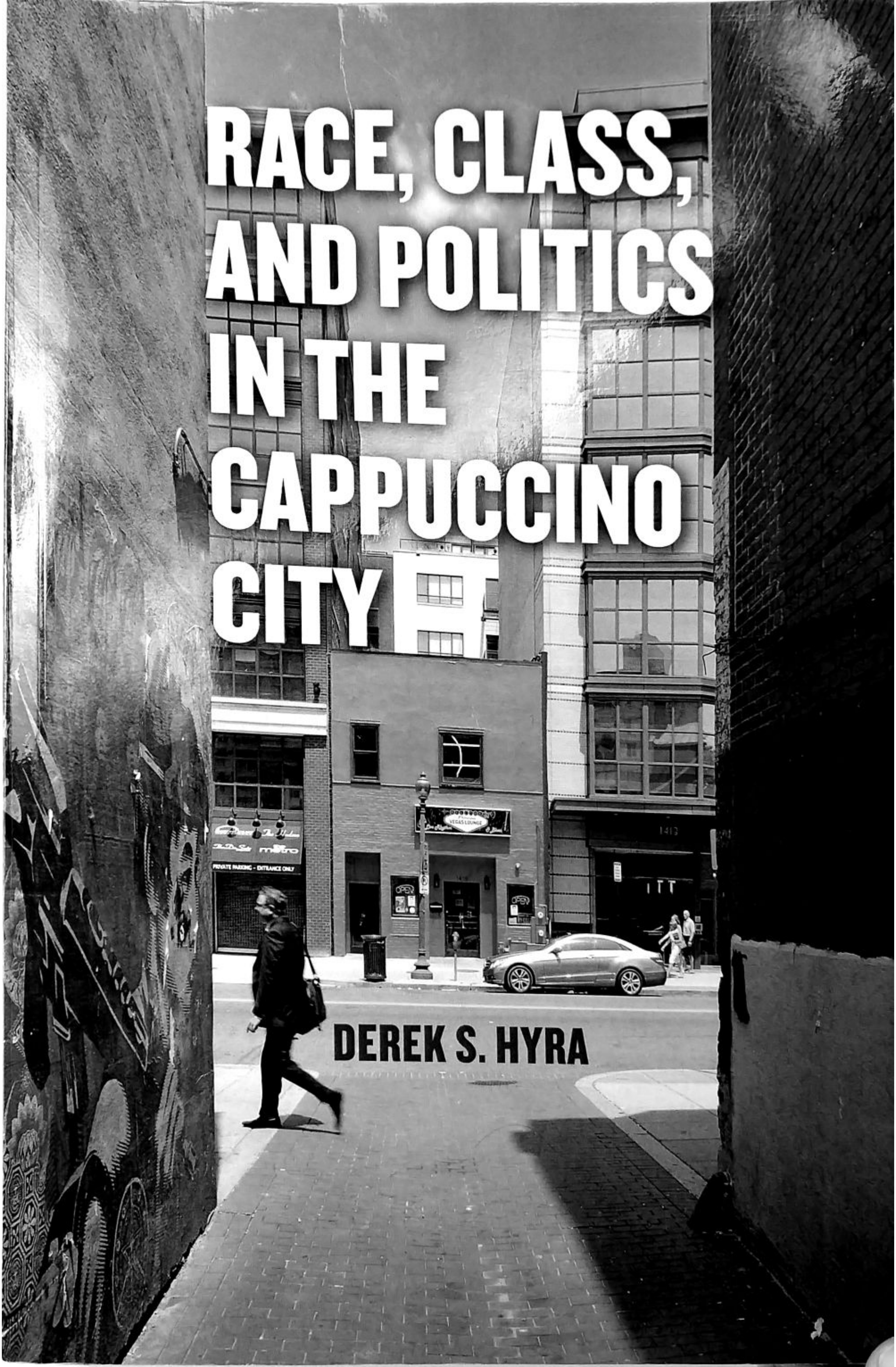
RACE, CLASS, AND POLITICS IN THE CAPPUCCINO CITY

DEREK S. HYRA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Black Branding

While DC's changing political economy and the associated back-to-the-city movement accelerated the revitalization of Shaw/U Street, Black branding is also important for understanding that community's redevelopment. Black branding occurs when versions of Black identity are expressed and institutionalized in a community's social and built environments. Examples include a National Register of Historic Places designation, a comprehensive Black-themed redevelopment plan, the establishment of Black history walking tours, or historically significant African American–labeled signage, artwork, buildings, restaurants, and entertainment venues.[1] Typically, a combination of these items occurs within a Black-branded district. This definition of Black branding coincides with several components of what Michelle Boyd calls a "racial tourist district," where "organizations create and display cultural symbols that assert the identity of the neighborhood."[2]

The use of Black historic preservation as a community redevelopment approach represents a significant change in US neighborhood revitalization strategies. Not long ago, an urban community's association with Blackness was mostly perceived as detrimental to its economic development. During the early twentieth century, those living in majority Black communities were unlikely to obtain mainstream home mortgage or small-business loans.[3] Furthermore, real estate brokers and speculators, through blockbusting, used the fear of an African American influx to provoke White homeowners to sell their properties below market value.[4] African Americans were perceived to cause neighborhood decline. As Boyd states, "Whites often avoided neighborhoods with black residents because of racist assumptions linking African Americans to crime, drugs, and lowered property values."[5] But nowadays in certain urban African American communities, neighborhood-based organizations, real estate developers, restaurant owners, and urban planners commodify and appropriate aspects of Blackness to promote tourism, homeownership, and community redevelopment.

Scholars suggest that urban ethnic-cultural districts can provide at least four types of potential benefits to low-income people and communities of color. First, cultural heritage efforts can stimulate economic development for low-income communities, which might benefit local residents if they are able to capture tourist dollars.[6] Second, the branding of racial/ethnic areas might make it more difficult for outside groups to claim these spaces through gentrification.[7] Third, culturally rich spaces can institutionalize memory in the nation's urban fabric of the struggles and triumphs of minority group members.[8] Lastly, ethnic groups that culturally brand their neighborhoods can "manage the stigma" by showcasing the fact that stereotypical portrayals in mainstream media outlets do not accurately characterize minority populations and the spaces they inhabit.[9]

While several studies document the use of, and influences on, racial branding in African American communities, few if any have investigated how Black stereotypes influence the Black branding process in a context of neighborhood racial transition.[10] For instance, in Michelle Boyd's investigation of Chicago's South Side, she argues that "Jim Crow nostalgia" by Black elite actors shaped the "uplift" narrative formed to stimulate the redevelopment of Bronzeville. She suggests that these elites structured that narrative, neglecting the community's poor, to entice the return of the Black middle class.[11] Further, as urban sociologist Mary Pattillo highlights, Black branding and gentrification can be "part of a racial uplift project," where "black middle and upper classes act as brokers, well-connected to the centers of elite power but grounded by their upbringings and socialization in more humble black surroundings."[12] Lastly, in a study of the Black branding of Atlanta's "Sweet" Auburn district, urban geographer Joshua Inwood details how an African American–led, government preservation effort conflicted with the desires of the district's Black business leaders. These studies are insightful, because they elevate class disagreements and tensions among African Americans in community contexts of redevelopment with little racial demographic transition. However, they tell us relatively little about interracial dynamics, and how Black stereotypes influence the Black branding process.

It is important to study the interracial dynamics associated with Black branding. Even in predominately Black communities, White capital is needed to stimulate redevelopment.[13] In addition, there is evidence that Whites, more than ever, are willing to move to urban African American communities.[14] For instance, some Black branded communities that previously experienced Black gentrification in the 1990s, such as New York's Central

Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant, have seen a significant influx of Whites in the 2000s.[15] Moreover, historically Black districts in Houston and Portland have redeveloped and become increasingly White.[16] Thus, White perceptions of Black communities are critical to the community change process. This chapter fills a gap in the existing Black branding and gentrification literature by detailing and explaining the role of racial stereotypes in the process of Black branding. Investigating Black branding and community change within a racially diversifying community can deepen our understandings of twenty-first-century race relations, gentrification, and Black urban experiences.[17]

Shaw/U Street's redevelopment provides an interesting case for understanding race relations and community change through the lens of cultural preservation and Black branding. During the 1990s and 2000s, local real estate industry representatives, restaurant and bar owners, and civic leaders, many of whom were White, promoted the community's Black history. The development of Shaw/U Street's Black brand coincided with significant property value escalation and the decline in the proportion of the area's Black population. The neighborhood, which was 90 percent African American in 1970, was just 30 percent Black in 2010, and yet much of its African American history has been institutionalized and preserved in a variety of ways. This chapter assesses how racial stereotypes influence Black cultural preservation branding in a community becoming less Black.

In this chapter, I tackle two questions. First, how are racial stereotypes related to Black branding? Second, what attracts outsiders, mainly Whites, to low-income Black spaces once negatively characterized as iconic ghettos? By investigating these questions, I attempt to advance our understanding of the relationship between race and redevelopment in a racially and economically transitioning, low-income African American community. I argue that desires to both minimize and reinforce iconic Black ghetto stereotypes influence the Black branding process. I use the term *living the wire* to help explain what attracts some White newcomers to live in an "authentic" Black branded neighborhood. *Living the wire* refers to newcomers' preferences for moving into an inner-city neighborhood because it has been branded as hip or cool, which, to a certain extent, is associated with danger, excitement, poverty, and Blackness: iconic ghetto stereotypes. While the marketing of aspects of Black culture as an attractable community asset may signify some improvements in American race relations, it also reproduces and maintains some traditional racial stereotypes, indicating that race remains a very powerful and complex dynamic in shaping contemporary urban environments. This chapter suggests that consumption explanations of gentrification have some merit, as the cultural tastes and preferences of its newcomers have shaped Shaw/U Street's redevelopment patterns.

Connecting the Dots: Race, the New Economy, and the Search for Authenticity

The past two decades have provided some signs that Americans are becoming more comfortable with people of other races and ethnicities. The elections of President Barack Obama provide one indicator of this; additionally, survey research suggests a great affinity for those of other races and ethnicities. In 2007, nearly 80 percent of all ethnic/racial groups had favorable ratings of one another.[18] Interracial and interethnic marriage rates have also increased. The interracial marriage rate more than doubled, from 6.7 percent to 15 percent, between 1980 and 2010.[19] Moreover, metropolitan neighborhoods are more racially integrated than any time in the past eighty years.[20] Some scholars argue that this accumulation of evidence suggests we are moving toward a postracial society in which skin color is increasingly less important.[21]

Other scholars, despite evidence of improved race relations, suggest that discrimination and negative stereotypes of African Americans have not greatly diminished.[22] Social psychologists such as Adam Person, John Dovido, and Samuel Gaertner note that White racism has fundamentally shifted from blatant to aversive racism, where prejudices "get expressed in subtle, indirect and often rationalizable ways."[23] Furthermore, sociologist Elijah Anderson claims that while race relations have improved, there is a persistent stigma placed on African Americans because of stereotypical connotations of the iconic Black ghetto. He argues that the common image of the Black ghetto is of an "impoverished, chaotic, lawless, [and] drug-infested" area. Due to this powerful and persistent stereotype, Anderson maintains that African Americans striving to attain middle- and upper-class status in American society must work extremely hard to "distanc[e] themselves from the ghetto and its image."[24]

US race relations have shifted within the context of a changing national economic structure. As noted in chapter 3, the nation and to some extent Washington, DC, have moved from a Fordist to a postindustrial economic system, where knowledge production and services dominate and income inequality has grown.[25] At the high end of the wage distribution sits an increased percentage of the highly educated, high-wage, mobile labor force.[26] Urban scholars including Japonica Brown-Saracino, Richard Florida, Kevin Gotham, David Grazian, Richard Lloyd, Christopher Mele, Richard Ocejo, [illegible] authentic?

Frederick Wherry, and Sharon Zukin argue that mobile, high-wage knowledge producers crave a variety of "authentic" urban experiences.[27]

In some domains, stereotypical images of Blackness are strongly associated with such experiences. For instance, David Grazian explains how race is central for those individuals, primarily Whites, seeking the ideal blues club.[28] Grazian suggests that the relationship between authenticity and Blackness is based on persistent stereotypes. He notes that blues club locations and the race of their musicians are critical; those located in "slightly dangerous black urban neighborhoods" and featuring African American musicians are seen as most authentic. In the realm of the blues, "blackness connotes an extreme sense of authenticity."[29] He concludes that many White blues fans "often draw on very traditional stereotypical images of black men and women in their search for authenticity."[30] Grazian's research begs a consideration of whether persistent Black urban stereotypes and the search for authenticity influence the Black branding process in African American neighborhoods experiencing racial transition.

Whereas cities once focused their resources primarily on attracting jobs, by giving tax breaks to companies, for example, some scholars now suggest that cities are implementing policies to attract mobile middle- and upper-income populations with entertainment amenities rather than employment opportunities.[31] Terry Clark's entertainment machine paradigm claims that city politics are shaped more by consumer preferences than traditional growth machine actors: "Urban public officials, businesses, and non-profit leaders are using culture, entertainment, and urban amenities to . . . enhance their locations—for present and future residents, tourists, conventioneers, and shoppers."[32] As was seen in chapter 3, DC's politics in the 2000s heavily focused on creating an entertainment district downtown to attract newcomers.

Entertainment machines

Clark's entertainment-, amenity-, and consumer-based machine perspective also identifies "new rules of the game for consumption and politics" in a postindustrial city. He suggests that traditional social categories such as "class, region and ethnic background" are becoming less significant in predicting individual behaviors and policy preferences.[33] Clark proposes that entertainment machine–focused governments now implement consumer-oriented policies, which suffer much less from race, class, and gender biases compared with past policies executed by traditional growth machine cities.

*

One new consumer-oriented preference is for cities with racially diverse neighborhoods.[34] In response, many US cities are scrambling to signal diversity to potential urban consumers by constructing cultural tourist districts in Asian, Latino, and Black communities as places of middle- and upper-class residence, entertainment, and shopping.[35] This chapter investigates aspects of Clark's entertainment machine perspective by exploring whether racial considerations, in particular racial stereotypes, influence the primary developers, sellers, and consumers of Black branded neighborhoods. However, rather than coining DC an "entertainment machine," it is a "Cappuccino City," where race, in the sense of both minimizing and reproducing Black stereotypes, is critical to understanding why the formerly dark ghetto now entices some upper-income White residents.

Constructing Black Narratives and Fighting Racial Stereotypes

While some Black cultural branding initiatives are spearheaded mainly by African Americans, much of Shaw/U Street's Black historic preservation can be traced to one of DC's premier preservationists: Kathryn (Kathy) Schneider Smith, a middle-aged White woman.[36] Smith, a District resident since 1965, is the founding editor of the journal *Washington History* and former president of the Historical Society of Washington, DC. She also founded the DC Heritage and Tourism Coalition, an alliance of over 230 arts, heritage, and community organizations, which in 2003 became Cultural Tourism, DC.[37] Through these institutions during the 1990s and 2000s, Smith vigorously worked to preserve certain aspects of the capital's history in an attempt to draw millions of DC tourists from the national monuments to the city's diverse neighborhoods.[38]

Smith strove to educate DC visitors on essential city history apart from the monuments on the National Mall. She wanted people to know that DC and its neighborhoods have a distinct and worthy past. She believed that to fully understand the city's history, one had to know its Black history. For most of the twentieth century, Shaw/U Street had been Black Washingtonians' cultural and economic hub; thus, one had to become familiar with this community's past in order to fully understand DC's Black history.

For over fifteen years, Kathy Smith was intimately involved in a number of Shaw/U Street historic preservation projects. In 1994, she collaborated with the African American–directed Thurgood Marshall 12th Street YMCA and Marya McQuirter, an emerging African American scholar of American history, to document both the Y's and the broader community's history.[39] These efforts helped earn the Y a place on the National Register of Historic Places.[40] This history project eventually expanded, becoming *Remembering U Street*, a temporary public art installation of community history.[41] Along with that exhibit, in 1997 Smith created the Duke Ellington's DC bus tour,

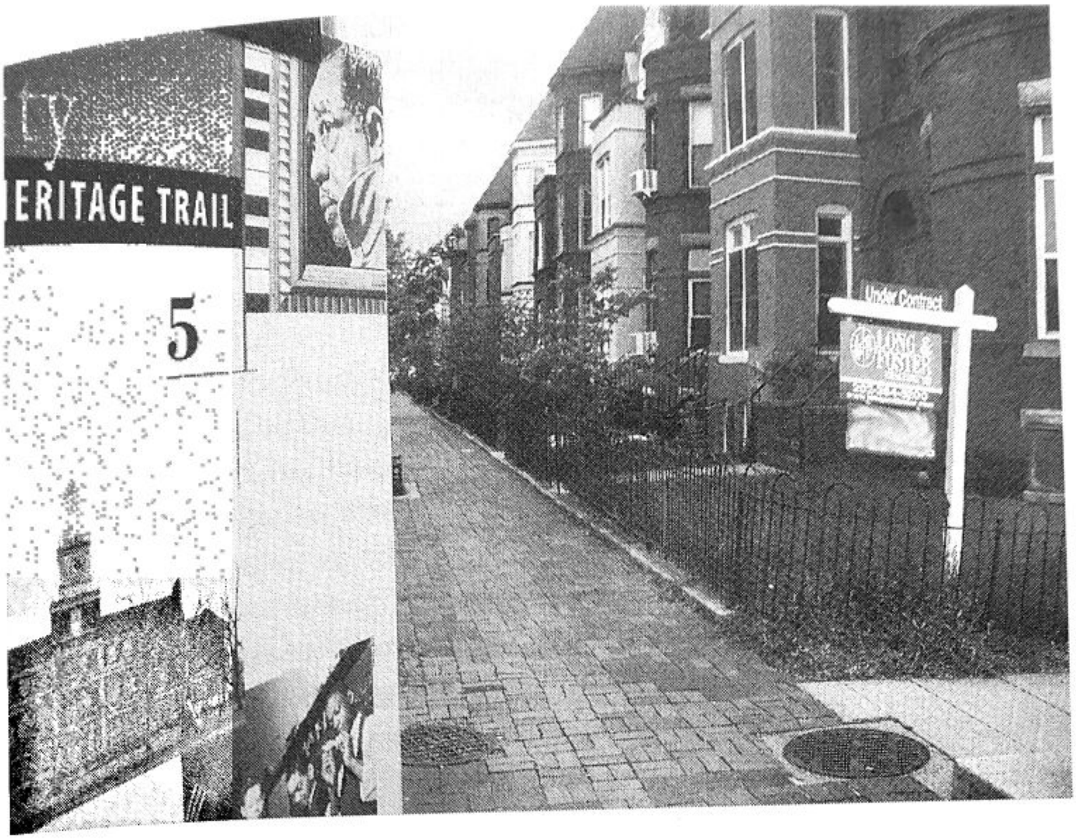

Figure 10. Black Heritage Trail sign.

which eventually morphed into a guided walking tour, Before Harlem, There Was U Street.[42]

Kathy Smith's cultural preservation work garnered her and the community local and national recognition. In 1999, she was a lead consultant on a Public Broadcasting Service documentary special, *Duke Ellington's Washington*, which prominently featured Shaw/U Street's Black history. In 2001, the detailed Black history Smith presented on her guided bus and walking tours was permanently institutionalized in the community's street infrastructure through Cultural Tourism, DC's work. The coalition obtained federal and city funding to install a series of large, permanent, billboard-like sidewalk posts displaying information about the area's Black past (fig. 10).[43] These posts, scattered throughout the neighborhood, make up two city-endorsed, self-guided walking tours: City within a City: Greater U Street Heritage Trail and Midcity at the Crossroads: Shaw Heritage Trail. In 2003, Cultural Tourism, DC collaborated with the 14th Street Main Street Initiative to further showcase the community's past by having selected commercial establishments display historic photos of prominent local Black institutions.[44] A year later, the preservation of the community's Black history gained further momentum when the DC Office of Planning released the "Duke [Ellington]

Plan," which laid out the city's comprehensive effort to fully transform much of Shaw/U Street into an African American cultural district.[45] The plan designated Cultural Tourism, DC the lead implementer of the cultural district. In all, thanks to Smith's steadfast efforts, it is nearly impossible to walk through Shaw/U Street without gaining some understanding of the community's connection to Black history.

Smith recalls in a conversation with me that when she began her Shaw/U Street cultural preservation work in the 1990s, she believed that "Shaw had one of the city's richest histories, but that the history was just unknown" to most people. She explains that part of the reason for the obscurity of the community's history was its insufficient documentation, but also that in the 1990s the community "felt dangerous"; thus, few outsiders ventured into the neighborhood to learn about it. To attract people to the community, she had to convince outsiders that the neighborhood was more than its short-sighted association with blight, drugs, crime, and prostitution. So her mission, in part, was to change the negative iconic ghetto stereotype associated with the community's more recent past.

The Creation of Iconic Black Ghettos: A Complicated History

Great migration & segregation

Reconstructing the narratives of African American ghettos can be difficult because of their multifaceted histories. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as part of the Great Migration, many African Americans fled the Deep South in search of a better life in northern cities.[46] They sought employment opportunities and the promise of fewer racial restrictions. However, in many receiving cities, restrictive covenants legally barred individuals from selling their homes to African Americans.[47] As a result, few urban communities were open to Blacks, leading to the emergence of racially segregated but economically integrated Black Belts, "cities within cities."[48] In these Black ghettos, lawyers, doctors, and other professionals lived near those who were unemployed and receiving assistance from social welfare programs.[49] These segregated, mixed-income neighborhoods raised and nurtured some of the nation's greatest musicians, artists, architects, academics, medical experts, and political leaders.

Shelley vs. Kraemer

In 1948, restrictive covenants were made legally unenforceable, and in the 1950s and '60s, many Black professionals left the Black Belts. Consequently, these Black ghettos became even more segregated and impoverished, because those with the least resources were unable to leave. Furthermore, federal and local policies steered massive public housing projects to these communities, institutionalizing concentrated poverty.[50] The extremely destitute and segregated conditions of the dark ghettos demonstrated that "America's Dilemma" continued in the 1950s and '60s.[51]

The deprived conditions of the dark ghettos created the nation's worst urban riots.[52] In the aftermath of these riots, between 1970 and 1990, circumstances in many Black ghettos grew even worse. Deindustrialization, disinvestment, Black middle-class flight, government cutbacks in social welfare spending, crime, and the rise of single-parent households are some of the explanations for this decline.[53] As businesses pulled out of these ghettos, they were replaced to some extent by an informal economy, most noticeably the drug trade.[54]

In the 1980s and '90s, the drug and gang activity in Black ghettos contributed to the stereotypical images of the iconic ghetto. Dangerous urban wastelands of abandoned buildings; uncontrollable, dangerous Black men; "thugs"; lazy, undeserving welfare queens who were unable to look after their children; and crackheads were among the images that went mainstream. In the late 1980s and early '90s, popular Hollywood movies, such as *New Jack City* and *Boyz n the Hood*, and rap groups, like the Geto Boys and N.W.A., exemplified the iconic ghetto and brought its inner-city images to suburban America.

While the images of drugs, despair, joblessness, and organizational deprivation are part of the Black ghetto's history, it is an exaggerated negative narrative.[55] Some residents of these neighborhoods during this more troubled time were middle class, and the majority of residents were not involved in the drug trade. Most were low- and moderate-income people struggling to survive and cope with concentrated poverty.[56] Yet because of persistent segregation and discrimination, the exaggerated negative ghetto narrative helps to maintain an association between Blackness and poverty. According to Elijah Anderson, the stereotypical iconic ghetto image is so strong that it implicates all African Americans. He suggests that African Americans who are not poor and do not live in the urban ghettos must go through great lengths to shed the piercing misperception of their being associated with a stereotypical image of Black inner-city life.[57]

Creating a Black Brand and Distancing from the Recent Past

For cultural historians, it can be challenging to accurately describe the complicated trajectory of segregated, African American communities that have produced both inspiring and terrifying outcomes. In Shaw/U Street, the "Black Broadway" entertainment narrative, with Duke Ellington as the celebrated centerpiece, dominates the reconstructed Black brand. This narrative embellishes the community's heyday, roughly between 1920 and 1940, when it was a segregated, mixed-income space.

The Greater U Street walking tour's written guide, coauthored by Kathy Smith, opens with the following:

> Until 1920, when New York's Harlem overtook it, Washington, D.C. could claim the largest urban African American population in the United States. The U Street area provided the heartbeat. It inspired and nurtured the elegance and the musical genius of Duke Ellington. In the 1930s and 1940s, the likes of Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey, Sarah Vaughn, Jelly Roll Morton, and native son Duke Ellington played on and around U Street, and hung out at after-hours clubs in a scene so full of magic that it was dubbed Washington's "Black Broadway."[58]

This Black branding material largely ignores the neighborhood's more recent past.[59] In the late 1970s and '80s, the Shaw/U Street reputation coincided with notions of the iconic ghetto, as it was known for containing "the heart of Washington's drug corridor."[60] Not only were drugs a major concern, but prostitution was as well. One of the community's earliest White "pioneers," Jackie Reed, in describing the community's Logan Circle area in the late 1970s, says, "In 1978, it was hell here. We had the house down the corner, Kingman Place, was an active house of prostitution. The house right next door to us became a house of prostitution. . . . I never saw much drugs. I just saw women and men going in and out. . . . It was just awful! Twenty-four hours a day! Cars coming down the street honking. 'Hey, baby!' you know. It was just awful!"

Black Broadway

The creation of the Black Broadway narrative was largely shaped by the desire of internal and external community actors to fight certain negative iconic Black ghetto stereotypes. Kathy Smith insists that the Black Broadway narrative came "from the community." During her cultural preservation research, she held several community forums and heard stories about the neighborhood from seventy-five mainly long-term residents. According to Smith, most community meeting/focus group participants were in their seventies and eighties; they told "how they made it" despite persistent segregation and discrimination. Smith explained that the residents did not speak about the crime and the drugs of the 1970s and '80s; rather, they shared their stories of "achievement" and "uplift." In this way, internal community forces were distancing the neighborhood's newly created brand from the stereotypical image of the ghetto.

The Black Broadway and racial uplift themes in the Shaw/U Street branding are similar to what Michele Boyd found in the Bronzeville neighborhood on Chicago's South Side.[61] Boyd highlights that one of the main goals of constructing Bronzeville as a Black racial cultural district was to change outsiders' negative perceptions of the area. She claims that Bronzeville's "neighborhood leaders were acutely aware that achieving their economic and political goals would require them to transform prevailing ideas about people as well as place."[62] She argues that to fight negative neighborhood perceptions, "supporters deliberately reconstructed the neighborhood's black history" into a rise-and-fall narrative.[63] As in Shaw/U Street, Bronzeville's reconstructed Black narrative is one of uplift and achievement in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s, followed by a prolonged period of decline. Boyd states, "This narrative of achievement and decline helps sell the neighborhood by imbuing its residents with heroism and historical significance."[64] The heroism motif partly distances the neighborhood's association with its poor and iconic ghetto images by "obscur[ing] the existence and contributions of average black citizens [and] attribut[ing] racial accomplishments to the miniscule black middle class."[65]

Although internal Black preferences to fight racial stereotypes helped shape Shaw/U Street's Black Broadway narrative, Cultural Tourism, DC staff also played a critical role. The organization wanted to market the community to outsiders. To do this, it presented a safe, simplified, noncontroversial community narrative. Smith notes that Cultural Tourism, DC was trying to tell and sell the neighborhood's history to outsiders that "didn't appreciate African American culture."

Because the neighborhood's history as presented by Cultural Tourism, DC was so sanitized, some critics said, "Where're the prostitutes? They were here during the 70s and 80s."[66] Others would ask about the absence of the 1960s history of protest politics, through which civil rights leaders such as Walter Fauntroy, Stokely Carmichael, and Marion Barry organized the neighborhood. Smith lived in DC's Capitol Hill neighborhood during the 1960s and knew of the protest politics stemming from Shaw/U Street, but says it was difficult to tell that story, as well as the more recent story of the proliferation of drugs and prostitution in the neighborhood. She rhetorically asks, "How do you talk about tough things? This wasn't the way to start a public history of Shaw." She speaks about how challenging it was to get funding to communicate a politically charged neighborhood story, noting that her major Cultural Tourism, DC sponsors were the DC Chamber of Commerce, the Humanities Council of Washington, DC, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. She realized that some of these funders were not interested in communicating a comprehensive history; they wanted a public narrative that would attract development.

The selection of particular parts of Black history to fight stereotypes, market a community to outsiders who might not appreciate Black culture, and receive funding for neighborhood development can be problematic. One of Smith's African American preservation partners, Marya McQuirter, who helped with the research for the 12th Street Y, the public mural installation, and Greater U Street Heritage Trail, says that the rise-and-fall narrative of the walking trail was something that "I totally disagreed with." She explains, "So I was attempting to insert more poor and working class and tensions around gender and all these different things, but that's not the thrust that folks were interested in."[67] She mentions that intraracial class tensions and the presence of poor people were downplayed along with interracial relations and sexual orientation.[68] As she explains, "You could have narrated U Street as a place of cross-racial, cross-gender, cross-sexual interaction . . . cross-class interaction. . . . And then if you do that, then what does that do for the whole rise and fall narrative?"[69] By excluding references to the poor, Cultural Tourism, DC helped to distance the community from iconic ghetto stereotypes.

Simplifying history to market place.

Often, historic preservation initiatives choose what is perceived as the high point of the area's development. As cultural preservation expert Andrew Hurley states, "Highlighting a golden age helped legitimize a neighborhood's historic status. . . . Privileging the distant past at the expense of the recent past, however, robbed people of the ability to make connections to the present. . . . Those who possessed local roots were usually those whose own history was most closely intertwined with the era of decline, precisely the period that booster-oriented preservationists wanted to forget."[70]

Both internal and external preservationists wanted to minimize the decline period because it reproduced a stereotypical ghetto image they were trying to diminish. The desires of both some local residents and Cultural Tourism, DC staff to tell a marketable uplift story help explain Shaw/U Street's constructed Black Broadway narrative. In this narrative, entertainment is highlighted, while other community themes like interracial relations, intraracial class conflict, protest politics, prostitution, drugs, and poverty are minimized.

Some who have intensely studied Cultural Tourism, DC and its actions in the Shaw/U Street area claim that its work greatly contributed to the community's redevelopment and White takeover. Stephanie Frank, in her master's thesis on tourism and gentrification in that neighborhood, argues that the "role of historic preservation and cultural heritage activities in the

Greater U Street neighborhood is a revanchist one. The efforts guised as those meant to preserve the neighborhood have instead put into motion the refashioning of the former 'heart of black Washington' into a white middle-class neighborhood." She maintains, "The white middle-class claiming of the Greater U Street neighborhood is aided by CT/DC's [Cultural Tourism, DC] efforts."[71] Kathy Smith remarks that some residents said to her, "You told our history and made the community look good"—which led to its gentrification.

While some scholars might claim that Smith's cultural preservation efforts contributed to a White takeover of Shaw/U Street, others point out that Black branding should protect a race district from gentrification.[72] According to Michelle Boyd, "As entertainment and culture industries rely increasingly on images of racial difference and urban culture, the populations that supply those images are included, rather than excluded, from those economies. By the same token, racial tourism offers the opportunity for marginalized populations to remain in their communities, to cultivate community pride, and to participate in the benefits of economic regeneration."[73] In Chicago's Bronzeville, the neighborhood Boyd studied, the Black branded community stayed, for the most part, Black—but this did not happen in Shaw/U Street.

Shaw/U Street's Black branding work occurred as the community was transitioning from Black to White, a context complicating the Black history preservation effort. Smith reached out to the community grassroots organization Organizing Neighborhood Equity (ONE DC), which has relationships with many in the neighborhood's lower-income African American population, to partner on the Black history tours. The idea was to have low-income, long-term residents actually give the tours. ONE DC's outreach coordinator and community organizer, Gloria Robinson, helped train the U Street tour guides for Cultural Tourism, DC. Robinson, who is African American, has had it rough at times. Maybe because of her life struggles or the fact the she grew up in the neighborhood, she, much like Dominic Moulden, ONE DC's lead organizer, is extremely committed to helping the neighborhood's low-income residents.

Robinson and I chat in ONE DC's conference room, where the motto "Gentrification Is a White Collar Crime" is written on a whiteboard. Gloria insists that the tours got to be uncomfortable, because most of the people taking part "looked like you, Derek." She recalls that the "tourists," instead of asking questions about the community's Black history, were more interested in learning about its crime rates, its transportation routes, and the quality of its public schools: "These are people looking to find a home! These aren't tourists." She says it felt awkward helping to support Black history tours to mainly White participants who clearly wanted to redevelop the area. Robinson began to resent these "tourists," and decided that it was best for ONE DC to stop sponsoring the tours.

Smith's Black history preservation effort was a strategy to reduce Shaw/U Street's iconic Black ghetto stereotype and to build an appreciation for its important history. The effort marketed the community to outsiders who craved an authentic neighborhood experience and appreciated the area's inspirational Black narrative. However, some newcomers were attracted to Shaw/U Street because of its recent past and authentic association with the iconic ghetto.

'an authentic neighborhood':

Living the Wire and Reinforcing Traditional Stereotypes

While aspects of Shaw/U Street's Black history and culture have been woven into the community's fabric and linked with the area's redevelopment, some newcomers are not convinced that its historic Black brand is directly tied to its current economic revitalization. Ben, a White newcomer and avid neighborhood blogger, says, "My observation is a lot of the newer residents particularly of younger . . . people, 30 and under, who are coming here, it's more commercial attraction than it is any value of . . . the cultural. . . . They may see some [of the community's] murals. They might know who people like Thurgood Marshall [are] but not what he did." Ben's comments reflect an understanding that not everyone is moving to Shaw/U Street because of its African American history.

The neighborhood has unquestionably become one of DC's hippest. The headline of a *New York Times* article on the community emphatically states, "U Street: The Corridor Is Cool Again." A *Washington Post* piece claims that along 14th Street, one of the community's principal commercial arteries, "hipster shops, edgy theater and eclectic eateries form Washington's new Main Street."[74]

The area's hipness is connected to its popular alternative performance venues, such as the Studio Theater, Black Cat, 9:30 Club, Bohemian Caverns, and Jazz Twin's, but it is also associated with the marketing of the community's Black history.[75] Catherine, a White newcomer in her early twenties, enthusiastically describes Shaw/U Street:

> U Street has almost always had a cool reputation, back to, like, in the 1930s and '40s. It was where, you know, the musicians came to play. I've been here for three years, and the difference between what it is now and what it was three years ago is so different, even between what it was a year and a half ago.

> So many different businesses [with a meaningful connection to the community's Black history] are opening. . . . There's Busboys and Poets to remember Langston Hughes, there's Eatonville that's named after Zora Neale Hurston. Um, there's Marvin [named for Marvin Gaye].

Catherine's remarks suggest that the commodification of certain aspects of the community's "heyday" Black history is tied to its redevelopment and reputation. She recounts the neighborhood's "cool reputation," based on its reconstructed Black Broadway era. She then speaks about some of the new trendy restaurants, Busboys and Poets, Eatonville, and Marvin, that pay symbolic homage to aspects of the community's Black history. She explains that this history and coolness attracted her to the neighborhood over other, "boring," sections of the city.

[illegible] of culture

American society is more integrated than ever, and for some scholars this is a signal of increasing racial and ethnic tolerance.[76] Today, when some people select a city in which to live, one critical criterion is its racial and ethnic diversity.[77] Some inner-city African American communities have now become hip to White America; whereas Whites once fled from Black communities, now the twenty- and thirty-somethings, like Catherine, flock to them to experience what they perceive as cool, hip living.[78]

Other newcomers are drawn to these areas to *live the wire*—a term that both references David Simon's successful HBO series *The Wire*, and describes a bundle of dynamics that draw young people to gentrifying inner-city Black neighborhoods. *The Wire* offers a compelling and complex structural analysis of urban inequality and inner-city Black life in Baltimore.[79] However, much like ethnographic inner-city accounts of the drug trade, such as sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh's *Gang Leader for a Day*, the series clearly sensationalizes drugs and urban violence.[80] I chose the term *living the wire* to reference and symbolize the association among entertainment, urban poverty, violence, and Blackness: all iconic ghetto stereotypes.

Living the wire.

Living the wire also refers to newcomer preferences to move into an inner-city neighborhood because it has been branded as hip or cool, which, to a certain extent, is associated with poverty and the violent past of inner-city Black neighborhoods. For some, the hip and cool notions of the neighborhood relate to its heyday history, as Catherine notes, but for others it relates to its status as an "edge" neighborhood once avoided by the city's mainstreamers.

Living the wire is a new form of urban slumming in which newcomers experience aspects of low-income neighborhoods, not by exploring them on bus tours or visiting them at night in blues clubs, but by actually moving into these neighborhoods for the ultimate "authentic" experience.[81] While living the wire has the potential to expose outsiders to the complex conditions of America ghetto life and may reduce stereotypes, racially diverse, mixed-income living environments can also reinforce traditional stereotypes of the iconic ghetto.[82] Hence, the concept of living the wire relates to the dual notion of desiring to experience firsthand the complex nature of the inner-city life but also wanting to be excited and entertained safely.

Notions of living the wire became apparent to me one December night in 2010, when I attended a fundraiser for one of Shaw/U Street's civic associations. The event took place at Town, a local gay dance club that opened in 2007. The two-story, twenty-thousand-square-foot club sports large, wall-mounted, high-tech video installations and a disco ball. The fundraiser was held in the early evening, before the night crowd gets going. On the first dance floor, groups of people, mainly White, gathered around cocktail tables set at its center. I listened in and participated in several conversations as I ate finger food and walked around, bidding on several silent auction items. I noticed that some people were talking about area crime in an odd way. They described neighborhood carjackings, shootings, and purse snatchings with laughter and jokes. They talked about crime as if it were something to brag about. It was as if they were describing a movie as opposed to having a serious discussion. It was as if they were proud to live in an area that was unsafe and edgy. It seemed that the neighborhood violence gave some newcomers to the area bragging rights and something interesting to talk about at parties.

During the auction, one White newcomer who worked for a socially responsible investment firm in a nearby Maryland suburb described a shooting that took place on her block. She explained that an elderly man was trying to stop a teenager from selling drugs there. In retaliation, the teen shot him in the head. The woman said that her minority neighbors held a candlelight vigil for the man; afterward, many celebrated his life by lighting up blunts of marijuana. The woman said she could not understand: if the issue was getting drugs off the block, why were her neighbors using drugs in tribute to the elderly man?

The conversations I heard were of the type that urban scholar David Grazian references when he claims, "Thrill-seekers compete among their peers for the bragging rights that accompany the experience of authenticity."[83] For some people, living the wire seemingly helps them "become authentic" by experiencing poverty and Blackness firsthand.[84] It also relates to aspects of what sociologist Andrew Deener discovered during the gentrification of the rougher sections of Venice Beach, California, where elite bohemia collided with the Black ghetto. One of his participants reported, "People are down here on Abbot Kinney [the bohemian corridor] and they're having their tea and coffee, and just kicking it and having a grand ol'time, looking at the little boutiques, and meanwhile, there's murder going on around them. It's stupid, ya know? But it was happening."[85]

The concept of living the wire revealed itself to me on several occasions. For instance, a new White resident was explaining what made Shaw/U Street exciting and cool: "I just knew after, like, certain nights when it's, like, really hot out on a Friday night and noticed people hanging out on the street outside a shop or whatever. You could tell certain nights that it was, like, 'OK, I'm gonna wake up in the morning, I'm gonna get an email, and someone's going to have gotten shot.'"

The term *living the wire* can be juxtaposed to *Living the Drama*, the title of urban sociologist David Harding's excellent ethnographic account of how poor neighborhoods influence negative outcomes for minority youth.[86] In it, Harding describes the ways in which violence and the fear of violence among boys living in impoverished areas of Boston greatly determine their life-course trajectories. According to Harding, "Violence and strategies for avoiding victimization loomed large in the lives of boys in poor neighborhoods. Whether it was where to go to school and how to get there, whom to befriend and whom to avoid, or how to interpret the behavior of the adult they encountered, many decisions could not be made without reference to the violence that casts a constant shadow over their lives."[87] *Living the drama* means to carefully navigate and cope with extreme forms of urban violence.

During the 2000s, crime drastically decreased in Washington, DC. However, in certain sections of Shaw/U Street, major violence still occurs occasionally.[88] In 2015, diners seated at P14's outdoor patio dove under their tables for cover when gunfire erupted nearby. Those shots killed a twenty-nine-year-old African American man who had grown up in the neighborhood.[89] The community has some remnants from its days as an infamous drug market. Moreover, it has some "hot spots" for robberies despite the redevelopment that has taken place.[90]

For Novella, an African American resident of the Foster Homes, a subsidized development about six blocks from Town, living the drama is an everyday occurrence. She says that even though the neighborhood has changed, a lot of gang violence and drug dealing still go on. Young men involved in crews, DC gangs, continue to wage territorial battles, and these disputes sometimes escalate into violence. Novella explains that if someone has a "beef" with a guy who crossed a turf boundary, he shoots at him. She claims that her generation used fistfights, not bullets, to settle disputes. But today, she says, guys shoot. Novella talks about crime and neighborhood violence as something to be feared, not joked about.

For several long-term African American residents, living the drama has had tangible consequences, such as the loss of a loved one. I met Curtis Mozie, known as C-Webb, while playing basketball at the Kennedy Recreation Center. Though in his forties, C-Webb has the stamina of a twenty-year-old. He would always want to play one more game when I could barely breathe after playing with him for more than an hour.

C-Webb has been documenting the violence that has plagued Shaw/U Street for decades. He records videos of the area youth as they grow up in the community, particularly the ones involved in the crews. He attempts to serve as a mentor and show them that running the streets usually leads to jail and/or death. C-Webb has compiled numerous videographic tributes to the many young men who have lost their lives to the violent streets near the Kennedy Recreation Center.

David Robinson, known as Day-Day, was one of the area's youth who lived the drama.[91] He grew up in the Washington Apartments, a subsidized housing complex a few blocks south of the Kennedy Recreation Center, and was raised by a single mother, Evon Davis; his father was rarely around. Although Evon, and several mentors, tried to keep David out of trouble, he struggled in school and lived by the code of the street.[92] He felt that to protect himself from the area crews, he needed to join one of them; so he joined the Seventh and O Street crew and carried a gun. In the ninth grade, David was arrested after a hallway shoving match with another area crew made its way out into the streets after school. A few years later, in 2009, David was shot at age seventeen after a fight broke out at a concert.

This near-death experience made David change his ways. He got a job at Home Depot, made a commitment to finish his high school degree, and got serious about his pregnant girlfriend. His goal was to finish school and be the father to his son that his father never was. Just before the birth of his son, David was shot by a group of young men who wanted his new $220 Nike sneakers. Instead of giving up the shoes, David had pulled his gun and was killed. Like many of the youth of Shaw/U Street, David lived the drama with serious consequences, despite the redevelopment that has taken place in this community and along the 7th Street corridor.

The Grit and the Glamour

Certain new upscale and exclusive neighborhood establishments, such as the Gibson, play off the community's edginess and the stereotypical image

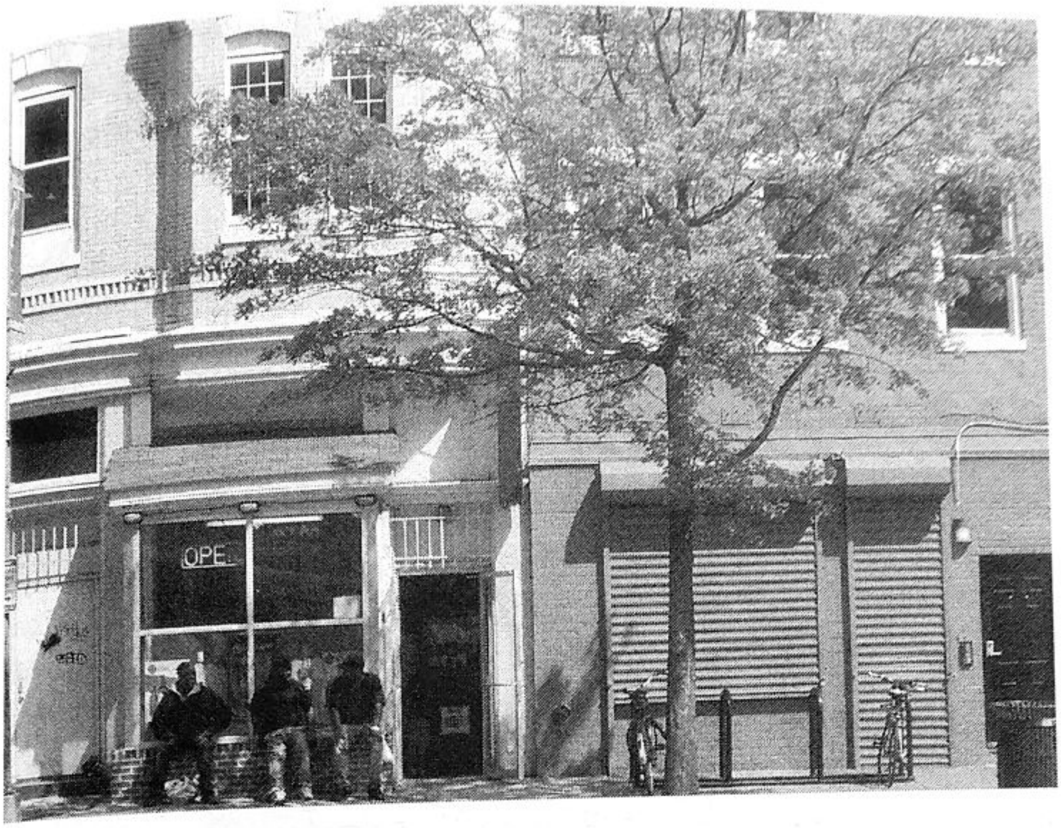

Figure 11. Outside the Gibson.

of the iconic ghetto. The Gibson is a contemporary, "hidden" speakeasy. It is located in a nondescript gray building that looks abandoned (fig. 11). There is no signage, and no street-facing windows on the first floor. All that can be seen from the street is a small, unassuming doorbell-like buzzer discreetly placed near a front door. When the buzzer is pressed, a stylishly dressed young greeter comes out. If it is early evening, you will likely get in; otherwise, you have to put your name and cell phone number on a waiting list. When a spot opens at the bar—this can take an hour or more, depending on the night—the hostess texts you. Once inside, the environment changes from the gritty exterior to a posh, retro 1920s-style speakeasy interior with a dark-wood-framed bar showcasing illuminated shelves of liquor, dim lighting, and mixologists serving signature cocktails for fifteen bucks apiece (fig. 12).[93] On any given night, it is not uncommon to see and hear political appointees talking over a few drinks.

Directly next door to the Gibson is a ghetto-style liquor store with Plexiglas separating the customers from the merchandise, much of which is fifths of liquor. On any given night, a group of older or middle-aged African American men hang out in front. Additionally, a nearby bus stop ensures frequent bursts of activity from people of color outside the Gibson.

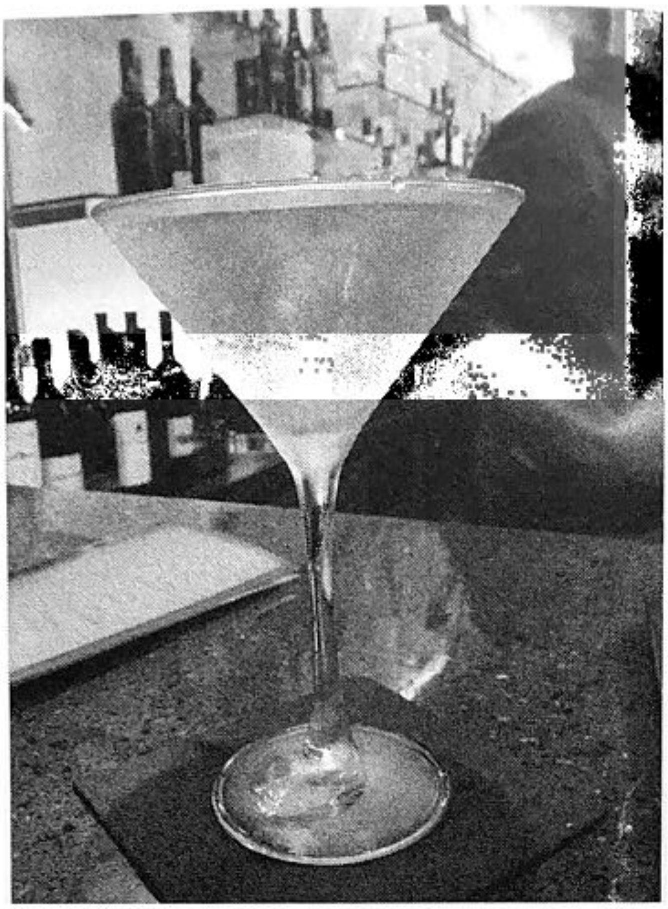

Figure 12. Inside the Gibson.

The liquor store's grit provides the perfect contrast to the glamour of the speakeasy. The juxtaposition of the Gibson, an exclusive, upscale cocktail establishment, to the grimy liquor store and a group of African American men on the street gives the speakeasy an ethos of hipness and edge based in part on a Black ghetto stereotype. All that is needed next to the Gibson to complete the iconic ghetto stereotype would be a storefront church.

The bar's White owners, Eric and Ian Hilton, deploy the trope of the iconic ghetto to attract resident tourists.[94] In describing how he and his design team came up with the concept of the Gibson, Eric remarks, "Our process starts with an exploration of atmosphere: what else is on the block, who lives in the neighborhood."[95]

This proximity of grit and glamour plays off the notion of neighborhood newcomers' preference for living the wire while it relates to the community's Black brand. The stereotype that the Gibson works off is that somehow a certain type of Blackness equals the authentic ghetto experience that certain customers, mainly White, seek. The Hilton brothers in Shaw/U Street have located their business where "stereotyped images of the city" give the Gibson its coolness and edge.[96]

The bar is one of DC's hottest, and its coolness, to a certain extent, is associated with an almost fabricated crime "hot spot." The Gibson uses imagery of an iconic ghetto where, as Elijah Anderson indicates, people are "both curious and fearful of 'dangerous' black people."[97] The men congregating in front of the liquor store next door and the faux-abandoned building that houses the Gibson provide the image people expect to see in the ghetto. Except in *this* gilded ghetto, studios rent for $2,300 a month and row homes sell for over $1 million.

Other local commercial establishments cash in on elements of living the wire. Some incorporate the neighborhood's African American history in a variety of ways, to make their places stand out and appear cool and attractive to a diverse set of middle- and upper-income customers. One of them is Busboys and Poets, a trendy restaurant, bar, bookstore, coffee shop, and performance venue all in one. As owner Andy Shallal (fig. 13) proudly and sincerely explains, Busboys incorporates a variety of African American traditions into its "DNA."

Shallal, an Iraqi American, describes the relationship between the Shaw/U Street community's past and Busboys and Poets, which was established in 2005: "This is historically a Black community. It was called Black Broadway . . . and I wanted to be able to bring that back in a way that I felt was

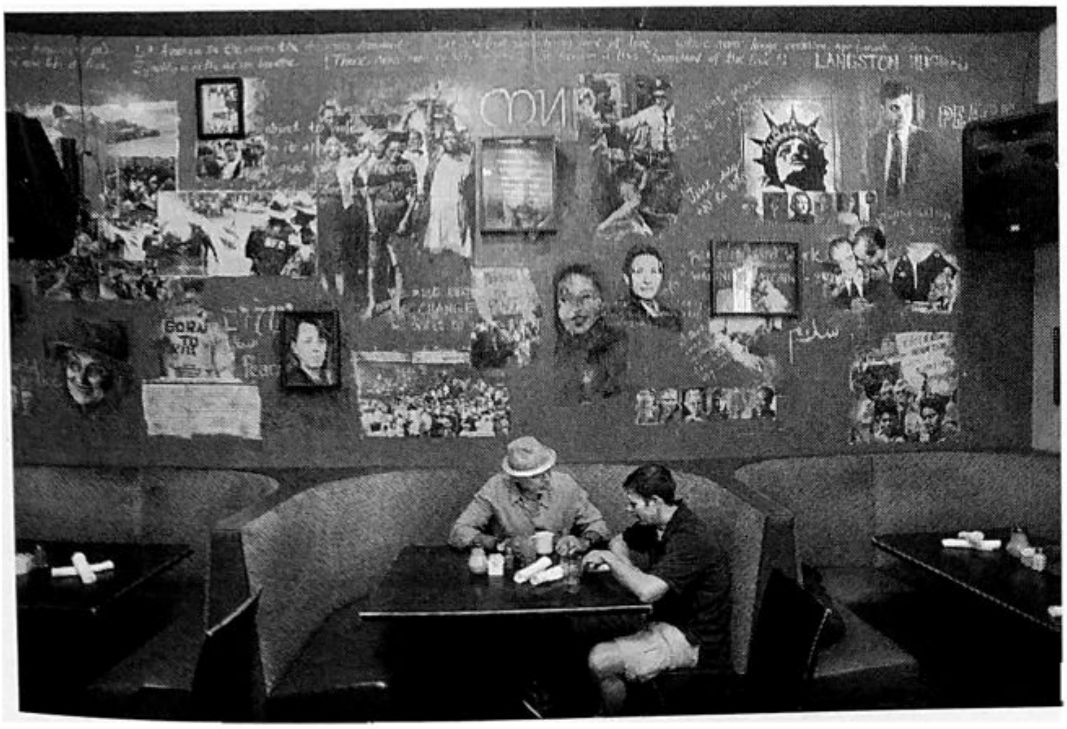

Figure 13. Owner Andy Shallal (*left*) and the author in Busboys and Poets' Langston Hughes Room (©Jim Stroup).

getting covered up by much of the changes that were taking place in this area. . . . And so we named this place Busboys and Poets in honor of Langston Hughes, who worked as a busboy while writing poetry in Washington, DC."

Not only does the name of Shallal's restaurant incorporate aspects of African American history, but the menu and performance programming do as well. Shallal explains:

> I went out of my way to be . . . more inclusive of African Americans. . . . The menu clearly had to be representative of things that the community liked. . . . Things like having catfish on the menu . . . represent a certain [kind of] hospitality. It is traditionally an African American dish. It is something that we happily make to say to the indigenous community here, which is mostly African American, that this is a place that speaks to them. Another part was the programming, which is really eclectic in its variety and mix. We have open mic here on a regular basis. . . . open mic in this area had a real strong tradition, strong history, mostly African American.

Shallal is clearly drawing on stereotypical notions of Blackness: catfish and spoken word as a form of protest politics.

A strong link exists between Busboys and Poets and a certain African American heritage and culture, but it is not just this culture that is important; the culture is tied to a specific Washington, DC, geography. In explaining why he opened the first Busboys near 14th and U Streets, Shallal expresses the connection between the neighborhood and his establishment: "It had to start here, because I wanted to establish the brand. I wanted to establish the Busboys and Poets idea, what it was about."

Shallal describes what the neighborhood was like before Busboys and Poets came in: "When we first moved here, there was the relief recovery center, which was right across the street here on the corner to us, which was an A[lcoholics] A[nonymous] center for recovering addicts and alcoholics. It was mostly Black men that belonged to that program. So . . . the whole time before we opened, there was a congregation of men at that corner." He noted, "The perspective of many is that there's a bunch of Black men on the corner, and there's only trouble that will go on."

Shallal recounts the racial tensions that arose when some of the new White condo owners perceived a threat across the street:

> So, we invited the director of the [AA] program to come and speak to the community here. We had a meeting right here in this room, where a few of the workers were here as well as some of the people who were involved with

> the program . . . talking about the program. They [the new condo owners] became the biggest advocates for the program because . . . it's better to have a bunch of Black men standing on the sidewalk trying to recover than a bunch of Black men that are drug addicts. You know, the people that used to be here.

Shallal and many DC residents know that the area where Busboys is located used to be one of the city's most notorious open-air drug and prostitution markets.[98] The community's difficult past, especially the area in the vicinity of Busboys that was the site of the DC riots of 1968, an open-air drug market, and then a recovery center, is part of what gives Busboys its edgy and hip brand while being associated with Blackness, poverty, and authenticity.

40s, MD 2020, and Lottery Tickets?

While both the Gibson and Busboys and Poets use traditional ghetto tropes along with other characteristics to fabricate their coolness, sometimes those living in or frequenting Shaw/U Street encounter more vividly ingrained ghetto stereotypes. Good Libations is a liquor store that some might describe as having a multiple personality disorder, but in fact it represents the neighborhood extremely well. It has some features of both a stereotypical inner-city liquor store and a high-end wine shop. A worn wooden counter and a large, three-inch-thick wall of Plexiglas separate most of the liquor and the sales clerk from the customers. The panel has a small revolving door that the clerk spins around to take your payment and give you your purchase. The merchandise behind the Plexiglas includes an array of vodkas, bourbons, and scotches. However, a variety of wines, from well-known regions like the Napa Valley, are not behind that wall. Near the unprotected wines are high-end beers such as a twenty-two-ounce of Chimay for $12.99. Refrigerators in the back of the store contain pricey microbrews in addition to twenty-two-ounce cans and bottles of Heineken, Miller Lite, Pabst Blue Ribbon, and other cheaper beers.

Ron is the store's African American owner. He tells me he keeps the Plexiglas because it signals to customers that they need to make their purchase and get out, not linger in the shop. He adds that it prevents some petty thefts.

Ron began the business in 2005, and says that as the neighborhood has changed, his customer base has also changed. When he began, his customers were 70% Black, 25% White, and 5% Asian and Hispanic. He says that now they are 60% White, 35% Black, and 5% Asian and Hispanic. Subdivided row houses once stood across the street, and their African American occupants were among Ron's regular customers. Now, he says, the row houses are either single-family homes or duplexes and are occupied by Whites. A set of his African American customers come from the Section 8–subsidized Washington Apartments nearby as well as low-income co-ops.

Ron's establishment caters to both lower- and upper-income alcohol preferences. He remarks that the new, higher-income White and Black populations are "buying more wine, more upscale spirits, and more of the craft beers. Whereas the Blacks who I guess were born here or who have been living here for a long time, the old-timers . . . still continue to buy the lower-level items." Ron explains that he likes variety, and so offers a wide selection of alcohol. He does note that his longtime Black customers occasionally call him a "sellout" for increasing the amount of "White people's wine." But it might not be the wine that upsets Ron's longtime Black customers so much as the fact that it is freestanding, while most of the other beverages are kept behind the Plexiglas barrier.

The city banned the sale of forty-ounce single-container liquor in 2008, but Ron stopped carrying "40s" before that. He got tired of how many younger White newcomers to Shaw/U Street were buying them:

> For some reason, I guess these kids have grown up watching videos or whatever, and now it's . . . This one White guy came in; he was just like, you know, straight White guy, glasses, everything. And he was, like, "Oh, you don't have any 40s?" And I thought he was trying to make a joke, because . . . he came in looking for forty-ounces, MD 2020, and lottery tickets. And I was, like, "Huh?" He goes, "Well, I'm going to a party." I said, "What type of party is this?" He told me, he said, "Oh, we're going to a 'hood party." And I'm just like, nah, nah, get out of here. I have no problem with 40s, but don't come in because you're trying to be stereotypical.

Ron explained that this incident occurred frequently enough that he just stopped selling 40s.

To a certain extent, the neighborhood's redevelopment thrives on the community remaining racially diverse or, more specifically, Black and edgy. It helps give the community its pulse, its vibe, its coolness—but this "construction of coolness" reinforces and perpetuates traditional stereotypes to some degree. Some Whites think it is cool to live in a racially transitioning, formerly low-income neighborhood and throw stereotypical ghetto-themed parties. The Gibson's edge is associated with its proximity to a stereotypical "inner-city" liquor store and the group of Black men that congregate outside it. Other newcomers talk about tragic neighborhood crime and violence as if they were describing a scene from HBO's *The Wire*. It seems that the sporadic violence is merely a community backdrop to some newcomers who move to Shaw/U Street, in part, for excitement, entertainment, and authenticity from living the wire.

In the neighborhood, a certain amount of poverty, blight, Blackness, and danger gives it its authentic, edgy brand, which in turn is associated with property demand and skyrocketing home prices. This is a mind-boggling turnaround from the times when these same characteristics would likely have been associated with substantial property decline. The concept of living the wire helps to explain part of this phenomenon, where certain iconic ghetto features provide the "authentic" neighborhood drama, a live reality show of sorts, sought by some White middle- and upper-income newcomers.

For some, this concept might conjure notions of 1920s urban slumming, yet something profoundly different is occurring.[99] Living the wire is just that. It's not simply visiting an area as a tourist or urban thrill-seeker; it is residing within a Black-identified space.[100] Where living the wire mirrors the slumming concept is in the fact that the thrill, the edge, the coolness, the Black brand, is based on preexisting Black ghetto stereotypes—Black men and women as entertainers, drug dealers, and lazy people hanging out on the corner. It also brings up images of Black people as the Other. The neighborhood is hip partly because it is perceived as a place to avoid because it was once dangerous.

Summing Up

The urban landscape is constantly shifting, and many African American iconic urban ghettos across the nation are being rebranded as hip, edgy, and historic areas for the consumption of Black culture. Some of these communities are experiencing Black gentrification, while others are becoming more racially diverse by attracting middle- and upper-income Whites. One common feature is that many of these low-income Black neighborhoods are using forms of Black branding to attract development.

There is no question that DC's Shaw/U Street neighborhood has an African American brand. Its streets are dotted with walking-tour signs describing the accomplishments of African Americans associated with the neighborhood's past. Several neighborhood roads are named after significant Black figures, and community murals depict important African Americans. Moreover, trendy new restaurants as well as luxury apartment and condominium buildings are named after African American literary and musical icons.

For some people, Black branding, and its association with neighborhood redevelopment, signifies racial progress. We have witnessed a major transition in the acceptance of Blackness. Black branding provides some evidence that we as a country appreciate and value elements of Black history. It was not long ago that many Americans feared the Black ghetto, and the majority of urban neighborhoods deemed Black were avoided. Today, historic Black neighborhoods are attracting a much more diverse population, and in some instances Black branding is associated with neighborhood redevelopment.

While the Shaw/U Street area's Black Broadway brand was shaped by multiple forces, one was the desire to reduce the community's negative iconic ghetto image. Decisions about having the rebranded image not be too Black, too poor, or too controversial were influenced by both African Americans and Whites in order to present a positive community image to outsiders. Oftentimes this external audience focus reinforces Black stereotypes, such as the one of African Americans as musical entertainers, clearly represented in Shaw/U Street's Black Broadway image; but it also relates to elite Blacks and other community stakeholders wanting to minimize negative African American stereotypes. The sanitized racial uplift image attempts to distance the community from iconic ghetto stereotypes.

Many historic Black communities are spinning a similar uplift and entertainment narrative regardless of whether the storylines are spun by Black-controlled local governments, elite Black residents, or White external elites, as in the Shaw/U Street case with Cultural Tourism, DC.[101] Much like Starbucks has commodified and exported a certain small Seattle coffee shop experience and McDonald's has duplicated a version of the classic American hamburger and fries around the world, Black neighborhoods are attempting to commodify a certain nostalgic Black history experience in cities around the United States.[102] By branding Black culture and mainstreaming the ghetto, we reduce some African American stereotypes, but at the same time we lose some complexity about how institutional racism contributed to creating the Black ghetto in the first place.

While Black and White preservationists work to counteract negative stereotypes of the iconic ghetto, some neighborhood newcomers are looking for authentic experiences based on their expectation that inner-city Black areas are dangerous and exciting. This iconic Black ghetto stereotype is associated with contemporary and hip, urban and grit. Real estate developers and commercial businesses have tapped into this valued "edge living" commodity and are selling it for a premium to those who can afford it. It is hard to conceptualize exactly what they are selling or what customers are purchasing, but part of the amenity bundle can be explained by what I have called "living the wire," which is based on preexisting stereotypical images of the iconic ghetto.

Living the wire refers to a notion of residing in a community that has an energy and an edge that distinguishes people who live in the inner city from those living in the "boring" homogeneous suburban and central city areas. Living the wire helps newcomers carve out their urban niche in the metropolis. They flock to historic Black neighborhoods to experience the thrill of viewing elements of the iconic ghetto.

While the fact that Whites feel comfortable moving to Black spaces might seem like racial progress, to a certain extent it is based on stereotypical portrayals of African Americans. Some newcomers move into African American communities based on a perceived association between urban authenticity and Blackness. The relationship between authenticity and Blackness is related to the stereotypical association of Blackness with poverty, danger, and excitement, which in turn symbolizes contemporary subtle racism. I consider this a form of subtle racism, compared to the past, when people would not move into a Black community due to blatant racism.

Harvard University sociologist William Julius Wilson uses the HBO series *The Wire* as part of his course on urban inequality.[103] One of his students, Kellie O'Toole, states, "People in society attempt to distance themselves from the 'other.' . . . 'The Wire' works against this idea by depicting the connection between mainstream and street culture. It shows that, while people sometimes think they live in different worlds, we are more alike than we are different."[104]

However, some newcomers to redeveloping ghettos who might be inspired by and appreciate elements of Black culture do not truly engage in the ghettos' complexity. The younger newcomers, the tourists in place, seem more concerned with consuming ghetto-inspired culture than connecting and identifying with those struggling with the ills of racism and structural inequality. The relationships among discrimination, institutional racism, and intergenerational poverty are not part of a narrative told to them in the community's rebranded story, nor are these relationships often addressed by newcomers when they engage in community politics.

Andrew Hurley explains that festive cultural districts often "discouraged visitors from reflecting deeply."[105] Few Shaw/U Street newcomers seriously contemplate the community's past to understand how the neighborhood was structured and how it produced concentrated poverty. Rather, iconic ghetto elements of poverty, crime, and Blackness are seen as exciting community backdrops. This situation reinforces Elijah Anderson's observation that "as the urban environment becomes ever more pluralistic and the veneer of racial civility spreads, a profound stigma persists, embodied ultimately in black skin and manifested in the iconic black ghetto."[106]

This is not the first study to highlight that certain people are drawn to urban areas that contain poverty and posh amenities. In his detailed ethnographic study of the redevelopment of LA's Skid Row, Bernard Harcourt states, "It is precisely that juxtaposition of high-end lofts and homeless beggars that gives L.A.'s Skid Row a trendy, urban, edgy, noir flavor that is so marketable."[107] In Chicago's gentrifying Wicker Park, Richard Lloyd notes that for upper-income newcomers, "sharing it with working class and non-white residents, even if personal interaction remains superficial, is part of their image of an authentic urban experience."[108] Lloyd explains that the newcomers' understanding of their neighborhood's rough past as infested with gangs, drugs and prostitutes "coincided with the bohemian disposition to value the drama of living on the edge."[109] Christopher Mele and Sharon Zukin claim that some middle- and upper-income New Yorkers find the close proximity of grit and glamour an "authentic" postindustrial aesthetic.[110] What all these scholars describe undoubtedly manifests itself in Shaw/U Street, and provides concrete evidence that consumer culture and the search for authenticity shape neighborhood development.

The influences of reducing and reinforcing racial stereotypes on Black branding processes have implications for theories of urban development and growth. Black branding and living the wire correspond to Terry Clark's entertainment machine theory.[111] Clearly, in Washington, DC, city officials are backing efforts to merge Black culture, entertainment, and diversity to form a commodity to attract twenty- and thirty-somethings to Shaw/U Street.[112] While the commodification of Black culture is part of Shaw/U Street's revitalization story, aspects of the community process, particularly the marketing of elements of Black culture, are shaped by a racial framework: reducing some iconic ghetto images while at the same time promoting and reinforcing others. Both Black and White understandings of the iconic ghetto and its association with Blackness relate to the construction, commodification, sale, and purchase of the community's Black brand. This finding supports Michelle Boyd, who states that Black branding "does not imply that race is insignificant: despite academic clamoring for its end, race remains important in the political life of African Americans."[113] Race is critical to both Black political life and the understanding of White consumer preferences, which are associated with neighborhood change in inner-city America.

Racial understandings are critical to making the gilded ghetto. What we see in Shaw/U Street is not the typical gentrification pattern but rather the past of the neighborhood fashioned as a "city within a city": its Black

Broadway heyday in the early part of the twentieth century and its more recent past as an iconic Black ghetto in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s are critical elements in marketing this community to newcomers. It is precisely the community's history as a Black ghetto that helps make it cool, hip, authentic, and attractive to upper-income, mainly White, newcomers.

My findings challenge the claim that Black branding can safeguard a minority community from gentrification and displacement.[114] In the case of Shaw/U Street, cultural preservation helped make the community "capital ready." Investments in rehabilitating buildings and constructing historic districts, murals, and signage are signals that the community is "tourist ready," but they are also signals to investors and "tourists" who desire to live the wire. Black branding does not ensure that the community can control its own destiny, nor does it predict Black control over a Black branded neighborhood. In Shaw/U Street, the rise of the Black brand correlated with significant decline in the number and percentage of Black residents, and an increase in property values. Some of the Black population decline was based on choice, and some on forced displacement caused by rising property values.[115] As Hurley claims, "It is one thing to assess a commitment to social diversity through preservation and public interpretation, quite another to prevent soaring property values from displacing existing residents or a least imposing hardship on those with meager financial resources."[116]

The concept of living the wire helps explain why mixed-income living is so difficult to implement or maintain, and why it is not producing the expected results in terms of racial and income mixing. Gentrification author Sarah Schulman states, "Mixed neighborhoods create public simultaneous thinking, many perspectives converging on the same moment at the same time, in front of each other. Many languages, many cultures, many racial and class experiences take place on the same block, in the same building."[117] However, if one population is living the wire and the other is living the drama, crime might be interpreted in very different ways, making it difficult to develop shared understandings and goals. As policy makers promote mixed-income living environments, we cannot assume that people moving into these environments understand community circumstances and events in the same way that long-term residents do. For instance, some newcomers might view the perception of crime as important to the neighborhood's hip identity, while others might view crime as detrimental to their life chances.

Positionality

This chapter demonstrates the importance of race in the process of Black branding and presents a plausible explanation for the arrival of some Whites in traditionally low-income African American communities. While interrogating Black branding and the influx of Whites in Shaw/U Street, this chapter generates more questions than it answers. For instance, by what specific mechanisms do cultural preservation initiatives lead to community revitalization? Moreover, at what population tipping point does the Black brand begin to fade? As noted in 2010, the Shaw/U Street neighborhood is only 30 percent African American, and it seems as if this percentage will only decline as the community continues to redevelop.[118] Will Shaw/U Street still hold on to its Black "authentic" identity if African Americans are no longer a sizable resident population? Lastly, how do newcomers in historic Black neighborhoods relate to the original residents?

In the next chapter, I examine how low-income African Americans and new White residents interact within this mixed-income, mixed-race community. As can be anticipated, racial conflict emerges, but race alone is insufficient for understanding the internal dynamics of this complex community. The influence of multiple social categories must be acknowledged to better understand the tensions and discords materializing in Shaw/U Street.