

Summer 8-2016

# Black Gentrification Twice Removed: A Study of Migration and Community Involvement in Washington, DC

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RUNNING HEAD: A STUDY OF MIGRATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN DC

**BLACK GENTRIFICATION TWICE REMOVED:**

**A STUDY OF MIGRATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN  
WASHINGTON, DC**

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PIM 74

Capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master's of Arts in Sustainable Development at the SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, VT, USA.

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May, 2016

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Date: August 16, 2016

**Acknowledgements**

To my Father God, for leading me to this point in my life, and giving me my mother and father, two of the most supportive parents I know. You have contributed much to this journey and I cannot give enough thanks. To my family, in blood and in spirit, thank you for your support and prayers. And to all Black people, struggling to succeed, and struggling for recognition even when they do. Our time is coming.

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# A STUDY OF MIGRATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN DC

## **Abstract**

This paper is about Black people and community involvement against the backdrop of gentrification in Washington, DC, and possibility of Black-led neighborhood revitalization. My practicum in Southeast Washington DC compelled me to examine the ability of a Black person in Washington DC to sustain commitment to a community that they do not live in, and if Black people moving to gentrifying areas of Washington DC can help the predominantly Black non-gentrifying areas to gentrify on their own terms.

This paper focuses specifically on Black individuals who have spent time in DC and proposed ways that Black non-gentrifying communities can revitalize their areas without the threat of displacement.

Research showed that a number of Black men and women are able to maintain significant support to the gentrified DC community over an extended period of time, regardless of living in the area of community support. The findings shed light on a seldom discussed aspect of gentrification, namely, the Black people who choose to live in gentrified areas with the intent of making a positive impact in the gentrification narrative than is often not perceived or acknowledged.

## Introduction

Washington, DC has been referred to as Chocolate City for its high population of Black residents in comparison with adjacent communities in the capitol region (Kellogg 2011). But when I moved to DC, I realized that it had a pretty consistent swirl of vanilla running through particular areas. I knew that gentrification had taken off in the area, but I had no idea how rapidly it had occurred. According to the Washington Post, DC is the second fastest gentrifying city in the country, second only to Portland, Oregon by a margin of 7 percent, the difference in percentage of eligible gentrifying land tracts (Maciag 2015). I saw the new storefronts with apartments on the upper floors in the area in which I live in the northwest part of the city (Petworth) in contrast with the dated storefronts and crumbling infrastructure of the housing of the area I worked in in the southeast section of the city (Benning Road). Both areas are listed as “qualified to gentrify” based on data from an interactive map on the Washington DC Gentrification Maps and Data website. But, Southeast has seen far fewer instances of actual gentrification than Northwest (Zip Code to Census Tract Equivalence Table). I wondered why that might be, and whether the fact that Southeast DC has one of the largest working-class Black populations in the city (20019 Zip Code Detailed Profile) had anything to do with it.

During the time I worked in Southeast DC, at Plummer Elementary through my practicum organization, The Fishing School, the differences between the various

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neighborhoods in DC became even more apparent to me. Outside of the work environment, I was effectively removed from the daily experiences and challenges faced by the residents of this area, including my students, since I lived in Petworth, a predominantly middle-class area with a growing white population.

To clarify the differences, Petworth, a neighborhood referred to by the Census Bureau as Tract 24 in DC, is gentrifying (Zip Code to Census Tract Equivalence Table). The house I live in is approximately a seven- minute walk from two major grocery stores, one of which offers organic fare. The estimated median household income for the area in 2013 was \$54,488. The percentage of area individuals with income below the poverty level that same year was 15.4%. The majority of renters pay between \$1000-\$1249 a month for their dwellings. The population is about 78% black, and about 13% white (2011 Zip Code Detailed Profile).

In comparison, the neighborhood surrounding Plummer Elementary in Southeast DC, Census Tract 77.08 (Zip Code to Census Tract Equivalence Table), had an estimated median household income of \$34,832 in 2013 (2019 Zip Code Detailed Profile). 26.9% of the population in this area had an income below the poverty line in 2013, and the majority of residents pay anywhere from \$800-\$899 a month for housing. The only commercial food outlets one encounters in a seven-minute walk from the school are a Denny's, America's Best Chicken Wings, and Subway, all 'fast-food'



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restaurants. The black population in the neighborhood in 2013 was just over 95%, while the white population was less than 3% (20019 Zip Code Detailed Profile).

One day, on my way to work, I saw a young man who had been shot lying motionless under a white sheet of cloth only two blocks from the school. Up until that point, I had not considered just how different my day-to-day living environment was from my work environment. It seemed like such an oversight: I had not even been watching television news to keep up with what went on in different parts of the city. I realized then that I was more or less sheltered from these harsh experiences in the gentrified Northwest area, which I felt good about. But—I grappled with whether or not this comfort meant I was less committed to the kids I worked with each day; that I didn't care as much because I had ended up living in an area so far from my area of work both physically and socially. I wanted to explore, through the lens of the ever present gentrification that seems to be going on all through the established residential areas of DC, how my detachment from the community I work in could affect the quality of my involvement in it.

At this juncture in DC's life cycle as a city, everyone--black, white, or brown--can be considered a gentrifier if they are able to live in a certain area and engage in certain activities. It is not a matter of accusation or guilt-tripping, but a matter of fact. I myself am able to pay close to 800 dollars a month to live in the attic of a Petworth area home. Regardless of where I get the money from, the fact that I am able to pay, and therefore

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not compelled to live somewhere else, puts me at an advantage that many DC natives living in gentrifying areas do not have in this era of high and escalating rent levels. I may move to DC to call it home, but being able to do that at this point, living in the gentrified parts of the city, would make me part of the reason that rents increase. If I lived in the parts of the city that are not currently gentrifying, but are ineligible or in the process of gentrifying, I would probably still be paying astronomical rents because of the high status associated with the area<sup>1</sup>. Through this thought process, I formulated my research question as: *Can one sustain their commitment to a community over a long period of time without living in it?* To clarify these terms, “sustaining one’s commitment” is marked by one’s ability to continue working in the community or otherwise providing support to it, after moving from the area to another in the city, or moving out of the city to Maryland or Virginia. A “community” is any modestly defined area of the city of DC, generally characterized by distinct socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, such as a high concentration of minorities, particularly Blacks, and household incomes lower than 50,000 dollars a year. A “long period of time” is characterized as at least a calendar year, during which the individual helps out in the community more than once a month.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Governing’s website (<http://www.governing.com/gov-data/washington-dc-gentrification-maps-demographic-data.html>) ineligible land tracts typically constitute middle and upper-income areas, and do not meet the qualifications of being in the bottom 40<sup>th</sup> percentile of all tracts within a metro area at the start of a decade. The ineligible areas of Washington D.C. from 2000 to around 2013 account for the neighborhoods of Takoma Park, Forest Hills, Cleveland Park and others, predominantly in the Northwest and national monument areas, highlighting the high-income correlation to the non-gentrifying areas.

### **Literature Review**

DC has had a long experience with gentrification, since the early 1900s, through redlining and segregation covenants, particularly (Lloyd 2012). Redlining is a form of gentrification perpetrated by housing organizations that preceded today's developer-led variety (Moore 2009, p. 120). Redlining was initially done by the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, where they drew up maps of communities across the country to decide which areas would be awarded mortgage loans. Color-coding marked the distinction between eligible and ineligible, with red areas being "high-risk" or having a history of "inharmonious" racial groups (Lloyd 2012, p. 16, Badger 2015). The criteria by which each community was assessed included things like "neighborhood age, racial composition, growth rates, and the presence of immigrants and lower class whites", demonstrating inherent racial and economic bias (Lloyd 2012, p.14). In addition to redlining, racial covenants were the community-level way to keep unwanted groups of people from moving into a particular neighborhood (Lloyd 2012, p. 14). These community agreements barred many Black families from purchasing homes that were in predominantly White neighborhoods (Hillier 2003 cited in Lloyd 2012, p. 15). In 1926, during the US Supreme Court case of *Corrigan v. Buckley*, a group of lawyers including Charles Hamilton Houston unsuccessfully argued against the practice of racial covenants (Ober 2014). In 1948, Hamilton Houston and his team of lawyers made a winning argument against racial covenants citing deplorable living conditions and

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increased infant mortality in overcrowded communities because of the ordinances. Even with the US Supreme Court ruling against the constitutionality of racial covenants, they retained their usage in real estate transactions and by civic organizations on the neighborhood level well into the 1950s (Ober 2014). Sometimes these ordinances and covenants were attached to individual houses, and at other times to entire neighborhoods, all in a bid to keep racial or religious minorities from moving in (Ober 2014). An example of how restrictive the racial covenants could be in DC was demonstrated in 1950 with the Deane family.

Dr. Robert Deane was interested in buying a house for his family at 1841 Park Road in the Northwest DC neighborhood of Mount Pleasant. The house was the largest one on the block, and the Deane family would be the only Black family in the neighborhood. The Mount Pleasant Civic Association fought against the family taking residence in the neighborhood, as all the residents had entered into agreement about restricting who could live in the area. Their resistance went as far as suing Lillian Kramer, the woman who owned the house and, like the rest of the neighborhood, was White (Ober 2014). The Deane family was eventually able to move into the home, but faced significant racial tension and had little to no dealings with their neighbors (Ober 2014).

Gotham (2000), as cited in Lloyd (2012), states that the procedures of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) had grave impacts on minority communities through

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their racist underwriting manual, which made it mandatory for insured subdivisions to comply with their standards. After the race riots took place in D.C. in the late 1960s, many homes in those areas were taken over by the D.C. Redevelopment Land Agency. During that time, the Fair Housing Act of 1968 was passed, thereby prohibiting process-based redlining (Hillier (2003) as cited in Lloyd (2012)). But then, in the mid-1990s, the District of Columbia Housing Agency or DCHA was formed, and became the main entity to sell HUD houses for market value in revitalizing neighborhoods. Their aim was for these homes to be bought, renovated, and sold to lower-income populations looking for housing, but the majority of the people that purchase these homes are middle- to upper-class Whites, buying to renovate for the same demographic, if not for themselves.

Kohn (2013) cites a definition from Smith (1996) calling gentrification “the process by which poor and working-class neighborhoods in the inner city are refurbished by an influx of private capital and middle-class home buyers and renters”. Tom Slater, in his article entitled *Missing Marcuse: On Gentrification and Displacement*, refers to a definition offered by Lees, Slater and Wyly calling gentrification “the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of a city into middle-class residential and/or commercial use” (2008). Slater explained “vacancy” as the prominence of “new-build” gentrification that often occurs in old working-class or industrial areas (Slater 294). I also made a point of getting the ‘people’s definition’, which is important for the

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fact that they are usually chronicling their experiences in a gentrifying area as they occur, and that personal narrative is particularly important to my research methodology. Because I am most interested in the motives behind people's move to DC and what they do in the community, firsthand accounts and case studies on different areas are beneficial. The downside is that gentrification in DC has been little researched, (Lloyd 2012, Hilton 2011, Prince 2014, Wax 2011) and the motives of the various groups of gentrifiers themselves even less so (Hilton 2011). Research of the phenomenon in New York, (Jerkins 2015, Cauley 2015, Dawes 2015), Chicago (Badger 2012) and Philadelphia (Moore 2009), have become necessary proxies, in general if not in the specifics, for gentrifying metropolitan areas with large Black populations like Washington, DC.

Kanegawa (2014) writes a well-rounded narrative observing the good and the bad of the phenomenon:

Gentrification is, in the broadest terms, when a wealthier class of people arrives in a "socioeconomically disadvantaged" urban neighborhood, causing a spike in rent and property values, along with gradual shifts in the local culture. On one hand, this turns poor communities on their heads, depriving residents of their houses, businesses, apartments and community spaces. On the other, it shifts investment towards the development and infrastructure of blighted areas

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(especially in the context of Los Angeles), stimulating economic growth, creating new jobs and reducing crime.

Given the definitions I found, gentrification almost always involves middle- and upper-class individuals moving into an area not originally populated by a majority in those two socioeconomic classes. These areas are usually predominantly Black, lower-class, and in need of serious re-development. New things are built from the ground up, and old things are renovated, but only to the benefit of those who can pay the higher price demanded. Many of these new housing developments are too expensive for the incumbent population, and the newly created shops and restaurants also price them out. The reason for gentrification is more or less unknown, but can be related to the desire for populations that once dwelled in the suburbs on the outskirts of town to move back to the urban centers. Based on the recent wave of gentrification over the last decade, profitability is another goal for those who initiate the changes in these communities. City and state governments also have a desire to eliminate urban blight to make their communities more attractive to newcomers. One article from *Time.com* states that young people in the 25-34 age group want to be closer to their peers and places of work, while also cutting their automobile usage (Frizell 2014).

Alex Kellogg, an NPR contributor, points out that the white population in DC has risen significantly in the past decade and a half. He cites in his article one DC native's commentary on the gradual increase in white families in areas like Anacostia,

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joking that “I told you they was coming back”, in regards to the White population that had gradually decreased since the 1950s. The element of race seems secondary to that of class, which is often cited as the dominant descriptor of one who gentrifies (Kohn 2013, Kanegawa 2014, Smith 1996). But race is obviously still an issue (Kellogg 2014), as it often dovetails with class in American society. White gentrifiers dominate the stories that people tell about re-development happening in their communities, and not often in positive terms (Newitz 2014, Foster 2012, Prince 2014). Usually, the black community is seen as the native or resident community, and the white population is seen as the newcomers, at the same time the harbingers and beneficiaries of gentrification (Prince 2014). But nothing I read in the academic literature really seemed to cover or acknowledge other types of gentrifiers, such as the Black variety. Much of what is written on ‘Black gentrification’ is found on blog posts about the experiences that some Black women have had (Jerkins 2015, Cauley 2015, Dawes 2015). The struggles cited by Cauley and Dawes were related to a disregard for the level of success that these women had individually reached.

Cauley, a first generation college graduate and the first lawyer in her family, moved to New York’s East Village because she could afford the rent and wanted access to many of the amenities that all her fellow gentrifiers did (2015). When she encountered long-time residents who asked her, even as they saw her wearing business attire, Manolo heels and carrying a briefcase, if she was from the area, she felt slighted,



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as if they could not recognize that she too was part of the 'gentry' that were gradually taking over the East Village; in other words, just another well-to-do occupant of the new luxury apartments in the area.

Dawes also cited experiences she had after her move from her native Canada to Brooklyn that seemed to have automatically placed her in the box of the "poor Black person". When she went to the grocery, she was asked on more than one occasion for her EBT card, based on the assumption that because she was Black, she was on government assistance (2015). Even as a non-citizen, Dawes still faced the issues of being Black in a gentrifying community, where it seems no matter how much money you make, you can't fight history's hold on your success.

Jerkins had less of an issue with being a Black gentrifier who was not recognized as such, rather, being one who was recognized as one, that people could pinpoint as an outsider. She struggled with being a Black gentrifier who Harlem natives could see was a transplant, in addition to realizing that she was part of the cause of displacement for other people of her race in a community that she had hoped to seamlessly fit into (Jerkins 2015). These three articles shaped an integral aspect of my research focus: the perception of Black people in the US today.

On my way home from work one day, I saw a sharply dressed young black woman on the train and started to think that perception might be the only reason that Black people as consumers of new apartments and rising rents in gentrified areas are

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not commonly spoken of in the same sentence. This young woman on the train had immaculate, jet black, waist length single braids and a gray Michael Kors tote bag on her shoulder, and was gazing into her phone. I thought, she could be in her mid- to late-twenties, and might also not be a native of the city. In that moment, I understood that not everyone coming here to work (or live) is White--I considered my own situation working briefly in the community during my practicum phase. In that moment on the train, and even subsequent to that, I saw that black gentrifiers also exist amidst the white variety -- we just tend to blend a little better with the natives. I thought, maybe, this young woman is working a high paying job downtown but chooses to live in the NW, or any other gentrifying enclave in the area, because she can afford it. Why can't she, too, exude all the trappings of personal success? Thinking more deeply now, I realize that this is the most common issue regarding gentrification and race: black people are not customarily seen as middle-class, let alone rich. M. Pitter sheds some light on this concept in a post on *inparenthesemag.com*:

In the twilight of a freshly gentrified area, many of the newcoming residents actually have black and brown skin and yet, socially, they are still sort of exempt from being 'gentrifiers' (in the popular sense of the word) since perhaps the Black and brown people in this country were not typically recognized as a part of any 'gentry' (2014).

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The restrictions that have been imposed on Black people socially and economically over the last few hundred years have trickled down through the generations to make it difficult for individuals to even rise out of the mindset that they can succeed, and even more difficult for people who are not Black to believe that they can.

An article that was integral to the formulation of my research question was “Gentrification in Black Face?: The Return of the Black Middle Class to Urban Neighborhoods”, by Kesha Moore. This piece introduced the concept of the Black gentrifying community, where Black gentrifiers were part of a collaborative effort with native residents to revitalize deteriorating inner-city communities (Moore 2009). Moore spent over three years in the Brickton neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania learning about the special type of gentrification that was taking place there. During that time, she proposed recognition of a separate form of Black gentrification, one that she sees as “a product of the continual racial exclusion of African-Americans and reflects a specific social justice agenda that challenges this system of racial and class stratification” (Moore 119). This stands in opposition to the inherently status and profit-driven gentrification most know of. Notably, the population of Brickton was 92% black, but had a mix of middle, upper, and lower income residents living side by side (Moore 124-25). In the community, a pastor recruited middle- and upper-class Blacks to move to the area to help improve it, building new and affordable housing for the people who were already there, in addition to renovating older houses for a more upscale clientele

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(Moore 128). This is in stark contrast to the way that gentrification conventionally functions, which is to turn poor or blighted neighborhoods into middle- or upper-class enclaves that the incumbent residents cannot afford, and therefore are essentially pushed out of their own neighborhood.

In Brickton, Black gentrifiers were glad to move to the area knowing that they would be living among lower-income individuals, seeing it as an opportunity to give back to the Black community (Moore 128). Some Black gentrifiers even cited a relief in being “classless” as a reason to live in the community, since people of all classes were working to help one another (Moore 129). The Brickton gentrification case study was clearly in contrast with the narratives and experiences of Dawes, and Cauley, in particular, regarding the issue of class. Cauley was very focused on people recognizing the personal achievements and individual success that underlie her role as a Black gentrifier pushing out a poorer Black population from their neighborhood, while people who moved to Brickton as Black gentrifiers made it a conscious move to help improve the lives of other Black people less privileged than them, *to enable them stay in their ‘gentrified’ neighborhood.*

Another example of Black gentrifiers working hand in hand with the native Black population to change the tide of conventional gentrification, is the case of Bronzeville in Chicago, Illinois (Badger 2012). This historically black community has been revitalizing old brick houses and welcoming more and more middle- and upper-

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class Black gentrifiers over the past several decades. The population is now made up of a healthy mix of the original residents and Black professionals and entrepreneurs who have moved back after being away for years, and others who only recently decided to make Bronzeville home (Badger 2012).

Another predominantly Black community in Brooklyn, New York is developing through the help of supportive community members. In Brownsville, murals are painted on the walls and community gatherings are held in the neighborhood center to show that the residents are serious about revitalizing their community. Violence and poverty have wracked the area, which is 80 percent Black (Walshe 2015). The neighborhood is surrounded by rapidly gentrifying Bushwick, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Crown Heights, so the residents feel that they must take matters into their own hands before it is too late. Lewis-Allen, a community activist, states, "If we can empower the residents with jobs and skills that will help them shape the neighborhood's future, then they are less likely to be displaced when Brownsville suddenly becomes hip." With the assistance of community leaders who are predominantly Black business professionals and a passion to help the community turn around for the betterment of all, Brownsville is helping itself to gentrify on its' own terms.

The stories about predominantly Black communities working together to build up their neighborhoods in the face of gentrification that threatens to take them down is inspiring, and gives me hope that other metropolitan areas with high concentrations of

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Black residents will be able to do the same. I have seen follow up information on both Brownsville and Bronzeville, but have not been able to find anything besides the case study by Kesha Moore regarding more recent developments in the community. I think that a future research topic could be the update of these three communities based on their counter-gentrification activities.

In his article entitled *Neighborhoods That Are More Black Don't Gentrify*, Gene Demby cites that based on a study by Harvard researchers, there is a "racial ceiling" to how cities gentrify, at least in the case of Chicago, the city in question. In the research, it was found that areas which had the most gentrification taking place had a visible White working-class or Latino population, but an almost insignificant number of Blacks. Along those lines, they found that when the Black population in certain areas reached 40 percent, any gentrification stopped at that point. When I read this it reminded me of the idea of the "poor Black person" that cannot be seen as affluent, and whose community is blighted by default. This particular article reminded me of another article on gentrification in DC that stated that less than one-fifth of lower-income tracts experience gentrification, while wealthier, whiter tracts aren't even eligible to gentrify (Maciag 2015). This article makes a connection between the map on the *Governing.com* website that shows the more affluent areas of Washington DC as ineligible to gentrify, and the revitalization work that has been done in Brickton, Brownsville, and Bronzeville: because the areas that are predominantly Black are very often not

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gentrifying, Black communities have an opportunity to affect change for themselves and by themselves. The fact that the research was conducted qualitatively also gives more weight to the findings because of the rich and comprehensive scope of the research. Researchers accounted for hundreds of blocks of evidence, observing the incidence of new construction, renovations of existing homes, public improvements, and signs of "disorder" like graffiti or litter (Demby 2014). As Harvard researcher Jackelyn Hwang sums it up, "What's really happening is that the neighborhoods that could use some reinvestment and renewal aren't even being touched" (Demby 2014). These heavily Black neighborhoods are, clearly, prime candidates for a Brickton-style revitalization; indeed it might be the only way they will get 'gentrified', based on current trends.

It is notable that I have only found one article about a Black man's experience with gentrification. His experience was more about his disillusionment with the city life in his hometown of DC that prompted his move back to the suburbs than his issues with people's perception of him as a Black gentrifier, even though he has also written a piece on gentrification in DC at large (Devlon-Ross 2014).

Through my research, I see that gentrification does not exist in only one color: the process is not monochromatic. Black gentrifiers are also part of the wave of change reaching urban areas, and their experiences are authentic to the gentrification storyline. I see that Black gentrifiers have a burden to bear in one way or another, based on

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historical themes that are hard to break out of. In one regard, they are struggling with being recognized for the achievements they have made, and not being automatically lumped into the category of “poor Black person” (Cauley 2015, Dawes 2015). Some Black gentrifiers are recognized as just that in the communities they move into, but the weight of it is sobering, and causes them much reflection, making it more difficult to find community in their chosen area of residence (Jerkins 2015). Some individuals have outgrown the city, and while they understand the role they play as Black gentrifiers, they are not ashamed to call the suburbs home (Devlon-Ross 2014).

Moore, Badger, and Walshe propose three scenarios in which gentrification, Black gentrification specifically, can turn the tide of displacement and improve the negative impressions of the phenomenon. Their proposals of mainly Black communities posit that the unity of Blacks around gentrification in urban centers can build everyone up, and allow them to bloom where they are planted. Racial solidarity is a salient theme in the communities of Bronzeville, Brickton, and Brownsville, and the teamwork and solidarity demonstrated in these writings is definitely of the social justice variety.

Although Moore asserts that Black gentrification inherently has the social justice component—in other words, that it is of the ‘active’ gentrifier variety—it does not seem to be the case for every Black gentrifier. Instead, it seems that there may be some gentrifiers who are simply comfortable living comfortably, and others who move to an area with the main goal of lifting up the incumbent community so they move forward



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together. This difference informed the primary conceptualization of my research, namely, differentiating the sociology of the passive from that of the active gentrifier. I used these two categories of Black gentrifier to give respect to the individual narratives of Black people on the issue of gentrification (Moore 2009, Cauley 2015, Jerkins 2015), and to enable me identify aspects of this non-homogenous phenomenon that may actually lead to the improvement and sustaining of, not the wanton destruction of, struggling Black and inner-city communities.

### **Research/ Inquiry Design**

I used both an online survey and one-on-one interviews in my research. I conducted the survey with Black adults who have spent a significant amount of time in Washington DC, whether in a single instance or over an extended period of time. The Black community was my obvious research subject group since the study is of Black people and community involvement against the backdrop of gentrification. I chose not to narrow my subject group by age since a lot has changed in DC over the course of the past several decades. Receiving input from those who are older than 40 years of age made it more likely that I received a broader narrative on types of community involvement. I also sought information from each of my subjects about the extent of their civic involvement in their community, to see if there is some correlation between age and ability to maintain support to a community over an extended period of time.

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I collected information via online surveys created through Survey Monkey. I posted the survey link on my Facebook page, in the online forum *Topix.com*, on *Craigslist.com* in the community category, both general and volunteer, and I printed flyers with tear-offs of the survey link, which I posted in different areas of Northwest DC. I chose to post the flyers in this particular area of Washington DC because Northwest is the largest area of the city, with the largest section of gentrifying neighborhoods, and I believed that I would get responses from a variety of different socioeconomic backgrounds, resulting in a broad range of narratives within the Black community in this region. I also spoke with six individuals by phone. I read the survey questions to them and entered their responses into the survey fields as they answered. I sorted out the information by range of community involvement and the time frame specified for that involvement.

The survey questions were:

- Are you male or female?
- How old are you?
- How much time have you spent in DC?
- What is your reason for spending that much time in DC?
- What type of housing do/did you live in

Apartment                      House (boarding house set up, many unrelated occupants)

House (single family)      Other:

- What is the price range you pay/paid per month to live in your housing  
400-700      700-1000      1000-1400  
1400-1700      1700 and up      I do not pay for my current housing
- What area (NW, NE, SE, SW) do/did you live in?

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- Did you always reside at the same address since you were/have been in DC? If not, where else have you lived and why did you move?
- What area (NW, NE, SE, SW) do you work/attend school in?
- Do you make a conscious effort to patronize business (of any sort) in your area of residence? Why?
- What is the nature of your work/study, i.e. school/company/organization/foundation, and what does it do?
- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being very little or not at all and 10 being very often, how involved are you in the community (newcomers mingling with DC natives in community activities beyond eating and drinking together, attending class together, working together)?
- What is/was the nature of your involvement i.e. volunteering, job, daily neighborhood interaction (greetings, block watch and like meetings)? If you have not been involved, please state "N/A" for not applicable.
- How long were you/have you been involved in the activities stated above? If you have not been involved, please state "N/A" for not applicable.
- How soon after you moved to DC did you get involved in the capacity stated? If you have not been involved, please state "N/A" for not applicable.
- What were some of the reasons that you got involved in the way you did? If you have not been involved, please state "N/A" for not applicable.
- How do you feel your involvement affects/affected (positively and/or negatively) the resident community of DC? If you have not been involved, please state "N/A" for not applicable.
- Anything else you would like to share:

I analyzed the results to see how well my sample population was able to maintain their support to communities over a period of at least one year. This was

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based primarily on the criteria of: range of community involvement from 1-10 (1 being very little (every few months) and 10 being very often (several times a month)), and the quality of the responses given for why each individual got involved in the community the way they did. The range of support from 1-10 spans the course of a year. The closer an individual is to the lower end of the spectrum (1-5), the less frequent their community involvement. The closer an individual is to the higher end of the spectrum (5-10), the more frequent their community involvement. From these observations, in addition to the information provided about the work that the individuals do and businesses they patronize, I gauged how well (or not) each individual was able to maintain their involvement in the community over time.

The most apparent limitation on my research is the quantity of viable survey responses. The survey was active for ten days and received a total of twenty-nine responses. Several surveys came back with no responses: there was a range of 16 to 20 individuals who did not answer more than two questions in the survey, which were the original consent question and the gender question. The first two days the survey was live, there were no responses. There was a two-day lull after the responses began to come in, and another one on the seventh day the survey had been active.

Since I had only posted the survey link sheets in different neighborhoods in Northwest DC, I may have geographically limited the responses I received. I posted a

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flyer in places that Black people from all over DC tend to go (barber shop, historic Afrocentric cafes) in hopes that I would get a good, sufficiently varied crowd of locals.

The age range of the respondents is 26-73. There was a respondent from each age-decade (20s, 30s...up to the 70s), but the fact that there were only one or two representatives for each of those decades narrows the range of information that I received. Given that I asked family and friends to refer any eligible person to take my survey as long as they were willing, I believe that the sample is as representative as it can be for the number of responses I received.

I formulated five questions for individual interviews as well as group discussions with members of the Black community. I held three discussions for people to come and voice their opinions in addition to the predetermined questions. I reached out to the Black community by posting flyers in cafes, community centers, libraries, black owned stores and other businesses. I also spoke with people that I had met in DC through these businesses who could share the discussion and interview information with people they knew.

The questions were as follows:

1. Are you involved in the community? Why or why not? What makes you want to be involved in the community?
2. If you are involved in the community, how is it being involved in the community if you live in a different area from your place of involvement, i.e. living in

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NW and working in SE. Do you think there is there a disconnect in relating to people from the area you are involved in and the area you live in? Why or why not?

3. In an article about Black gentrification in Brickton, a predominantly Black neighborhood in Philadelphia, the author, Kesha Moore, gives a definition of Black gentrification as:

"a product of the continued racial exclusion of African Americans and reflects a specific social justice agenda that challenges this system of racial and class stratification."

Do you think that you fall into that category of promoting this variety of gentrification? What is your main reason for moving to DC? OR--

If you were born and raised in DC, what do you think of this definition?

4. Brickton in Philadelphia, Bronzeville in Chicago and Brownsville in Brooklyn, are three examples of places where Black people have taken it upon themselves to revitalize their communities on their own terms without the help of developers.

Would this be something you could see being done in DC? What kind of mindset do you think would be involved in making something like that happen?

I asked the first question about community involvement to ascertain whether or not the individual(s) would be able to contribute an answer about the dynamic between the area they volunteered/worked in and the area they lived in. Whether the individuals were or were not involved in the community, they had the option of giving a reason for

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their involvement or lack thereof. This gave me insight into the reason behind their decision to participate or not participate in the community, the capacity in which they participated in the community, and how focused their community work is. The possibility of learning about why the individual moved to the DC area is also presented in the question.

The second question is a follow-up to the first one. It allowed me to pose my research question to the person(s) I interviewed, and to see if any of the research participants could relate to my experience of feeling disconnected from the community I worked in because I lived in a different community. The wording of the question allowed participants to state whether they felt they had to behave one way in the area in which they worked and another way in the area they lived in. I chose not to specify that the question came directly from my experience unless I received feedback from the participant that merited a more in-depth explanation of the question.

The third question was meant to see what Black people living in Washington DC thought about Black gentrifiers. Using the definition given by Moore, I was able to more carefully navigate the topic of gentrification as it relates to Black people. Since the definition has an inherent social justice base, people were less emotional when they heard it, because there was a positive spin on it in contrast to the usual definition of gentrification that is more profit-driven.

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The fourth question brought up the concept of Black people gentrifying on their own terms. The Brickton article made a major impact on me, so much so that I formed a supplemental question around it, asking whether or not a community-led revitalization could take place in the predominantly Black neighborhoods in DC. I was interested in hearing from people about whether or not they think that the Black communities in the non-gentrifying parts of Washington DC could also conceive of something like the community revitalization in Brickton, Philadelphia. I wanted to gauge the excitement, or lethargy, around the concept of doing that revitalization work with no help from outside of the Black community.

I analyzed my findings from the interviews based on the responses to the question of community involvement or lack thereof, in addition to the feedback on whether or not non-gentrifying communities in Washington DC could revitalize on their own terms. The limitations of the interview responses are based in gender, age, and locale. All three people who I interviewed were male, and between the ages of 25 and 30. Only one of the people interviewed is a non-native, and he lives in Southeast, as do the other two interview subjects.

### **Findings**

Out of the twenty-nine survey responses I gathered, eleven of them were viable, where the required questions, if not the optional questions, were useful in answering



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my research question. Of the eleven respondents, five were male and six were female.

Each age-decade from 20 to 70 was represented by at least one individual. I have organized summaries of their core responses, with information they provided about the type of involvement, length of involvement, rate of frequency for their involvement, reasons for moving to DC, and reasons for their community involvement.

Respondent 13 is a 26-year-old male who is in DC on business, and is not involved in the community, and therefore responded “N/A” or “not applicable” for all questions regarding community involvement. Respondent 29 is a 37-year-old female who was not involved in the community, and is a DC native who has lived in DC her whole life. She states that she cannot participate in the community because of her busy schedule. Respondent 7 is a male, age 28. He stated that he was attending school in DC, and living in the area for convenience. He did not cite any community involvement.

Respondent 8 is a female, age 36. She came to DC for school and stayed on. She cites daily interactions with neighbors and volunteering as her methods of community involvement. She has done this for ten months since 2015. She also mentioned that she began to volunteer about five months after she had been in Washington DC.

Respondent 8 specified that on a scale of 1-10 her level of involvement is a 1.

Respondent 11 is a 26-year-old female, working in DC as a consultant. She volunteers at a community center, and has been doing that for a year and a half, starting immediately

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after she moved to the area in 2014. She specified that on a scale of 1-10 her involvement in the community was a 7.

Respondent 22 is a female, age 60. She has been helping out at the soup kitchen, as well as the Bible Way Church, for 6 months and 1 year, respectively. She continues to volunteer at the church even now that she is living in Maryland. In response to why she volunteers, she said, "I'm a humanitarian, there was a need so I gave the help." When asked on a scale of 1-10 how often she was involved in the community, she gave herself a 6. Respondent 24 is a female, age 51. She lived in DC for three years while working, and after she moved to Maryland, she has maintained the same position for the past year. She works as an administrator for a United Methodist Church, and sets up event spaces for community activists to discuss issues such as human trafficking, healthcare, health insurance, and safety. When asked, on a scale of 1-10, how frequently she was involved in the community, she gave herself a 5. Respondent 4 is a female, age 32. She participated in the community through neighborhood watch meetings. She has participated in this capacity for two years, and she started because of crime in her neighborhood. She specified that on a scale of 1-10 of level of community involvement she ranked at a 5.

Respondent 25 is a male, 46 years old. He has been involved in the community for sixteen years, with the LGBT community as well as with an area church. He stated that on a scale of 1-10 he would gauge his involvement at 9. He states his reason for

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volunteering as seeking solutions for outstanding and on-going problems in the community. Respondent 26 is a male, age 73, who has lived in DC since he was a student at American University. He stated that he was involved in the community through socializing with schoolmates while studying. Based on his particular description of community involvement, on a scale of 1-10 he stated that his community involvement was at level 5. Although his on-campus peers were technically part of a community, this particular activity does not count as valid community involvement since he was in school and did not have to leave school to engage with his classmates. Respondent 27 is a male, 60 years of age, a DC native who lived in both Southeast and Northwest, and now lives in Maryland. His community involvement consists of mentoring young Black males in DC, putting him in the active gentrifier category. He reported that on a scale of 1-10 he was involved at a level of 10. This respondent specified that he got involved because of the problems that had been occurring with Black males in the area.

I conducted the first individual interview with a man who had lived in DC all his life in the Northeast neighborhoods of Trinidad, Brookland and Minnesota Avenue. In response to the question of community involvement, he simply stated that he is not involved. He specified that it is not that he does not care, but “that it is just the way life is right now” (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016).

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When asked if gentrification had affected him in some way in relation to his community involvement, he stated that it had not affected him, but he “understands that where he lives and where he grew up is where they are, in regards to the gentrifiers, and there are specific time frames and neighborhoods in which the gentrifiers show up.” He added that while he is no longer living in the neighborhoods where the gentrification has taken off, and the neighborhood in which he currently resides, Minnesota Avenue, is not much better than the other neighborhoods before gentrification, he is thankful that he has a place to live in his hometown. (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016). I added the quotation of exactly what he said. I have added a sentence for what it sounded like he was saying, more or less, in case paraphrasing is best in this instance. Otherwise, the part in quotations was verbatim what he said; I don’t know if I should add [sic] there, or use the paraphrase?

In regards to the question of relating to people from the area of involvement and the area of dwelling, he remarked that “you can relate to whoever you want to relate to, you choose to relate to them or not”. When asked to elaborate, he stated that he knows “plenty of folks that grew up in the city that choose not to relate to the people that came behind them,” as well as knowing “people who grew up in the city who choose to relate to them”. (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016). When asked more specifically if he felt a disconnect between the places he had grown up in (Trinidad and Brookland) and the place he was living presently (Minnesota Avenue), he said no, because he still

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frequents those areas, but does not consider himself an active, involved member of those communities because he goes just to see his family (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016).

When asked about if and how the Moore definition of gentrification applies to him, he stated that it did not fall into that category, but he understands that “there was a particular time in which the city was not getting better” (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016). During that time, he said, “before gentrification happened, a lot of people left this city on purpose—they weren’t pushed out. The folks who were pushed out were the leftovers” (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016). I raised the issue of being bought out, and in response he stated that not everyone was paid. What happened was that, “they were priced out of their neighborhoods, and when they were given the opportunity to buy back into the neighborhood they could not afford it (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016). Instead, “the entities that priced them out partner up with places outside of the community that those people who were priced out could afford to be at.” He went on to say that, “people have a sense of starting in an area, when in actuality they are in a box.” When I asked him to specify what he meant by “in a box”, he stated that “the whole of DC, all of America is like that—even when people are not able to live where they originally were living, they are more or less moved into another area, still, in a box.” He mentioned how, “Hispanics are in a box, they are all together in certain areas, and this is because they are welcome to the same places—put

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in a box.” “It is not because they found it but because this is where the US Census put them, where it said they can live.” (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016). “The same goes for [Ethiopians] in one area, they are also in a box, and they also follow their families.” He said that, “though we look like it, Black people are not a predominant race in this country, and there are just as many poor white people as there are poor Black people.” He said that it is a matter of “social systems and ownership—Black people do not predominantly own areas, so they cannot get mad when they get pushed out because it was not theirs, it did not belong to them and it never has” (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016).

In response to whether or not he saw the non-gentrifying areas of DC doing a Brickton-style gentrification, he thinks it is possible, but with any neighborhood revitalization it would have to include a developer. He said, “what I think would be a good idea is if we could get together some of these smaller developers, like small business owners....and get them included at that table” (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016). He mentioned that community associations need to come together with the smaller developers to do something. He said that even though it is nice to keep just small businesses in the areas that could do their own revitalization, gentrification thrives the way it does in Washington DC because the developers partner with big businesses, and that is what helps [the gentrification] expand. “DC is such a unique

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place, there is a lot to take into consideration. I think it could be done, it just has to be done differently.” (Personal communication 1, July 7, 2016)

The second individual I interviewed was a male from the Southeast part of Washington DC, off of Minnesota Avenue. In response to the question of his community involvement, he stated that he is “not as involved as he would like to be, but there [are] not much community activities [sic] in his area” (Personal communication 2, July 7, 2016). He referred to his area of residence as a “cultural desert” with maybe one recreational center about a mile down the street from him (Personal communication 2, July 7, 2016).

When asked about what made him want to be involved in the community, he mentioned that he has a four-year-old son, and he “wants him to be in a community where he doesn’t have to be scared to walk down the street or feel like he has to join some crazy neighborhood gang” (Personal communication 2, July 7, 2016). He wants to show kids that “they can do something positive and build in their own community, to show them that they don’t have to go to a carry out to get something to eat, show them that they can grow their own food, that they can cultivate whatever lifestyle that they want within their community” (Personal communication 2, July 7, 2016).

When asked the question of how location affected his community involvement in relation to where he was involved and where he lived, he stated that, “gentrification had not really come to his neighborhood, his area is pretty underdeveloped” (Personal

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communication 2, July 7, 2016). In response to the question of Black gentrification, he stated that he absolutely does not fall into that category, not only because he is a native, but “because he has no money, therefore he cannot gentrify any area—it is an absolute falsehood for him to be a Black gentrifier” (Personal communication 2, July 7, 2016).

The third interview was with a young man from Tennessee living in Southeast DC and who is a student in the city. When asked about his involvement in the community, he said that he has been involved, through garden initiative internships throughout the city. These internships have evolved into volunteer opportunities over time.

In response to whether or not living in a different community than his place of involvement creates any sort of disconnect, he said, “A lot of my community involvement has not been in the community in which I live. There is a huge disconnect between where I am involved and where I live mainly because of the lack of visible partnerships and community involvement/awareness that will reach out to areas where I work” (Personal communication 3, July 13, 2016).

Participant 3 does not live in a gentrified area or fall into the category of Black gentrifier based on Moore’s definition, but states that he engages in research on gentrification and protests against the racial exclusion of African Americans. His reason for being in Washington DC is to acquire his masters degree. In regards to whether or not Washington DC’s non-gentrifying neighborhoods could do their own revitalization,



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he said that “with a mindset keen to strategic planning, a spirit of community mobilization, flexible leaders who will maximize engagement from community members,” he could “definitely see this happening in DC” (Personal communication 1, July 13, 2016).

### **Discussion**

The findings of my research show that Black people who have spent some time in Washington DC are predominantly inclined to get involved in the community because they feel a need to do so, and that helps them to sustain their support over a long period of time. The respondents cited a community service connection to things that are important to them, be it populations within the community (LGBT), issues that affect the community (human trafficking, safety, health issues), or being part of a religious organization (United Methodist and other churches). It seems that women overall have a greater impetus towards civic engagement and sustaining it over a long period of time; all but one female respondent stated that they engaged in the community in some capacity. Respondent 29, the woman who did not cite any community involvement, stated that she was too busy to do so. Age might also have something to do with the sustainability of community involvement by respondents; two of the male respondents, ages 28 and 26, stated that they were not involved in the community.

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The drive to be active in the community was a hallmark of the longer term community support demonstrated by the respondents. Respondent 25 and Respondent 27 were the two who had the longest period of sustained community involvement, at 16 and 25 years, respectively. Respondent 25 mentioned that he wanted to be part of the solution to problems in his community, and Respondent 27 cited community issues with law enforcement as the impetus for mentoring young Black men. The female respondents also had good reason for their community involvement. Respondent 22 helped out at a soup kitchen as well as at a church, mentioning that she helped simply because she saw a need. Respondent 4 stated that she became engaged in her community watch group because of crime in her neighborhood. Seeing that both men and women have the desire to positively benefit the communities based on an awareness of what is going on where they live in is integral to the sustainability of community involvement even after leaving the community in question.

The respondents who did not participate actively in community affairs are here in Washington DC for narrow, discrete and specific purposes--school, work, or business. Respondents 7 and 29 both live and work in the Northwest region of Washington DC, and Respondent 13 lived in Southeast while working in Northeast. He also spent the least amount of time in Washington DC, at 4 months. Respondents 7 and 29 cited busy schedules as the reason for not participating in the community, 29 busy with work, and 7 busy with school. Respondent 29 is a native, while Respondents 7 and

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13 are from other cities. The time spent in Washington DC seemed to be more a matter of convenience for the latter two individuals. For Respondent 7, the commute to school was made easier living in the city, while Respondent 13 enjoyed the perquisite of working in the city and having his housing paid for in the Southeast part of the city (he mentioned that he did not pay for housing).

The interviews were probably my favorite part of the research, since the people I interviewed were so candid. They took the questions I asked and expounded upon them, helping me learn more than I did from the direct answers of the survey. I found out that for some natives of Washington DC, gentrification does not have that big an effect on the non-gentrifying communities; there is resilience towards the process of seeing revitalization go on in other areas when one's own is in need of it. The first man I interviewed seemed to be very at peace with his current situation. When I asked about his community involvement and he stated that he was not involved, not because he does not want to be but because that is just the way life is right now, he seemed to be accepting of where his life was. In regards to whether gentrification had affected him, he said that there is a specific time and place, regards to when and where the gentrification occurs. He said that though he does not live where he lived before, and it is not by choice, and though where he lives now is not that great an area based on infrastructure, that is where he is and he is thankful for all of it. Based on his responses, there is an inherent peace about the way his life is currently, regardless of how much or

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little it is like what he would want it to be. The second man I interviewed had hopes that his four-year-old son would be able to live whatever kind of life he wants to, right there in the city. He wanted his son to have an awareness that would lead to healthier decisions. The aspirations that this man had for his posterity showed that even though the situation caused by gentrification can make life difficult, resilience makes it possible to push through—and the goals he has in mind for future generations is a ray of light in the darkness of any present uncertainty. That ties an understanding of systemic issues, and how they affect the way that communities are never really that of the people who are native to them—they do not really own anything, so being upset if they have to leave it is almost unnecessary. When the first man I interviewed said, in essence that people are relegated to different areas based on demographic characteristics (race, ethnicity, income), he made a point about how the government has more control over the housing system than the people who are part of it. The idea that no one (besides, of course, Native Americans) is native to this continent, and therefore should not feel entitled to anything in this country, particularly when it comes to housing, says a lot about the displacement that is caused by gentrification. In his view, the housing system is “a matter of social systems and ownership—Black people do not predominantly own areas, so they cannot get mad when they get pushed out because it was not theirs, it did not belong to them and it never has,” It almost says that, people are moving from one

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place that is not theirs to another that is also not their own, so there is no need to feel wronged.

I noticed that people did not really see the Moore definition of Black gentrification in a positive way, even though I think it was meant to be positive. They seemed to focus more on the fact that gentrification was a part of the term, and the implication was that the definition pertained to people who were living in gentrified areas, so they disassociated from it.

At the outset of my research, I saw that I was investigating something that was not as closely related to my practicum as I would have hoped. My experience with my practicum organization and the kids I worked with sent me down a different path which made it difficult to come up with a research topic based directly on education, youth, or my practicum organization, The Fishing School. I had become more interested in the effects of gentrification on the natives of Washington DC as I saw the rapid gentrification taking place, and my own implication in it; and I knew that I would need to make a connection of it to my practicum to make the capstone come full circle.

Initially, my research questions were formulated in a way that I thought would offer a clear view into the lives of Black gentrifiers in the area. But over time I realized that the questions were more general than geared directly towards answering my research question. I had to make many revisions to accommodate the responses from

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research participants, and make changes to my research question to more accurately represent information garnered in sources I found while doing my literature review.

In regards to my survey, even though there were a lot of questions, nineteen to be exact, I still believed that the brevity and general nature of the questions would enable people to respond to each of them without any problems.

When a week went by with no responses, I was concerned. Had I really overdone it with the number of questions? Were they actually invasive? Was the wording unclear? It would be different, I imagine, if there were no responses in terms of any feedback on the survey, but that was not the case. I had gotten at least four surveys sent back with none of the questions answered. The only question that had a response was the initial consent to take the survey where everyone answered yes. In the moment, I was discouraged. But more than that, I wanted to find out why this was happening, and even if I couldn't, I wanted to make changes that might improve the chances of getting viable responses for my survey.

Initially, I had only posted on online forums: Craigslist and Topix. My practitioner inquiry group had great success with Craigslist in regards to getting survey responses. I realized though, that in an area like Brattleboro, Vermont, where nearly everyone knows about your school and folks are pretty helpful overall, getting people to participate would be pretty simple. In Washington DC, a city with a population about that of the entire state of Vermont, and a mix of cultures, languages and mindsets,

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not to mention endless hustle and bustle, it can be much more difficult to get people to pay attention. Based on this simple analysis of my past experience in comparison with my current one, I decided to also post the link to the survey on my Facebook page, and to make paper flyers to put up in areas frequented by Black people of the “conscious” mindset. A few more survey results came in, but still, the issue of blank responses remained. I decided to send the survey link to friends and family to get qualified people in their networks to participate. A few more responses came in, each question answered. Progress was being made. But, still, the number of responses was not what I needed it to be.

I contacted some well-connected family members who referred me to people who could answer the survey questions over the phone. Those responses became the bulk of my research data. One of these latter respondents, a DC native, asked for clarification at least once, and it made me more sensitive to the idea that I may not have written the questions in a way that everyone would be able to give a useful response to. Understanding this limitation, I made a mental note that any future survey questions would always be approved by someone from the target demographic, to have a better chance at reaching a high volume of responses. Throughout the time that I struggled to get responses, I reformatted questions, merged questions, and deleted others. The entire time I believed that the questions were viable for the information I was trying to collect. While I did not get the type of responses that I was looking for, the responses I received

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were still valuable. There are people who knew what DC was like when it really was Chocolate City and rents were \$475 for an efficiency in the Capitol area. They had much to contribute, and still do, to the unity and empowerment of the city, and I was fortunate enough to get responses from some of those individuals.

I hoped at the start of my research that I would get responses from Black people who had moved to Washington DC in hopes of changing it for the better, or, who had moved for a job that afforded them the luxuries of the new-build gentrification that has flourished in so many of the city's neighborhoods. I wanted to use the framework that I came up with in my third reflective practice paper to show how there were both *passive* Black gentrifiers (who simply enjoy the luxuries of a gentrified area) and *active* Black gentrifiers (who purportedly work towards a social justice goal for the natives and the newcomers in the city they inhabit)--in other words, to expand the narrative beyond the Black gentrifiers that Moore writes about that are specifically dedicated to community empowerment in the area they move to. But I did not get those kinds of responses.

The focus group was meant to add responses from people in the Black gentrifier category to the results I had acquired. This proved unsuccessful as well. I held three focus group sessions in the span of two weeks. I was mindful of the time, setting it at 7pm so that people could arrive on time, considering the city's traffic situation. I set the location as centrally as possible, not far from the Capitol building and train stops on



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two separate metro lines. I picked a spot on the corner so that people would not have to search. But I did not have the opportunity to moderate any focus groups; no one came. I ended up getting to interview a few people one-on-one instead.

I realized that I cannot make the assumption that Black gentrifiers are the only ones that would be able to sustain support to the gentrifying community over an extended period of time, or help DC take part in its own, universally-uplifting revitalization. I do, however, understand that this stipulation was based on my own experience in DC as someone who fits into the category of Black gentrifier (striving to be more *active* than *passive*). When I read in the Moore article that Black gentrification, by Moore's definition, had an inherent social justice base, I was compelled to make an addendum to that definition, since I had read blog posts from self-proclaimed Black gentrifiers who moved to areas for the intangible draw of the city, or because they could afford it (Jenkins 2015, Cauley 2015, Dawes 2016). I found that, given that there were at least two categories of Black gentrifier, that of the actively committed community member who is there to uplift the community and the passively involved community member who does not purport to uplift anyone in their community. I know that my passion lies in DC staging its own revitalization efforts to mirror that of Brickton, Bronzeville, and Brownsville, and that is something that I reflected more fully in my individual interview questions: do people think that there is a possibility for that to happen and if they would be willing to take part

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The focus group situation did prompt me to understand something that I was not as receptive to from the beginning. Before I started research, before asking any questions, before setting up any meetings and requesting people's attendance, I had to build community. That was something I should have done from the onset of my practicum. Instead, I busied myself with my RPQ assignments and let the stress of my after-school instructor position burn me out to the point of being too tired to go out on a weeknight, even if it was just to talk with people in the community, get to know their stories. I remember the experience that my Theory and Practice of Sustainable Development professor had while abroad in Namibia. She spent three years just getting to know the people in the area she lived in before she mentioned that she would like to conduct research within their community. I realized how important it was to know the people in a community before I ask to draw from their experiences.

A friend that I did get to know during my research mentioned a conversation he had witnessed between a woman who had come to town to conduct research and a native Washingtonian. The researcher proceeded to answer every question about herself that was posed by the native, and then turned to them and said that they hadn't said anything about themselves. The native remarked that they do not know her, so therefore she was not entitled to information about them. Regardless of the understanding of cultural nuances that make some people less inclined to answer questions than others, people tend to be more comfortable sharing their information,

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whether deemed personal or objective, with people that they are comfortable with. The best way to become comfortable with someone is through genuine interaction. This is where I learned why it might have been so difficult to get information from the community. It may not be that everyone would know who I was when they saw the flyers around town, but having built a relationship with the individuals who owned or frequented the places I posted the flyers might have improved the chances of people responding.

I might have benefitted from posting flyers in all parts of Washington DC, in office buildings, and on university campuses, among other places. But to have the network of people to call on for guidance about where I could probably find the particular group of Black gentrifiers I was interested in, would have simplified my research and perhaps yielded more useful results for my initial research topic. I probably would not have had to make the changes I did to the research, and would have had less difficulty closing my research gap.

As I complete my field research, I find that I did answer my initial research question *“Can one sustain their commitment to a community over a long period of time without living in it?”* through the results I garnered in the survey. The individual interviews did prove useful as well, giving me insight into how well a Brickton-style revitalization might take place in the non-gentrifying areas of Washington DC.

### Practical Applicability

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Community activism organizations such as the Council of the District of Columbia, Washington Peace Center, and Youth Activism Project could benefit from the results of this research. Specifically, it would enable them better understand how individuals coming into their community might be inclined to help revitalize it when they look more like the majority incumbent residents.

Councilmembers may also be able to use the information to recruit individuals to DC to start a revitalization effort that counters the common gentrification narrative. Exposure to the pioneering work being done in areas like Chicago, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn, can show the feasibility of attempting that something similar in the DC area. The benefits of improving a native population's hometown, which also happens to be the nation's capital, would parallel, if not surpass, the beneficial outcomes of Brickton, Bronzeville, and Brownsville.

In conversations with older people in the community, the term regentrification came up. When I asked what that meant, they told me that the gentrification that is going on now is not the first time it has happened in the area, so this being called gentrification is not entirely accurate. I take my unfamiliarity with the term before the completion of my research to be the reason for not elaborating on the other seasons of gentrification that have taken place in Washington DC before this latest wave. Future research could be conducted to detail the differences between the latest form of

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gentrification in the city and the one(s) that came before it, and how they affected the communities of the day.

The understanding among many native DC residents is that the only way Black people are involved in gentrification is through displacement; in other words, as the victims of a class-based housing allotment process. Reading this paper could shed light on the concept of Black people also coming to the gentrified areas of DC with the intention of working for the good of the whole population for reasons that can help the community, and help them stay in the areas they have lived in for so long. The recruitment of Black professionals to DC from other parts of the country is something that the individual shop owners and businesspeople could make a case for, and improve the likelihood that the community would turn around to benefit the areas that are not currently experiencing gentrification.

I think that the salient theme of supporting a community to provide for its needs is one that can encourage DC movers and shakers to become (more) aware of the capacity they have to help non-gentrifying neighborhoods gentrify on their own terms. I think the only thing standing in the way of a community-based revitalization is increased unity in the Black community. With an increase in *active* Black gentrifiers to the city, this unity may be realized more fully.

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