residents in a five year period. 2) Many of these neighborhoods have a high vacancy rate, and it is a matter of people moving in, rather than displacing existing residents (Freeman; Hampson). This would mean that in the H Street neighborhood we would expect a regular turnover of half the residents on a recurring basis. The examples provided by Poole and Washington represent the other half of the neighborhood that remains stable.

Freeman’s assertion is consistent with study conclusions of tract level data. One study published in a paper titled “Who Gentrifies Low-Income Neighborhoods?” compared the tract level data of the 1990 and 2000 Census (McKinnish, Walsh, and White). The authors conclude that on average:

…the demographic flows associated with the gentrification of urban neighborhoods during the 1990’s are not consistent with displacement and
harm to minority households. In fact, taken as a whole, our results suggest that gentrification of predominantly black neighborhoods creates neighborhoods that are attractive to middle-class black households. (McKinnish, Walsh, and White)

“Reversal of fortunes” is another relevant concept that clarifies why people move, and more importantly why they stay. A study by Ellen and O’Regan in 2008 concluded that gentrification had a positive effect in areas of high poverty and black households through substantial income gains they termed as “reversal of fortunes”3 (Ellen and O’Regan). Freeman did not conclude the same income gains, but in a similar tract-based study using the geo-coded Panel Study of Income Dynamics found little evidence to support an association between gentrification and displacement of low-income households (Freeman). Freeman concludes that although some households are forced to move as a result of rising costs, there is little difference between gentrifying neighborhoods and non-gentrifying neighborhoods with regard to low-income turnover rate. There is only a 0.5% greater likelihood that a low-income household will be forced to move on in a gentrifying neighborhood over a non-gentrifying neighborhood. Freeman suggests that although some residents choose to leave, others are attracted to stay as they benefit from new job opportunities, improved security, cleaner streets and more amenities.

Although property values are on the rise in D.C., causing distress to some property owners and renters, those seeking relief may not find it in the metropolitan area suburbs. Although this was the case during the era of urban flight following the 1968

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3 Ellen and O’Regan define “reversal of fortunes” as the process of realizing increased home values among long term residents as a result of gentrification. Home purchased at a low price in the periods of neighborhood decline become valuable assets as the neighborhood rises.
riots, the suburbs no longer offer the same economic benefit. According to a study conducted by the Urban Land Institute in 2009, Washington, D.C., remains an affordable place to live in relation to surrounding suburbs, particularly when transportation costs are considered. Of the 22 metro area counties and cities included in the study, the District of Columbia ranked second most favorable ($27,553 average annual combined housing and transportation cost) with only the City of Fredericksburg, Virginia, less expensive ($25,404 average annual combined housing and transportation cost) (Robles).

Several conclusions can be drawn with respect to gentrification based on this data. For residents displaced by rising housing costs, there are limited options in the D.C. metro area by which to improve their financial condition. Even though the cost data do not support it, many still move to Prince George’s county according to census data. For those displaced from D.C. and remaining in the D.C. metro area, they may be able to afford the move by cashing in on the high home values and finding a lower cost alternative either inside or outside the District. It is also possible that some may cash in, and move to lower cost areas outside of the D.C. Metro Area.

According to the Urban Land Institute, managing gentrification is a key concern accompanying the development of new residential and commercial investments in urban areas that have experienced decline. There are clear benefits such as the appearance, infrastructure and economy of a formerly depressed community. However, as wealthier residents move in, the cultural and social fabric of the neighborhood can be at risk. As investment flows in, rents rise, property values and taxes increase in lockstep, rental buildings are converted to upscale condominiums, older buildings are razed and replaced with high priced developments, and the cost of living increases for everyone (Myerson).
Race-based culture and lifestyle conflicts often arise as wealthier white residents arrive and racial minorities feel threatened, marginalized, or otherwise priced-out of the new amenities. The conflict arises as new residents are followed by businesses catering to the newcomer’s tastes and income, while businesses catering to the traditional residents diminish. There are also distinctions in behavior – how neighbors are greeted, reliance on the person next door to watch out for them, and simple things such as bringing in your neighbor’s garbage can (Poole). The Urban Land Institute provides guidance along with unanswered questions:

Is gentrification an inevitable part of the natural life cycle of real estate? Is it unavoidable in a thriving economy? Or can communities plan for mixed-income neighborhoods, reap the benefits of economic revitalization, and successfully retain their social and cultural heritage through this lifecycle change? (Myerson)

Although changing demographics can be viewed as a threat to the social culture, not everyone agrees. In a 2011 *New York Times* article, Sabrina Tavernise quotes Albert Hopkins who is skeptical of those who favor a nostalgic perspective: “Were we happy that we were 90 percent black? [the D.C. black population actually peaked at 70 percent in 1970] No. It was nothing to light a bonfire over, because we were 90 percent black without resources” (Tavernise). The same holds true for H Street. Jacques Washington brought this point into focus as he said “There are going to be winners and losers, and the people with the money are winning. But mostly, things are getting better” (Washington).

In her 2012 *Atlantic Cities* article “Facts and Fictions of D.C.’S Gentrification,” Garance Franke-Ruta suggests perceptions and data do not always match up when considering shifting demographics that accompany gentrification. Refering to Stephen A.
Crockett Jr.'s piece, "The Brixton: It's new, happening and another example of African-American historical 'swagger-jacking," Franke-Ruta says:

This article rehearses the by now tired tropes of the anti-gentrification genre, harkening back to a mythic, culturally perfect moment that was somehow destroyed by white middle-class professionals and successful new businesses that - entirely on their own - made the decision to move into historically black neighborhoods. But the reality of the transformation of D.C. is that that is not what actually happened. (Franke-Ruta)

Franke-Ruta says that the census data tells the real story. Between 1980 and 2000, the black population dropped dramatically with more than 1,100 people leaving the neighborhood “long before any of the so-called 'culture vulture' venues came in” (Franke-Ruta). A close look at the Census data shows that black population loss in the neighborhood actually slowed as gentrification picked up, dropping almost in half from the previous decade's rate as whites and Asians flocked to the neighborhood in the first years of the new century, and as new amenities moved in (Franke-Ruta).

In a Washington Post article profiling the neighborhood formerly home to former mayor Marion Barry, Paul Schwartzman quotes Kionna Stephen, an African American real estate agent who moved to the neighborhood in 2001. She sees the change as a positive one particularly for her children, “It’s a diverse world we live in, and it exposes them to something other than themselves. It’s good for everyone” (Lac and Schwartzman). Schwartzman ends with an interview of Furar Tate, a small business owner who lives just three blocks from the home of his youth. Tate is optimistic about the change:

‘There won’t be as many African Americans, he said, ‘but there will be myself and others who find importance in staying in their community. There are a lot of people stuck on hurt. I tell them, find the positive solution. Fix up the house or sell it or do something. Complaining is a waste of time.’ (Lac and Schwartzman)
H Street was underutilized when the planning process leading to the gentrification began. The corridor included 232 buildings of which 51 were vacant (Woody). Nearly one third of the street level storefronts were empty, and 47 percent of the mixed-use upper floors were vacant. Undeveloped parcels compounded the dismal image of vacant storefronts and empty floor space. Most of the empty lots were ghosts of demolished buildings dating from the 1968 riots. The businesses that remained were emblematic of a downtrodden street and included barbers, clothing stores that catered to a bygone era of fashion, liquor stores with safety glass, fast food, and depressed mom-and-pop convenience stores.

The catalyst for much of the cultural change is tied to the evolving landscape of H Street. The fate of H Street began to change in the early 2000s. Many attribute this renaissance to renewed interest in city living coupled with organization of H Street business owners who saw potential in the neighborhood. Realizing the influx of new residents and the opportunity to revive the corridor, business leaders collaborated with Washington’s Office of Planning on a plan to spur revitalization. According to Darrick Lanardo Woody (Chief Executive Officer of DLW LLC, a Washington, D.C. real estate and land use advisory firm):

With this influx of new residents joining longer-term, existing families came debates about the demolition of architecturally-distinct properties and the potential for reuse of places like the Atlas Theatre. At this juncture is where OP [District of Colombia Office of Planning] enters at the request of the Mayor to work with communities and other stakeholders to develop what became “REVIVAL: The H Street NE Strategic Development Plan.” (Woody)

When completed in 2003, the estimate for implementing the plan reached $1.38 billion (Woody). The first major piece was completed in 2010 - a $53 million streetscape
project which included laying tracks for streetcars. This government investment alone attracted nearly a dozen medium to large scale developments including both residential and mixed use properties. Between completed and planned private investments, the initial phases of the plan have attracted nearly $2.5 billion in projects (Woody).

Change brought on by shifting demographics and investment is not good news for everyone - including businesses. In 2011, George Butler announced the closing of an H Street icon, George’s Place. The store opened in the 1950s, survived the riots and decades of neglect on H Street, but could not survive gentrification. But gentrification was just one of several factors that included mounting pressures from Internet shopping and changing tastes. Butler recalls the riots and witnessing the flight of businesses from H Street. He is a military veteran with a survival instinct, but the influx of upscale restaurants and bars targeting the affluent white residents left him feeling a pressure to move on. “There is no longer room on H Street for traditional black-owned businesses” (Izadi, “As Business Closes, Owner Looks Back at Decades on H Street | D.Centric”). Although there are those who see Butler as a victim of gentrification, there are those who see him as the beneficiary. The building was listed for $1.4 million when Ben’s Chili Bowl purchased it to open a second location (Saleem).

In a 2011 New York Times article, Sabrina Tavernise tells the story of another business owner unhappy with the improvements to H Street:

Pamela Johnson, an African-American who owns a small storefront building, said her property tax bill had more than tripled in the three and a half years since the city began building a streetcar system that she said she never wanted. She said that she could not afford to pay and that she was one of several dozen owners in danger of losing their properties in a tax sale. (Tavernise)
Johnson said “This process was imposed on us, and now it’s driving us out of here” (Tavernise). In contrast to Johnson’s statement, D.C. Officials said the city had gone to extreme lengths to lessen the burden on owners such as Johnson by lowering their tax rate and providing $723,000 in tax relief.

Another business case is that of the early movers who come to transitional neighborhoods based on affordable rent and a promising future. These early movers are often the first signs of gentrification and help create the success leading to full-scale investment. However, the early movers that contribute to revitalization often find themselves priced out of the neighborhood and are forced to close or move to a less expensive area. The [H Street] Playhouse is an example. In 2012, [H Street] Playhouse announced it would move after a 10 year run.

Adele and Bruce Robey purchased the building in 2002 for $300,000 and opened the H Street Playhouse (DePillis). The [H Street] Playhouse was a black-box performance space that rented to theater groups. Adele Robey sold the building in 2009 for $1.1 million and used the proceeds to fund a three-year lease. At the end of the lease, the new owners increased the rent to $55 per square foot; approximately $20,000 per month. According to Robey, most theater companies find it difficult to pay even $6,000. The space was no longer a viable business proposition, and Robey was forced to move. Ultimately, the H Street Playhouse moved to Anacostia and was reborn as the Anacostia Playhouse (“Anacostia Playhouse | A Performing Arts Venue East of the River”).

According to Greg Leisch, chief executive of Delta Associates, a real estate consulting company in Alexandria, Va.: “As an area becomes re-enlivened, there’s a natural cycle that retailers go through; they move from more mom-and-pop to less, and
from less chain stores to more.” Leisch points to Georgetown and Bethesda, Maryland, as local examples of this progression (Abrams). The challenges for existing businesses are significant according to John McIlwain, an expert on housing and urban issues and a senior research fellow at the Urban Land Institute:

It’s quite a challenge for a store owner to change to a very different, significantly different clientele, and it frankly requires more than just bringing in some items they might like. It’s really a whole new repositioning of the store. If the store sends the message that this is a store for the low-income community, most of the new residents… will look elsewhere to shop. (Izadi, “How a Small Business Can Survive Gentrification | D.C.entric”).

Whether gentrification is a benefit or a curse is a matter of perspective. In some cases, the perspective can vary even within a tightly defined constituency. For example, pre-gentrification residents may lament the loss of a local sandwich shop that could no longer afford the lease, yet be thrilled by the loss of a downtrodden liquor store replaced by a large chain store. Similarly some residents fear the rising cost of housing and property taxes, while others relish the opportunity to take advantage of the wealth suddenly found within their own walls (Kennedy and Leonard).

Anwar Saleem, executive director of H Street Main Street (hstreet.org), was 13-years old when the riots struck and has seen people cash in on gentrification. He witnessed the rubble and empty lots that littered H Street for decades. And he lived through the height of crime and drug culture that accompanied the decline. Saleem owns a hair salon and two other buildings on H Street. He sees great promise for the corridor. “Buildings that once sold for less than $100,000 are now selling for more than $1 million” (Saleem). "I think Dr. King would have wanted any neighborhood to be economically viable, and in H Street, people of all races do business together. I think Dr.
King's legacy is playing out here now” (Bello and Keen). Saleem notes a significant change in business ownership on H Street since 1968. Now most black run businesses own the properties and account for approximately 60% of the stores on H Street (Saleem). “We didn’t have that opportunity in ’68” said Saleem (Bello and Keen).

The modern day story of H Street and the surrounding neighborhoods begins with urban flight starting in the 1950s that was radically accelerated by the 1968 riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The 1970s, 80s, and 90s were periods of steady decline in population and prosperity. Gentrification prompted by renewed interest in city living followed the period of demise with an influx of new residents. The migration continues today resulting in a dramatic shift in the landscape, business environment and composition of the neighborhood. Transition of the corridor has resulted in mixed opinions dominated by pervasive optimism and gratitude, yet countered to a lesser extent by detractors. The story continues to evolve with no clear conclusion in sight. The construction cranes twist and turn on the skyline as a reminder more is yet to come. Predominantly white newcomers and traditional black residents wrestle with defining how they will live together. The emerging culture will inevitably be forged as a hybrid of historic traditions and the values imported by new arrivals.
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Chapter 2: Visual Review

“Heal H Street” is a documentary video project seeking to answer the question of how gentrification affected residents who remained in the H Street neighborhood of Washington, D.C., following the 1968 riots. The project begins with the 1968 riots precipitated by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., continues through the devastation and decline of the neighborhood in the aftermath of the riot, and concludes with the eventual rebirth and gentrification of the area in the 2000s. In telling this story, it is important to understand the visual precedents that can inform the approach and convey the story in an engaging and compelling way while avoiding the pitfalls of less successful projects such as Gentrification: Portlandia that rely nearly entirely on a single interview with limited visuals. The sources for this review are principally compiled from film and documentary projects having gentrification as the central theme. Other sources are reviewed and cited as having relevant visual, structural, or story telling approaches.

The Gentrification of Harlem is a short documentary film produced in 2010 that tells the personal stories of people affected by gentrification in Harlem (Aminy). Visually, the piece is interesting because of the dominance of tight and medium length shots accentuating the feel of intimacy and personal impact. Wide shots are used sparingly along with short time lapse sequences between scenes. Almost all shots are taken from a tripod, which from a storyline perspective provides a sense of stability - as the neighborhood changes, there remain aspects that are immovable. The film also uses
crossfades from derelict buildings to new construction to enhance the feeling of transition. Tight shots taken from a tripod promoting a sense of intimacy and stability, time lapse as chapter delimiters, and crossfades from derelict buildings to new construction to emphasize change are all techniques that will be considered for my project.

*My Brooklyn Trailer* is the trailer for a 2012 documentary film that looks at the gentrification of Brooklyn’s Fulton Mall from the perspective of government promotion of investment and the impacts on residents of a community undergoing gentrification (Anderson). The trailer incorporates a variety of visuals including photography, mounted video, static interviews, handheld video, news clips, and motion graphics. From a visual perspective, the video is particularly interesting because of the variety of forms it draws on. Constantly moving from still, to static interview, to street level handheld shots adds interest and keeps the viewer engaged and anticipating what might come next. While the handheld shots do not appear to have a specific purpose in this piece, the variety of material used is valuable to my project by providing a model of how diverse visuals assist in maintaining engagement in the story. The motion graphics are of particular interest. They add to the story by presenting complex information concisely and in a manner difficult to achieve with photography or video.

*DIRTY OLD TOWN – TEASER*, produced in 2010, deals with pain, change and individual adaptation in the Bowery of downtown New York City (Blowback Productions). It is an intimate look at lives on the fringe of society. The contribution of this piece is that of showing emotions of people in a state of transition. People who once had it all figured out now find themselves distressed. The trailer offers many close and
short shots of people in the throes of deep emotion. The intimacy of the close shots amplifies the visual representation of emotion. Much of the shooting is done handheld and lends to a sense of instability. The piece offers a viable alternative to tripod shots by adding emotion through a moving camera. My project will have a significant emotion component that would benefit from handheld shots.

*Affording Progress: A Community Response to Gentrification* is a 2011 short documentary film focused on gentrification in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn (Cabral). Like H Street in Washington D.C., the neighborhood experienced riots, devastation and decline following the assassination of Martin Luther King. The film features interviews with people who witnessed the riots, decline and eventual gentrification. It also tells the story of people who are currently affected by gentrification. There are those that see gentrification as a community benefit, while others who are feeling the financial pressures that come with rising rents and are not pleased with the impacts of development. The film uses archival photography and video coupled with present day images of new construction and changing demographics to propel the story.

In many ways Cabral’s visual approach is similar to that of my own. Those being impacted now add to the words of those who experienced the full cycle of decline and gentrification. Like “Heal H Street,” archival photography and video tell the history, while present day video shows the impacts of gentrification.

*Fate of a Salesman* is a 2012 documentary film particularly relevant to “Heal H Street” because the subject matter is that of a failing business located on H Street (Crosbie and Moran). The shop catered to the fashion demands of local residents. In the 2000s, styles from the 1970s populated the shelves. The salesman in *Fate of a Salesman*
dressed in suits appropriate for a bygone era. Although the business struggled to survive and even offer more contemporary clothing, it was too late. Visually, the story is compelling through use of mostly tight shots including details of clothing, shoes, and the expressions of those affected by the declining store. The sadness of the story is supported by twilight shots, and other scenes influenced by overcast skies adding to the mood of demise. The videographer also adds a sense of distance or foreboding with shallow depth of field, giving the impression of knowing the present but unsure of what is beyond.

Each of the visual approaches add a sense of intimacy relevant to “Heal H Street.” The tight shots are particularly compelling and relevant to conveying the individual and personal impacts of gentrification.

_Hollow_ is an interactive web documentary that tells the story of a declining West Virginia town (Hall). While the website is engaging and cleverly constructed, the heart of the project lies in telling the personal stories of those who witnessed the decline and are attempting to survive in a neglected region. The strength of the presentation lies in multiple experiences of people coping with a bleak future. Strong visuals with a mix of perspectives (establishing, medium and tight shots), engaging audio (local music, community voices, and natural sounds of activities in the towns), and multiple personal accounts are components to emulate. The varied personal stories encourage my project to include a variety of voices with different perspectives and experiences relevant to H Street gentrification.

_Anaquash: A Community’s Relationship to Its River_ is a 2013 short documentary that tells the story of a community’s relationship to the Anacostia River (Harlan). The documentary is a combination of video and still photography with heavy reliance on
recorded audio. The documentary is relevant because the central character is not a person – it is the Anacostia River. A number of voices propel the story of the river and the meaning it has for those who live near it and rely upon it. With the river as the central character, this piece demonstrates that a compelling story need not have a single person to animate the story. With a broad variety of voices, the story weaves together seamlessly and demonstrates the power of collective attachment to place.

_Gentrification: Portlandia_ tells the story of gentrification in Northeast Portland (Pham). It was produced in 2013. I find the story useful because much of it echoes the H Street story with regard to displacement of people who can no longer afford the rising rents and taxes associated with increased property values. Visually, the story is not particularly compelling and provides an example of something to avoid – too great a reliance on the image of the interview and insufficient b-roll to cover the interview. Also, the interview is not particularly well constructed and leads to excessive dialogue. The story is also told from only one perspective – one voice that in the end decreases credibility of the overall story. In summary, the story is a parallel to H Street, but the visuals and construction of the narrative provide examples to avoid, or use sparingly.

_Gentrification and a Gypsy Cab_ tells the story of gentrification in Bushwick, Brooklyn from the perspective of a gypsy cab\(^4\) driver (Pylayev). It was produced in 2013. Visually, the story has several elements worth emulating such as scenes with the camera in motion as the cab driver moves through the neighborhood. Poetry read by the main character also serves to enrich the storyline and combines well with scenes of normal

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\(^4\) A gypsy cab is an unlicensed taxi. In some locations, taxis are licensed to respond to calls, but not to pickup while transiting between calls. These too are commonly called gypsy cabs.
neighborhood activities. Shots to emulate include those of residents affected by gentrification and engaged in activities such as basketball games, shopping, and hanging out on the corner.

*Bed Stuy* is a 2010 music video by Spec Boogie and directed by Ali Santana that tells a gentrification story in a rap music format (Santana). The video shows neighborhood scenes that reflect the lyrics with mostly close shots that visually tell part of the story from an intimate perspective and leave other parts to the imagination. Many of the shots are taken in either early morning or at twilight which enhances the story of the challenges faced daily in a gentrifying neighborhood. Focus is placed on the locations that have not yet felt the impacts of gentrification such as corner liquor stores and run down streets. These images reinforce that gentrification has not affected all corners, and a history of the less prosperous days remains. Similarly, H Street has not fully transformed. This piece inspires me to include scenes that reflect the history of decline that yet remains visible and neighborhood icons that survived the period of decline and continue to contribute to the neighborhood positively.

*Offending the Clientele* tells the story of gentrification in a Berlin neighborhood from the perspective of a disgruntled, possibly even emotionally unstable resident who narrates the film (Sender). It was produced in 2010. The story is about rapid change and the entry of the “creative intelligencia mob” that take over the streets. The entire film is shot off-tripod and focuses on street scenes, bars, and cafes principally showing the “clientele” that have invaded the neighborhood. The shaky camera approach accentuates the impression of change while providing a detailed documentary of the neighborhood as the narrator viciously rants against those who have stolen the culture of his neighborhood.
While it is not yet clear this approach should be used in “Heal H Street,” it bears remembering should the storyline demand an element of instability.

_Gentrification in Brixton_ is a 2013 documentary that tells the story of gentrification in Brixton, a rapidly gentrifying section of South London (Teodori). Visually, it is a combination of stills, static interviews with low-income people who can no longer afford rising rent, and a combination of handheld video and tripod-mounted video. One section of the video shows a multi-paneled view of rent and lease signs that quickly populate the screen giving the impression of rapid change. Bar and restaurant scenes help propel the story of young affluent professionals moving into the neighborhood. Once a highly ethnic neighborhood, many of the video sequences show groups of young white people walking down the street accentuating the displacement of prior residents. While most of the video offers little new in comparison to others in this review, the feeling of rapid change invoked by the multi-panel view of rent and sale signs could contribute to “Heal H Street.”

_Two Cities: Gentrification and Displacement in New Orleans_ is a 2013 Aljazera News piece that tells the story of the Treme district of New Orleans (Flaherty). The Treme district borders the French Quarter and was targeted for development following the devastation of hurricane Katrina. The visuals show a portion of the neighborhood that was devastated coupled with closed storefronts that once hosted jazz bars and other culturally-important icons of the community. Several sequences show the new businesses and locations that have flourished as a result of redevelopment - where public and low income housing once stood. A repeating theme of the video comes from revisiting locations that were musical and cultural icons in the community. Interviews conducted in
front of a derelict building that once hosted the vibrant core of music was particularly compelling. Similarly conducting interviews at noteworthy locations on H Street could provide desirable context.

The conclusion of this visual precedents review results in a variety of visual approaches, techniques, and themes that inform “Heal H Street,” and contribute to setting the mood and emotion. “Heal H Street” seeks to tell the story of impacts on people who experienced and were affected by the riots, decline, and gentrification. These impacts are generally not uplifting and positive. The mood and emotion are somber and at times even dark. The visuals and the audio should remain in a palette of appearance and sound that contributes to these often painful and disturbing emotions. The combination should result in the viewer feeling the discomfort.

The visual works reviewed suggest effectiveness of tight shots to reveal intimacy and personal impact; tripod-mounted shots to enhance a sense of stability in the midst of change; crossfades from derelict buildings to new construction to contrast old and new; a variety of material to help maintain viewer engagement (stills, video, news clips, motion graphics, etc.); tight handheld shots with shallow depth of field to elevate emotion and instability; contrasting archival and present day shots to provide temporal context; twilight or night shots to enhance a sense of foreboding or impending change; the use of multiple personal stories focused on a central storyline to broaden diversity; car mounted shots moving through the neighborhood to provide a sense of place; activities such as shopping and basketball to reveal the daily pulse of the neighborhood; shots of the parts of the neighborhood that remain in decay showing that gentrification is a process – not a destination, and use of easily recognized locations to add contextual reference.
Each of these techniques and approaches are valuable models for my project and will add to the visual success of the story. However, the story remains the most important component and leads me to the most important conclusions from this visual review. Most of the documentaries addressing gentrification focus on displacement of economically disadvantaged residents coupled with the changing visual landscape of a transitioning neighborhood. This review confirmed my desire to break the mold and offer something new to the gentrification conversation. I am now convinced that making the project more personal is a refreshing approach. By telling the story of cultural identity change from the perspective of personal impacts, I hope to present an original perspective on gentrification.
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Chapter 3: Narrative Essay

Not Fully Baked

Bone chilling cold settled on the first days of April, even by Michigan standards. I sat on the floor of the mudroom struggling against my uncooperative over boots. I recall them vividly and I was losing the battle. Folding metal clasps riveted to frayed black rubber – one of the clasps broken and hanging loosely. The boots were far from being a fashion statement, but they had a purpose. I was six years old in 1968 as I waged war with my boots. The mercury was creeping near 40 and I was anxious to play in the melting piles of snow, puddles, and muck. It was my life, and it was normal. For all I knew, the whole world was heading out to enjoy the muddy soup we call a Michigan spring. And best of all, I would return to the warmth of our home knowing one of my mother’s delicious cherry pies, fresh from the oven, would be waiting for me.

Weather defines life for a kid growing up in Michigan. Frost covered grass in autumn turns to brutally cold winters with the inescapable lake-effect snow – the snow that keeps the landscape pristinely white between the real snowstorms. If you cut your own firewood, it’ll warm you twice was my father’s mantra. The brilliant white of winter fades to the brown mud of spring, and is finally relieved by long summer days. Boots are discarded for bare feet, and shovels laid to rest as hoes take the watch. A shirtless and shoeless summer is the reward granted by the last day of school.
But weather is not the only defining characteristic of Midwestern Michigan. I was too young to know it at the time, but my hometown of Howard City was defined by what wasn’t there as much as what was. Other than a five and dime store, Matson Hardware, a library that would fit in the living room of most homes, a bank, a butcher, and a grocer, fields surrounded us as far as the eye could see. Olsen Knife Company was the only industry. “Fatty Fatty run for your life, here comes Skinny with an Olsen Knife.” In spite of the jingle, I had a crush on Tammy Olsen. Tammy was cute, and she represented something larger because of the family business. With a population of less than 1,000, the prospects for adolescent romance in Howard City were slim, and I was shy. I’m sure Tammy had no idea of my feelings.

German, Polish, and Dutch immigrants built Howard City. There were probably a few Italians adding a little flavor, and a smattering of less flamboyant Scandinavians. The ubiquitous white snow mimicked our lily-white heritage. Learning about people different from us – beyond the expansive corn and soy fields that guarded our remote hamlet, was as likely as seeing a pig fly – and we knew all the pigs. They just weren’t that ambitious.

Africans, Jews, Asians, Arabs, Latinos? About as common as lips on a chicken. I could count the number of black children in my school on one hand. The absence of anything other than my own reflection was not a concern to me. Anything I did not see in my small town was as distant, unknowable and exotic as the images in National Geographic.

And when it came to blacks, things were worse. What I learned about African-Americans came from the jokes, slurs, and stereotypes perpetuated by my family. My
only hope for understanding black people was television. But what I saw was similarly unflattering. Images of marches, riots, and violence filled the screen – all accompanied by my father’s bigoted narration. The sum of these experiences was fear. Fear of the violence I associated with blacks, fear of the cities they lived in, and fear of the unknown beyond the last row of corn.

Washington, D.C.’s, H Street, seven hundred miles away, burned while my family cultivated seeds of fear and insecurity. On March 31st, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. gave his last sermon at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., During this sermon, King Jr. said: “I don’t like to predict violence, but if nothing is done between now and June to raise ghetto hope, I feel this summer will not only be as bad but worse than last year.” At 7:12pm on April 4th, radio broadcasts in Washington delivered news that Martin Luther King Jr. had been shot at the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. Stokely Carmichael led the rioters within hours of the broadcast. The first night of rioting claimed one life and left the shelves of over 150 stores empty from the looting. Two hundred people were arrested. By the next day, rioting spread to the H Street corridor.

Bobby Poole was 13, just seven years older than me. Bobby lived a block South of H Street when the rioting started. He joined his brother in the looting that swept down the Street. For the predominantly black residents that lived in the neighborhood, H Street was their downtown. It was black Washington’s main shopping district and catered to all their needs. From barbers and clubs, to department stores and car dealerships. It was all there. And it was burning.
Bobby is my neighbor. We met when I retired from the Coast Guard and moved to Washington in 2007. We often sit on the porch and talk about the history of our D.C. neighborhood. Bobby regrets his participation in the riots but confesses he could not see past the emotion of the moment. At the impressionable age of 13 he was not prepared to make the decisions he would today. He went along with the free-for-all, although he now knows he participated in the destruction of his own neighborhood.

Bobby often tells me how devastating the 1968 riots were. H Street was physically and emotionally scarred. The physical impacts were immediate and in plain view. The emotional and economic costs soon surfaced as residents found themselves jobless, and nowhere to spend their money – if they had it. One of the most successful retail districts in D.C. was destroyed. Most of the lost jobs belonged to black residents. Poverty set in. Crime followed poverty. And crime pushed out businesses and residents who could afford to leave. Business owners found it difficult to hire and retain employees. They feared working in such a dangerous environment. Insurance for crime and fire skyrocketed and was beyond the reach of many merchants. The conspiracy of impacts quickened the losses.

Bobby witnessed the following decades and saw the depth of decline as businesses shuttered their doors and residents moved to the suburbs. Meanwhile, back in Michigan I was learning valuable life lessons as the demise of H Street took hold. My fear of black people and the violence I associated with them came into sharp focus at a basketball game. We were playing in a tournament in Grand Rapids – the big city as viewed from our cornfield bastion. A mysterious force transfixed us as we looked over at the opposing team. They were all black. I was not comfortable, maybe even afraid. I had...
never faced race - it was all talk before that moment. The tension on our faces was obvious to Coach Keith Grannis. As we huddled before the opening tip-off, Coach Grannis uttered the first words that began to break down the years of cultural and racial dysfunction that shaped my life, “They are basketball players just like you. They want to win – just like you. This is just another game.”

My perspective on race expanded in the 1980s while the view down H Street grew darker. I attended college at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. Blacks were represented at only a slightly higher ratio than my hometown. But my college experience as well as my career in the Coast Guard taught me to judge people based on their character and merits, not where they come from or the color of their skin. There were times when my development took leaps forward. It usually involved unforgettable pain.

A good friend called out my racist upbringing in one indelible episode. Craig Gilbert was my Swab Summer roommate. Swab Summer is the Coast Guard Academy version of boot camp. Craig was a good friend and did his best to help me learn to sail so I could impress my high school sweetheart when she visited. It was a sweltering hot day on the banks of the Thames River in Connecticut when I let one of the racial slurs of my youth slip.

It has been many years, so the exact words escape me. But the conversation went something like this. Me, referencing a fellow cadet who had just walked by: “Did you see the nigger butt on him?” Craig looked at me in disbelief and said: “What? What do you mean by that?” Already feeling I may have crossed an unknown boundary, I nervously
replied: “You know, it’s like a platform you can set things on.” I don’t recall Craig’s next words, but I can tell you they were not delivered gently.

Craig has an uncommonly quick wit, a sharp tongue, and a moral compass that points true north. I felt the impact of gale force winds as he verbally dismantled me for the indiscretion. I had disappointed a friend. I was sickened by the rebuke and my own insensitivity. It sticks with me to this day.

By the late 1990s, the neighborhoods surrounding H Street began to recover as affluent young people abandoned the suburbs in favor of the convenience offered by city living. It began on Capitol Hill and gradually radiated outward. The “transitional” zone quickly crept up on the South side of H Street. The neighborhood was emerging from a dark time, but my demons were still hard at work.

In 2004 I was sitting in a conference room with the Chief of Staff of the Trinidad and Tobago Defense Force. I was the only white person at the table. Whatever racial issues I still harbored could not be ignored or tucked away for later internal debate. I was working at the U.S. Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela with responsibility for the Eastern Caribbean. Meetings like the one with Brigadier Ancil Antoine in Trinidad were routine. I was completely immersed in cultures unlike my own – seemingly light-years from the days of sitting on a tractor in Michigan. Unlike the formative moment on the banks of the Thames River with Craig Gilbert, the impact was subtle. It was a gradual process rather than a significant emotional event. I worked in the unfamiliar Venezuelan culture daily and traveled to the islands each month. As time passed, I saw less color and language distinction. More and more I saw people rather than colors or stereotypes.
I left Venezuela, retired from the Coast Guard, and moved just a block off H Street in 2007. My wife and I bought our home on the sharp edge of the transition zone. And it was still not safe. In the three years following, our house was robbed three times, and my son’s scooter was hacked off a post and stolen. But the neighborhood was changing quickly. New businesses began to sprout on H Street at a dizzying pace. Homes were sold and renovated. Like the houses being flipped, the race and income demographics inverted. Crime steadily decreased.

My conversations with Bobby started with deep philosophical musings over Washington football. Soon we were talking about the history of the neighborhood, the 1968 riots, the decline of the neighborhood, and the ongoing gentrification. I knew little of the history. It was fascinating, and I paid close attention. It was then that I realized I was a gentrifier – a concept I found only vaguely familiar. Not only am I a gentrifier, but my presence – just being here – is affecting the culture and fabric of the neighborhood. My influence, and that of other like me is tied to economics, race, and the history that brought us to this point. Both my history, and that of H Street.

Just as my racially disturbing upbringing in the 1960s that shaped my life for decades, the H Street of today is defined by the 1968 riots. I have changed, and so has H Street. H Street and the surrounding neighborhoods are on the rise. However, our parallel growth has diverged. Mine was on a slow but steady path of growth as I worked through issues of race. As H Street rises from the ashes, the culture of the neighborhood is shifting and many long-term residents can no longer afford to live here. I cannot reverse the economic trend and climbing cost of the neighborhood. However, I can exercise
compassion and empathy for those who remain. I can adjust to the emerging culture rather than impose on it. I can be a good neighbor.

Not everything I learned as a child growing up in Michigan put me on a course of lifelong recovery. Many of the lessons from my youth help me understand the H Street neighborhood and ways I can support the historic cultural identity.

My parents, teachers and coaches taught me the value of hard work, and more importantly how to work with others. My grandfather was a model of integrity. My community showed me the virtues of a simple life…something not well understood inside the D.C. beltway. My mother insisted on good manners. My grandmother commanded respect for elders by the calm force of her presence. My Aunt Esther showed me kindness and the virtues of a sense of humor. And working in the fields that guarded my town left a lifelong appreciation of creating something with my bare hands.

Bobby tells me of similar people from his childhood. The neighbor that corrected him when he was out of sight from his parents. The coach that taught him not only how to play, but how to live. His brother that he always looked up to. His teachers that exposed him to a bigger world than his neighborhood.

H Street was built on the backs of honest, hardworking people. It was decimated in a moment of passion. It is being rebuilt by the deep pockets of wealthy investors and sweat of a new generation of residents who value urban diversity. The compassion of new residents will determine if the neighborhood culture thrives or disappears. My hope is to live up to the expectations of my neighbor Bobby when he said: “You will grow with the neighborhood, and the neighborhood will grow with you.”
The final chapter of H Street revitalization is yet unwritten. “It’s not yet fully baked” is something I hear from my neighbors – both black and white. Like H Street, my story is not yet done. I have a lot to learn and experience. I would be very disappointed if my growth ended with the last period of this story. For both H Street and me, let’s hope it’s as good as my mother’s cherry pie when we pull it out of the oven.
Conclusion

This project examined the question of how the H Street corridor evolved in the aftermath of the 1968 riots, how gentrification affected the residents who remained in the neighborhood, and the cultural impacts on newcomers that arrived beginning at the turn of the century. The 1968 riots were a turning point for H Street and the surrounding neighborhoods in Northeast Washington, D.C.. The devastation ushered in a period of decline and criminalization that lasted over 30 years. White and black residents who could afford it left the city for the safety of the suburbs.

The declining population mirrored the declining conditions of the neighborhood. In 2000, another turning point was reached as people returned to the neighborhood. However, the economic and racial demographics of new residents were different than those that departed. The new residents were mostly white, young, and affluent. The neighborhood quickly became racially and economically diverse.

This project examined the personal impacts experienced by people in a neighborhood undergoing rapid demographic and cultural change. The message of the project is that of increasing sensitivity to the complex perceptions and interactions in a racially and economically diverse neighborhood.

The narrow focus of this project leaves many unanswered questions regarding gentrification, particularly the question of displacement of poor residents. The research cited in this thesis suggests displacement is not as widespread many believe. However,
there is little doubt that it occurs, and for those who are affected, studies mean very little. With this in mind, I offer a number of questions that address the issues of displacement, cultural conflict, and community planning. Is anyone “responsible” for displacement, and if so, who? Did black residents leverage the value of their homes and move elsewhere? Were they compelled to leave due to an escalating tax burden and foreclosures, or did the shifting culture make them feel unwelcome? Who defines the vision of the future for a community? How is this expressed? How are the voices of community groups and the under-represented accounted for during the process of gentrification? Are they assimilated or excluded? What is the role of public policy with regard to not only the principal impacts of gentrification, but second and third order effects including unintended consequences such as cultural conflict?

Each of these questions are relevant for the neighborhoods surrounding H Street, Northeast in Washington, D.C. They are also relevant for neighborhoods across the country as the convenience and amenities of city living draw more and more people from the suburbs. The recommendation of this project was best stated by a prominent character in the documentary film produced as part of this thesis. Robert Poole gave me a valuable piece of advice when he said: “Be yourself. Don’t be arrogant. You will grow with the community, and the community will grow with you.”

**Figure or Illustration References**

Figure 1: Structural Damage from the riots.

Figure 2. Resident Population and Jobs in D.C. 1950 to 2012.


Figure 3. Heal H Street Website Landing Page


Figure 4. Screen Shot of Heal H Street Documentary Film on Heal H Street Website


Figure 5. Screen Shot of Narrative Essay "Not Fully Baked" from Heal H Street Website (first page of essay)


Figure 6. Screen Shot of Audio Stories from Heal H Street Website


Figure 7. Screen Shot of "About" Section and Community Engagement Scrolling Images from Heal H Street Website


Figure 8. Screen Shot of First Image in the Image Gallery from the Heal H Street Website


Figure 9. Screen Shot of Landing Page from CraigCorl.com (Linked from Heal H Street Website)


Figure 10. Screen Shot from Heal H Street Website with Images of the Community Engagement Event

Appendix A: Heal H Street Project Website

The Heal H Street project website publicly presents the products of this thesis with the exception of the research and visual review components. The URL for the site is www.craigcorl.com/healhstreet. The site is comprised of eight components including a landing page that introduces the project; a 17 minute documentary film entitled “Heal H Street” (also available at https://vimeo.com/91935634); a narrative essay “Not Fully Baked;” three audio stories featuring interviews on the decline of the neighborhood, impacts of gentrification, and perceptions on new development coming to the neighborhood; an “About” section that briefly describes the motivation and process for the project; a scrolling image carousel presenting images from the community engagement element of the project; a gallery of images from the project; and links to www.craigcorl.com where other works by Craig Corl can be viewed.

Following are screen shots from each of the website components.
Figure 3. Heal H Street Website Landing Page

Figure 4. Screen Shot of Heal H Street Documentary Film on Heal H Street Website
Not Fully Baked

Bone-chilling cold settled on the first days of April, even by Michigan standards. I sat on the floor of the mushroom growing against my unappetizing open boots. I wore them vividly and I was losing the battle. Folding metal doors invited to frayed black rubber — one of the classics broken and hanging loosely. The boots were far from being a fashionable statement, but they had a purpose. I was six years old in 1968 as I waged war with my boots. The mercury was creeping near 40 and I was anxious to play in the melting piles of winter jackets, and feed it to my life, was it normal? For all I knew, the whole world was heading out to enjoy the historically short spring we call a Michigan spring. And best of all, I would return to the warmth of our homes knowing one of my mother’s delicious cherry pies fresh from the oven, would be waiting for me.

Weather defines life for a kid growing up in Michigan. Frost covered grass in autumn turns to brutally cold winters with the indescribable lake-effect snow — the snow that keeps the landscape relatively white between the real snowstorms. If you cut your own firewood, it’s warm you were the provider of my father’s manilla. The bright white of winter fades to the brown rust of spring, and a finally relaxed by long summer days. Boots are discarded for bare feet, and snowshoes lead to rest as a home-take the watch. A childless and shoeless summer is the reward granted by the last day of school.

Weather is not the only defining characteristic of midwestern Michigan. I was too young to know it at the time, but my hometown of Howard City was defined by what south thirteenth much are what was. Other than a five and dime store, Stow Hardware, a library that would fit in the living room of most homes, a bank, a bus stop and a green field surrounded us so far as the eye could see.
Figure 7. Screen Shot of "About" Section and Community Engagement Scrolling Images from Heal H Street Website

Figure 8. Screen Shot of First Image in the Image Gallery from the Heal H Street Website
Figure 9. Screen Shot of Landing Page from CraigCorl.com (Linked from Heal H Street Website)
Appendix B: Community Engagement

The goal of this project was to gather the stories surrounding a defining moment in Washington D.C. history from the firsthand perspective of residents who experienced the 1968 riots, the decline of the neighborhood and eventual gentrification that materialized 30 years later. Gentrification means new restaurants, cleaner streets, less crime, and new services. It also means rising costs, loss of neighborhood icons unable to meet the needs of changing clientele, and a shift from mostly poor black to mostly affluent white residents. The result is a dramatic shift in the neighborhood culture – the underlying fabric that defines how people live together, communicate, and help each other. The project is intended to give present day residents context for the history of the neighborhood, and elevate sensitivity that gentrification, while benefiting many, detrimentally affects others. As a third prong, the goal of this project is to educate residents and policy makers on the effects of gentrification in other cities and locations experiencing similar cultural and economic shifts.

The audience for Heal H Street includes local current residents, past residents, policy makers, development organizations, and a similar set of interested parties in other cities in the throes of gentrification. For current and past residents, the project intends to advocate for a sense of respect for history, cultural change, and sensitivity for the people who not only do not benefit from gentrification, but are harmed by it. For policy makers and sister cities undergoing gentrification, the intent is to highlight both the benefits and
detriments of gentrification – encouraging a perspective that gentrification is a two-edged sword.

The community engagement component of this project included two elements; a public facing website, and a community premiere of the documentary film *Heal H Street*. The website was promoted via social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), local community blogs, and local community list servers. A community premiere of the documentary film *Heal H Street* was projected on the wall of a neighborhood home, just one block off H Street Northeast in Washington, D.C., on April 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2014. The event was well attended with approximately 30 local residents viewing the film and engaging in discussion following the screening. Figure 10 is a screenshot from the *Heal H Street* website showing images from the event.

![Figure 10. Screen Shot from Heal H Street Website with Images of the Community Engagement Event](image)

At the conclusion of the screening, lively discussion ensued. One of the people in attendance was an executive with the development company building the retail and apartment complex that will house a Whole Foods grocery store. He commented that the film presented a compelling story of neighborhood history and the impacts developments such as Whole foods have on the community. He expressed interest in making the Heal H Street project part of his company’s development. One resident who knows the feature character of the film, Bobby Poole, said “I had no idea that Bobby held these views and how we are impacting the neighborhood. I need to put more thought into this.” Finally, I
would like to mention the comments from a couple who are renting in the neighborhood. They told the story of renting with the intention of buying in the neighborhood. “Your film brought up some important points not only about the history, but how people live together. We will be including the message of your film in our decision to buy, and where to buy.”

Although the neighborhood screening of Heal H Street satisfied the requirements of this thesis, I am not yet done. The film will be entered in a number of socially responsible film festivals, and has already been entered in the DC Shorts Film Festival. Plans for additional screenings are also in the works including the Atlas (a performing arts center on H Street), a small theater owned by former D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams, Ava (a condominium complex), HR-57 (a jazz club on H Street), and Capitol Hill Towers (a retirement home in the neighborhood).
Curriculum Vitae

Craig Corl is an independent visual journalist based in Washington, D.C. who is passionate about telling visual stories. Broad multimedia skills support his commitment to telling documentary stories in the form most compelling and natural for the subject. His 10 years of visual production work are informed by extensive military, diplomatic, international, national security, leadership, and engineering experience. This wide-ranging exposure brings a unique perspective to his photojournalism, which is focused, visually strong, and cuts to the heart of important social issues.

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- Ph.D. Candidate (ABD), Environmental and Energy Management, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C.
- Bachelor of Science, Marine Engineering, U.S. Coast Guard Academy, 1984

Photojournalism Projects

- Heal H Street, Documentary Film, 2014; www.craigcorl.com/healhstreet
- Profile of a Buddhist Monk, Documentary Film, 2013; https://vimeo.com/73048204
- Profile of a Buddhist Monk, Ebook, 2013
- Blow Horn Use Dipper at Night, Documentary Film, 2103; https://vimeo.com/73585736
- Capital Culture, Photo Essay, 2013
- Burning H Street, Documentary Film, 2013; https://vimeo.com/65846618
- Boyz Klub, Music Video, 2013
- Kids Saving the Rain Forest, Documentary Film, 2013; https://vimeo.com/57399745
- Golf Drives Steve, Documentary Film, 2012; https://vimeo.com/55492096
• Raw Deal for P.A. Bowen Farmstead, Photo Essay, 2012

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