

Nature, History, and the Rhetoric of Redevelopment Along the Anacostia River

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DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Trudy. Thank you for being my inspiration, my biggest fan, and for teaching me to always save room for dessert.

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ABSTRACT

NATURE, HISTORY, AND THE RHETORIC OF REDEVELOPMENT ALONG THE ANACOSTIA RIVER

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Redevelopment has the ability to revise a community's concept of nature as well as its historical narrative. This thesis explores these revisions in one particular case study by focusing on the current redevelopment occurring along the banks of the Anacostia River in Washington, D.C. This thesis first examines the historical background of the Anacostia River by looking at the various ways that capitalism has shaped it into its current state, as well as considering the redevelopment and environmental issues surrounding the river. This thesis then reviews plans, reports, websites, published literature, and blogs from multiple D.C. city agencies, development corporations, local nonprofit groups, and local residents. Through analyzing the rhetoric of these stakeholder groups and examining a specific redevelopment project currently occurring along the Anacostia River, this thesis aims to document real life examples of the ways that local history and the concept of nature have been reconstructed and repurposed by development. The remaking and

rehabilitating of D.C.'s waterfront landscapes has greatly altered the original story of the Anacostia River and the very concept of nature, sometimes to such an extent that people in the local community understand the history and ecology of the area only as an imitation of the real thing.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Summary and Background

The story of the Anacostia River illustrates just how large of an effect the process of capitalism and the introduction of industrialization can have not only on river systems, but also on perceptions of the river and its aesthetics. While there are polluted rivers across the United States, the nation's leaders need only to look out their windows or walk down the block from their homes and offices to see the one that is directly in their own backyards. The Anacostia watershed covers over 176 square miles within suburban Maryland and urban Washington, D.C. Viewing the trash-filled, murky waters of the present Anacostia River, one would never guess that in a past life the river was a thriving Native American trading center surrounded by a dense forest and teeming with wildlife. Both urbanization and development have claimed much of the forest and wetlands, displaced wildlife, and polluted the water with industrial toxins, sewage, and runoff. The decline began when Europeans settled in the area and began utilizing the riverbanks for cultivating agriculture and the polluting has continued well into the 21st century as the Anacostia River and its neighboring communities have been largely ignored by policymakers and environmentalists. After four hundred years of development and urbanization, the Anacostia is now one of the most polluted river systems in the nation. Hundreds of years of neglect has led to contamination from legacy toxins, industrial

dumping, sewage, and storm water runoff, so that it is no longer safe to swim in the river or to eat anything taken out of it, and part of the river itself is a Superfund site. But the issues go beyond just environmental – as Julie Zauzmer points out in her *Washington Post* article, "the Anacostia is a strip of dirty water that is as much a cultural and socioeconomic divide as a geographic one" (Zauzmer 2015). The neighborhoods surrounding the river have the highest rates of unemployment, crime, and persons living below the poverty line in D.C. And while much of D.C. has been redeveloped, until recently these communities have remained untouched and even neglected; many residents and policy-makers treat the surrounding neighborhoods as if they are as toxic as the river itself. But attitudes surrounding the river and its usefulness are beginning to change as both local governments and private companies have started to reassess the Anacostia and its value.

Like many cities worldwide, D.C. has begun to rediscover its waterways and focus on seizing new opportunities to create new neighborhoods or alter the ones that currently exist surrounding its rivers. As the job market changed after the Industrial Revolution and most industry moved out beyond the city limits, D.C. joined the list of cities that abandoned its waterfront real estate; the properties surrounding the waterfronts in D.C. fell into what many saw as dereliction as they were overlooked and deserted by residents, city officials, and land developers. But negative attitudes towards D.C.'s waterfronts began to change as once undesirable properties began to be regarded as some of the most sought-after real estate in the city. Developers and city officials alike have renewed interest in these areas as urbanites have begun to express a desire to be closer

to natural features, such as rivers, wooded-areas, and greenspaces. The notion of what is nature versus what is urban has been argued across academic disciplines and through decades. This philosophical debate continues today within the D.C. area as the story of the Anacostia River gains another chapter, this one dealing with redevelopment along its shores.

Throughout the Anacostia River's narrative, the notion of what is natural and how people put a value on that assumption has evolved and changed. The Anacostia River, seen by early settlers as the area's most valuable resource, became devalued by its residents as its use by people transitioned from agricultural to industrial and, in turn, the river grew polluted from runoff, sewer overflows, and trash. Decades later the river's value shifted once again as people began to focus on redevelopment, and there arose a desire for a cleaner, more attractive river. Beyond just the manner in which we value nature, there has been a metamorphosis in the very way we understand and define nature. Whereas before many people viewed urban and nature as distinct and separate entities, today the meanings we attach to nature are more nuanced and intertwined with ideas of city, economics, and modernity (Hagerman 2006, 289). These concepts are interdependent and must be looked at together as a single entity rather than as separate parts, much the same way that the Anacostia watershed is made up of many smaller tributaries that coexist as one larger system. By studying the remaking and reshaping of the physical and cognitive waterfront, this thesis examines the ways in which people come to understand, recognize, and reimagine both nature and history through redevelopment and its discourse.

The vocabulary used to describe the redevelopment occurring along the Anacostia often focuses on a return to the “natural,” pre-industrial condition of the river. The rhetoric concentrates on bringing back what is natural, renewing the river and neighborhoods, and putting value into the surrounding areas in the hopes of drawing the attention of people and businesses interested in connecting with nature. Officials use words such as “restore” and “reestablish” when discussing both the environmental and cultural aspects of redevelopment, but neglect to discuss a baseline or expand on definitions. What many fail to realize is that redevelopment is not just changing the physical landscape of the area, it is changing the very fabric of the surrounding neighborhoods, both metaphorically and physically purifying the polluted Anacostia River and wiping clean the historical memories of marginalization and discrimination.

Statement of Research

As a consequence of planning and redevelopment both the neighborhoods and ecologies that surround the Anacostia River in Southeast and Southwest D.C. are being reconstructed, thereby forcing both local community members and a wider audience to reconsider the ways in which they perceive and recognize nature and the area’s history. I have examined the process of redevelopment along the waterfront neighborhoods around the Anacostia River, and the ways that redevelopment has reshaped understandings of nature and remade the history of the neighborhood. The remaking of the waterfront along the Anacostia must be studied within the context of the various ways that the term nature is used to shape both expectations and conspicuous consumption. I have looked at how the current redevelopment projects in D.C. are actively reshaping the ways in which local

community members and a wider audience perceive and recognize both nature and history by pursuing three secondary questions:

1. What role did capitalism historically play in the making and remaking of the Anacostia River and the surrounding neighborhoods and how has that role evolved over time?
2. How are local histories and the Anacostia River itself used in the discourse of development?
3. How are nature and society being reconstructed and reimagined through redevelopment?

Redevelopment has the ability to revise a community's concept of nature and its historical narrative. This thesis explores these revisions in one particular case study by focusing on the redevelopment occurring along the banks of the Anacostia River as a geographic microcosm within which larger issues can be examined. Looking at local details within the context of global issues will contribute to the ways that the current understanding of nature is modified through large-scale urban waterfront development projects. Through an analysis of the rhetoric of local stakeholder and in looking at a specific redevelopment project currently occurring along the Anacostia River, in this case The Yards, I have demonstrated real life examples of the ways that local history and the concept of nature have been reconstructed and repurposed by development. The remaking and rehabilitating of the waterfront landscapes has greatly altered the original story of the Anacostia River and the very concept of nature, sometimes to such an extent that people in the local community understand the history and ecology only as an imitation of the real thing.

Literature Review

This section reviews the existing scholarship surrounding the theoretical and empirical framework of my study. I draw primarily from anthropology and sociology, but also look beyond the works of both disciplines in order to garner knowledge from a wide and diverse range of subjects including geography, urban studies, political ecology, and history. These areas of study come together to both answer and ask questions related to my research in three principal areas: (1) development and redevelopment in D.C. and elsewhere; (2) constructing and defining the concept of nature; and (3) the history of D.C. and the role that capitalism has played in shaping the city and its natural resources.

Development and Redevelopment

Development, specifically waterfront development, is a widely-studied topic with much of the research focusing on the issues of redevelopment and the various ways that it affects the surrounding cities, communities, and natural resources. City officials around the world are pointing their attention and funding towards waterfronts as a way to bring revenue and attention to neglected, under-utilized parts of the city. Geographer Brian Hoyle, in his article “Global and Local Change on the Port-City Waterfront,” points out that “the popular success of many new waterfronts reflects the inherent magic of water, drawing people together, bringing citizens and visitors back to the water's edge, all interpreted as a tangible sign of the continuing vitality of cities” (Hoyle 2000, 414). Similarly, Sarah Wakefield, writing in her article “Great Expectations: Waterfront Redevelopment and the Hamilton Harbor Waterfront Trail” notes that, “waterfront revitalization has been seen by many cities as a mechanism to create and promote a more

positive image, thus securing growth and capital investment in a competitive global market” (Wakefield 2007, 300). Waterfront development, especially in urban areas, can be viewed as the focal point in an interwoven web of issues, processes, and people. These waterfronts and their redevelopment cannot be looked at or studied as objects, but rather as intrinsically connected decisions, connections, and transformations among people, places, and nature. In Susannah Bunce and Gene Desor’s article “Introduction to Political Ecologies of Urban Waterfront Transformations” they point out that these areas are important to study because they “reflect and constitute changes in governance, economic regulation, and societal imaginaries of the non-human environment” (Bunce and Desfor 2007, 1).

Waterfronts are often important historic points within the city, holding the legacy and memories of forgotten economic and social issues. In his article “Shaping Neighborhoods and Nature: Urban Political Ecologies of Urban Waterfront Transformations in Portland, Oregon” Chris Hagerman writes “studying urban redevelopment of the historic waterfront is an opportunity to examine, as Gandy suggests, the interrelationships between the city, nature, and social power in late modernity” (Hagerman 2006, 287). Redevelopment sites can act as a focal point in exploring matters of economic, social, and environmental issues within a cityscape. But with redevelopment also comes what Hoyle describes as the "sanitization of the whole area" (Hoyle 2000, 414). This sanitation comes in the form of environmental cleanup and restoration, the demolition of structures, the rebuilding and refurbishing of historic buildings, and the gentrification of surrounding communities. In his research of

redevelopment along the waterfront in Portland Hagerman saw that the restoration and redevelopment of many of these sites “reflects not only a remediation of the legacies of industrial pollution, but also an attempt to replace legacies of social conflict and labor unrest, through a focus on imaginaries of post-industrial economies, ecologies, and urban citizenship” (Hagerman 2006, 287).

Hagerman also writes “restoration of the urban landscape often requires the silencing of particular stories and the removal of contentious places and activities to make way for new livable spaces” (Hagerman 2006, 288). The history of a site can be removed by simply knocking down structures or, as David Gordon notes in “Planning, Design, and Managing Change in Urban Waterfront Redevelopment,” through “adaptive reuse” (Gordon 1996, 267). This is often done by repurposing former military or industrial buildings for use as commercial or residential space or by recontextualizing the spaces by replacing the surrounding areas with parks, works of art, etc. By using the history of a spaces as a character-building tool, developers are able to “invoke historic images” (Gordon 1996, 267) as a technique to change the negative memories or image of the site. And by placing an old building in new situational surroundings, developers are able to change negative images of sites by making a familiar place seem new. Gordon also notes that “the redevelopment agencies changed their site image with combination of two strategies – historic preservation and public access” (Gordon 1996, 265).

In recent years development projects have included more than just the constructing and remodeling of buildings – through both purposeful actions and secondary reactions these projects have also included both a level of environmental

rehabilitation and restoration and the pushing out of current community members through the process of gentrification. The redevelopment in Portland that Hagerman examined, as well as many other waterfront redevelopment projects, included restoring the river and surrounding area to preindustrial conditions. This cleansing process directly links environmental issues with urban transformations and economics as the waterfront is being reframed to work as a selling point for development projects. Though many of these projects focus on community well-being through greening areas, environmentally sound building practices, and bringing back natural landscapes, Wakefield notes that they “generally fail to reduce the city's impact on the local physical environment in key areas such as water and air quality, habitat protection, and biodiversity” (Wakefield 2007, 302).

The most volatile issue associated with development is that of gentrification, as Wakefield points out that “the literature is replete with examples of how redevelopment can isolate – and in some cases replace – working-class neighborhoods” (Wakefield 2007, 301). Beyond just the obvious issues of increasing property values, rising rents, and access to consumer goods, redevelopment also changes local histories and landscapes in an attempt to draw a new consumer base to the area; Hagerman writes “new visions incorporate particular memories and not others, articulate social exclusions, and recast places within new forms of cultural capital (Hagerman 2006, 286). The cleansing of these sites is often undertaken to make the development areas more outwardly appealing and livable to middle and upper class urbanites that have disposable incomes; “reminiscent of many of the narratives of other waterfront gentrification plans, the legacies of pollution,

decaying buildings, and the concentration of socially marginalized populations were considered obstacles to successful revitalization” (Hagerman 2006, 290).

Constructing and Defining Nature

Much has been written about humans and their attempt to understand, dominate, define, and compartmentalize nature. Noel Castree has contributed to the thinking around the manner in which social processes shape understandings of what is natural and towards defining the very concept of nature from multiple viewpoints. He, and many others, have discussed the various ways that people and groups define nature; during the early 18th century it was believed nature had to remain separate from things involving people and was seen as anything that was outside of society. Nature was often described and understood in dualism – urban versus rural, wilderness versus civilization, and so on. Modern scholars have widely dismissed this concept in exchange for something more motley. Castree writes, “nature is both a concept and all those physical things to which the concept refers. It’s a complex concept, not just because it refers to many different entities – from the weather through animals to human ‘nature’ and beyond – but because it also has multiple meanings” (Castree 2001, 5).

Scholars across disciplines also now agree that nature is a social construct. There are numerous texts by anthropologists, philosophers, and sociologists who have added to the discussion of nature and its social aspects, including Kate Soper in *What is Nature?* and William Cronon in his work *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Soper describes nature as “at once...very familiar and extremely elusive” (Soper 1995, 1); nature is used by a multitude of people in diverse situations, but its meaning is

constantly shifting depending on the who's, why's, and where's. Cronon also notes this point when he writes “[wilderness] is a profoundly human construction...it hides its unnaturalness behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it seems so natural” (Cronon 1995, 1). In his article “The Trouble with Wilderness; or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” Cronon goes on to write “as we gaze into the mirror [wilderness] holds up for us, we too easily imagine that what we behold is Nature when in fact we see the reflection of our own unexamined longings and desires” (Cronon 1995, 1). Castree and Braun, in their collection *Social Nature: Theory, Practice, and Politics* highlight the processes that people take to construct nature – people use both their own ideas and outside influences to shape what “natural,” “pristine,” and “authentic” mean to them. People are also prejudiced by the media and culture – watching movies and television, reading books, magazines, and newspapers, as well as religious beliefs and practices all influence the way people construct and relate to nature.

The process of redevelopment exposes the “shifting social constructions of nature” (Hagerman 2006, 286) by creating new visions of community and ecological landscapes. Hagerman notes that “this creation of a symbolic landscape includes construction of natural landscapes that also act to frame, define, and set apart the areas for subsequent residential and retail redevelopment within reclaimed urban waterfront ecologies” (Hagerman 2006, 286). The landscape becomes symbolic through its role of setting apart and defining the areas marked for development and the areas reclaimed as natural areas. With modern redevelopment projects the seeming duality between nature and urban becomes even more blurred as developers integrate buildings into the natural

landscapes and alter ecologies to fit into their design plans so that the environmental elements appear closer to their own definition of natural. This requires a certain kind of “reconciliation between urban social life and the integration of nature into the city” (Hagerman 2006, 289). As Gandy and other political ecologists have argued, there exists even within nature a “social and cultural history” (Hagerman 2006, 289) and so the meanings attached to nature within the boundaries of urban areas are intrinsically tied up with ideas of modernity and the city due to its history and cultural usage.

Through planning and executing, the redevelopment process “creates [a] new narrative highlighting restored ecologies, urban civility, and sustainability that overwrite legacies of oppression and pollution and the history of workers and residents within the industrial landscape” (Hagerman 2006, 295) thereby redefining the notions of both nature and history. Hagerman also discusses the ways that concepts of nature and urbanity are reworked in order to “shape expectations and consumption” (Hagerman 2006, 285) within these new neighborhoods. In their article “Urban Political Ecology, Justice, and Politics of Scale” Swyngedouw and Heyen look at the ways that capitalism has caused the commodification, and therefore the redefining, of nature. They write, “the environment of the city – both social and physical – is the result of a historical-geographical process of the urbanization of nature (Swyngedouw and Heyen 2003, 900). It has become impossible to define and understand the concept of natural without looking at the social and physical processes that have influenced and shaped it.

History of DC

In his book, *Anacostia: The Death and Life of an American River*, John Wennersten offers a detailed history of both the Anacostia River itself and the surrounding communities. He focuses on the ways that people and their capitalist-driven actions altered the landscape and neighborhoods. Wennersten covers the river's history, starting with the arrival of colonists and ending in modern times. He writes, "from the colonial period to the present the river has been a manipulated environment, one altered, transformed, or planned by agricultural and corporate elites, politicians, and real estate developers" (Wennersten 2008, xi). He makes the point that while the Anacostia River itself has "shaped the social identity of metropolitan Washington and is at the center of its historical development," at the same time "political and economic events over time in Washington have shaped the Anacostia's destiny" (Wennersten 2008, xiv). Through his narrative Wennersten also discusses the ways that the Anacostia itself is socially constructed through its former uses and current restoration, but he notes "as a socially constructed entity, the Anacostia River, in particular, is differently construed and interpreted by whites and blacks" (Wennersten 2008, xii).

In her article "A River Runs Through Us," Brett Williams directly explores the role that capitalism played in shaping the river and its communities. She writes, "understanding the pollution and the preciousness of the Anacostia River requires exploring natural and social processes that are connected dialectically, because contradictions are always there, and change is always coming" (Williams 2001, 409). In her research Williams specifically links the current state of the Anacostia River to forces

such as colonialism, militarism, racism, inequality, and urban renewal. She focuses on larger processes rather than smaller issues and events as a way to see the relationships between the forces, the landscape, and the communities. She writes:

By looking at the local history and examining the conflicts between economic advancements and environmental changes, it is possible to see the “unequal power that frame[s] the contradictions between use and exchange values, state formation and claims of citizenship, the mobility of capital and the immobility of the state, environmental degradation and environmental activism. (Williams 2001, 411)

My research will contribute to the field as a case study in which to view, analyze, and understand urban environmental issues and the influence of redevelopment discourse. As the population worldwide maintains its current growth, natural environments will continue to be redefined and cities will expand through redevelopment and gentrification. These issues that will persist in being the focus of much research and debate, and as such it is important to examine how residents, developers, and local governments all come to understand, reconstruct, and value the landscapes that are in flux in order to plan projects that can be supported by all stakeholders.

Methods and Structure

Research Method

The information in this thesis comes from secondary analysis, which includes archival research and text analysis. The framework of the research drew from anthropological and sociological texts concerned with the construction, reconstruction, and defining of nature and history. In order to recognize the ways that nature and history are understood and constructed within the context of the Anacostia River, I first investigated the historical background of the Anacostia River, specifically the various

ways that capitalism has shaped it into its current state, as well as redevelopment, environmental issues, and gentrification surrounding the river. I then researched plans and reports from multiple D.C. city agencies, specifically the Office of Planning (D.C. OP) and the Department of Energy and Environment (D.C. DOEE), two agencies directly involved in the redevelopment and environment planning along the Anacostia waterfront. It was also necessary to explore the outcomes of completed development projects, reports released by national and local nonprofits, and development corporations related to the waterfront areas. I also reviewed the websites of developers and local development projects in order to evaluate the discourse associated with redevelopment projects, with a particular focus on official websites related to The Yards development project. To offer an alternative viewpoint, I also looked at the ways that non-planners understand and interact with the river: residents, local interest groups, and non-profits offer a unique perspective of how the river and its surrounding areas are valued. I conducted textual analysis of their produced writing, via websites, published literature, blogs, etc. in order to gain a deeper understanding of an alternate view and history of the Anacostia. Finally I analyzed qualitative research previously conducted by others including interviews, focus groups, and neighborhood advisory panels.

Once the data was collected I used grounded-theory to identify common ideas and concepts. Starting with broad themes, I began by coding both the text and my own notes in order to turn the data I gathered into variables that could be studied and analyzed in relation to one another. As these common themes emerged, I narrowed down the data

into specific categories and used direct quotes and my coding to work through each of my research questions.

Structure

The analysis will start by looking at the history of the Anacostia River, specifically at the ways that capitalism has shaped and reshaped the river's ecology, value, and perception over time. The initial part of the chapter will center on the history of the Anacostia, while the later part of the chapter will look at both the current state of the river as well as redevelopment that has occurred within the Anacostia watershed.

Chapter 3 will concentrate on issues surrounding nature and society – specifically looking at the ways that nature is defined and reconstructed by people and capitalist enterprises over time. Considering how people come to understand nature is essential in uncovering how those views evolve over time and how they are influenced by outside forces. Once we gain a better idea of how nature is understood, manipulated, and reconstructed, we can begin to look at the ways that people are using those reconstructed concepts of nature and certain ideals of local history to market and sell redevelopment projects. This will lead to an examination of the different ways that the rhetoric surrounding waterfront redevelopment is utilized by different stakeholders, especially how they characterize the river when discussing and marketing development projects. Specifically focusing on the Anacostia watershed area, these stakeholders, which include government agencies, developers, and environmental groups, have diverse expectations and seek unique end goals from the local development projects. Because of their different positions within both physical locations and power hierarchies, they often use opposing

language in describing the actual projects and their desired outcomes. This area is important to look at because it examines the specific ways that redevelopment discourse reshapes and remakes our understanding of nature and history and also how nature and history shape our consumption and ideals. Examples of redevelopment discourse that will be discussed include: manipulating and sanitizing both history and nature, altering the understanding of the river and its surrounding nature, and the various consequences of redevelopment.

Chapter 4 will address the current redevelopment happening along the Anacostia River, with a focus on a single redevelopment project. Looking at a specific project will bring together the various parts of the literary analysis to life by connecting ideas to real world practices. Several areas of examination will include: the history of buildings on the site and how they have been repurposed, the marketing techniques that are being employed by developers, the ways that history and nature are being revised and then woven into the new neighborhood, and the ways that nature and history are positioned and utilized within the building projects.

The final chapter will consider what comes next for the Anacostia River and the redevelopment of the surrounding land. Looking at upcoming redevelopment projects along the Anacostia will allow for a glimpse into how nature and the surrounding landscape may be manipulated and revised in the future. The discussion will also focus on the various ways that success can be measured for redevelopment projects. The chapter will conclude with contemplating the importance of considering how the different reconstructions of nature and the various retellings of local history can come together to

tell a single story for the local communities rather than one that is disjointed and incomplete.

CHAPTER 2: THE ANACOSTIA RIVER

To gain a fuller appreciation of how current trends along the Anacostia River are altering the concept of nature and the local history it is essential to understand how the process of capitalism has changed the Anacostia River itself, as well as people's perception of over time. A picture of what the Anacostia looked like before humans first began monetizing it needs to be imagined in order to recognize just how much it has been transformed, which is why looking back at the river's history is an important part of the analysis. In the Foreword of Nancy Langston's book *Where Land and Water Meet: A Western Landscape Transformed*, Cronon writes, "history, after all, is the study of dynamic systems, of change over time. It almost always reveals that things are more complicated than they seem" (quoted in Langston 2003, xii). It is also essential to get a complete picture of the current environmental state of the river along with an overview of redevelopment in order to be able to put the future analysis of stakeholder rhetoric in a later chapter into context and to fully appreciate the case study of a single redevelopment project.

Rivers can be powerful symbols of the cities they run through, showcasing the issues, policies, industries, and boundaries. Rivers exhibit the interrelationship between people and the environment through not just space, but also time. Looking at the history

of a river allows us to understand our cultural past and present – as well as the ways that humans have dominated and shaped ecological landscapes. Langston writes, “water tells a story of its own past” (Langston 2003, 13). Rivers are not just geographic features; they are also socially constructed entities (Wennersten 2008, xii) that are differently understood depending on positionality – socially, racially, economically, and physically.

The history of the Anacostia watershed illustrates the specific role that capitalism has played in shaping the ecology and the identity of the area, influencing its value to local people, and showcasing how that role has evolved over time. In order to understand how capitalism has exerted itself on the Anacostia, it is necessary to gain a context-specific understanding of the various ways that the Anacostia River has been influenced and manipulated by people and processes over the last 400 years. Bunce and Desfor write, “the history of urban waterfront development provides examples of the ways material forms of nature have been transformed by a wide range of socio-political decisions” (Bunce and Desfor 2007, 4); colonialism, plantation agriculture, governmental powers, racial issues, real estate redevelopment, and pollution have all shaped and reshaped the river into its current condition. While the Anacostia’s history has been written about by scholars and historians, it is important to highlight and reiterate essential aspects of the story so that we have a robust and fully-realized concept of the present Anacostia River.

The main stem of the Anacostia River flows approximately nine miles starting in Prince George’s County, Maryland and ending in D.C. The Anacostia has thirteen major tributaries that cover approximately 176 square miles. At one point in its history the river

was a thriving Native American trading center surrounded by a dense forest and teeming with wildlife, but over the past 400 years development and urbanization have transformed both the river and surrounding communities. Most of the Anacostia watershed is now embedded within a metropolitan area home to more than 600,000 residents and miles of paved roads, buildings, and businesses. The history of the Anacostia River functions within a complex narrative of environmental degradation and social inequality; the historical processes of colonization and industrialization are responsible for the early degradation of the river and neighboring communities and later discriminatory zoning policies allowed for the continuation of these issues. Local residents have long tried to draw attention to the river's condition and the social and economic inequalities of the area, but for the most part they have been ignored and overlooked. Within the last 20 years both city officials and developers have become interested in the land around the Anacostia River due to low land prices, available areas to build, and the area's close proximity to downtown D.C. It was development through capitalist enterprises, such as agriculture and industrialization, that initiated the degradation of the river and now, in a strange turn of events, it seems as though it is development-driven initiatives that may revitalize the surrounding area and bring attention back to the river.

History of Anacostia River

When the first European settlers arrived in the Anacostia watershed in the beginning of the 1600s they encountered a “thriving center of Indian culture” (Wennersten 2008, 9) whose members responsibly utilized the river and its various resources. The surrounding forests were rich with diversity, the fishery was described as

“plentifully stored” (Wennersten 2008, 13), and the river carried very little sediment. Barely 200 years later local newspapers were running stories about the sewage-filled banks of the Anacostia that were “becoming stench-ridden disease centers” (Wennersten 2008, 84). In contrast to such negative discourse, today phrases such as sustainability, revitalization, and green infrastructure are being used to describe the areas surrounding the Anacostia River by various groups hoping to redevelop and revitalize the neighborhood. From the occasion the first groups settled along the river all the way through modern times, ecological sacrifices have been made for economic gains; the transformation of the Anacostia has followed a trajectory similar to many other American rivers.

Colonialists and Agriculture

When colonists arrived in the Anacostia area in the early 1600s they encountered groups of Native Americans who lived a semi-agricultural life along the river. Despite their agriculture, there was very little soil erosion and many of the early colonists “were amazed at the clarity of the various streams and rivers” (Wennersten 2008, 9). A major white presence was established in the region by the 1620s and in less than 100 years, “Europeans entirely replaced the indigenous inhabitants, and the river economy shifted to intense capital accumulation, as Washington became a colonial outpost of England” (Williams 2001, 412). Fur trading rapidly became the center of economic activities in the area, but “as the English population expanded, beaver, bear, and deer quickly became over-hunted. Unlike the Indians, the colonists identified wild game as a commodity from which to derive profit” (Wennersten 2008, 18); soon beavers disappeared from the

waterways and bear and deer became scarce so that economic attention was forced to turn away from fur and towards cash crops, specifically tobacco. Tobacco, which requires two things the Anacostia watershed had in abundance – fertile soil and a humid climate – brought a large return and dependable profit to area plantation owners. As Wennersten explains, “the real tobacco boom arrived in the Anacostia sometime around 1688 and made tobacco the linchpin in the complex relationship between ecosystem and human settlement” (Wennersten 2008, 19). Tobacco and the wealthy men who planted it quickly came to shape both the culture and the landscape in the area.

The shift in land use and economic practices swiftly led to a polluted river that could no longer be used for transportation or sustenance; “a tobacco field could only produce four years of good yields before it drained the soil of nitrogen and potassium” (Wennersten 2008, 21) and as a result virgin land was required to continue planting and growing which involved clearing forests to create new fields. Rather than practice responsible farming, most plantation owners attempted to make as much money as possible, and in doing so they “leached nutrients from the soil faster than the land could regenerate them, and the wasted land eroded under stress from rainwater and melted snow” (Williams 2001, 414). Agriculture became the first source of pollution for the Anacostia as deteriorated soil from upriver fields was transported downstream by the tide and sedimentation clogged the river. In only 70 years the Anacostia region lost nearly half of its woodlands and the river itself became too shallow for large sailing vessels to navigate due to silt and sediment accumulation. Over-used and abused, the watershed eventually lost its use as farmland and the fallow areas were left empty and ruined by the

time of the Civil War: “after only 100 years, tobacco cultivation had washed out. The river became increasingly shallow and swampy” (Williams 2001, 414). The area had reached a point where rapid settlement and deforestation had rendered the lands unusable for farming. Additionally, the decision to situate the new capital city along the Anacostia officially transitioned the area from a plantation economy to an industrial and urban economy, both of which brought a new profusion of complications.

Industry and Urbanization

Washington, D.C. experienced immense growth starting in the early 1800s, and with the escalation in both population and geographic footprint came the many problems that accompany urban development and industrialization. Going from small clusters of settlements and spread-out plantations to the nation’s capital brought many changes to the landscape, culture, and economy. Sewage became an issue as soon as the new capital organized itself and the factories and businesses that popped up along the river quickly began to create environmental changes to the Anacostia. Development in the new city caused a rapid deterioration of the water quality in the river due to pollution from military and government use, industrial waste, urbanization, and poor sanitation practices.

As D.C. was being built, city planners and government officials saw the Anacostia River as an asset to both commercial and military needs.

According to the 2011 report, *A New Day for the Anacostia* by DC Appleseed, a non-partisan public interest justice center:

Historical actions of the federal government, including deforestation, weapons manufacturing, approval and installation of the combined sewer system, historic dredge-and-fill activities, and river and stream channelization, have heavily polluted the Anacostia River and compromised its ability to cleanse itself. (DC Appleseed 2011, 3)

At the time these actions occurred they were considered standard practice, even so they have resulted in extensive damage to the river. Additionally, the Civil War brought massive deforestation due to the “army’s voracious need for barracks, medical facilities, bridges, and animal pens” (Wennersten 2008, 67). The military and government continued to utilize the river and its resources for their own purposes with the Federal government quickly becoming the largest landowner in the watershed. In the 1800s the military acquired land along the river and designated it the Washington Navy Yard; its first purpose was a shipyard, but once the Anacostia became too shallow for ships to pass through, it switched to the manufacturing of weapons. Factory waste, which included toxic materials such as mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), was discharged directly into the river. The hazardous materials became trapped in sediment and today still sit at the bottom of the river and continue to leach into the water. In 1998 the Navy Yard was declared a Superfund site by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and a comprehensive plan was created to contain and clean the area, but to date no cleanup work has commenced.

The Federal government, through the Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps), also had a hand in reshaping the flow of the river and the landscape of the surrounding area.

The Corps dredged the river to create parks and to make the waterway navigable to larger vessels, constructed sea walls to help with flooding, and drained marshes in an attempt to rid the area of disease carrying mosquitoes. The Corps played a large role in filling in over half of the total tidal acreage and over 95% of the original wetlands (DC Appleseed 2011, 34). They reconfigured the river through channeled tributaries and bank enhancement. All of their actions greatly reduced the river's ability to control pollution and drastically altered the physical appearance and characteristics of the Anacostia and in the end realized little to no progress towards the initial goals.

While the government and military established their presence along the Anacostia, there was also an increase in private industrialization along the riverfront. This, along with urbanization, further pressured the river and resources and lead to more pollution. Factories and warehouses including garbage, sand and gravel, and coal companies were housed along the river in order to provide industrial materials to the expanding city. "Increasingly the riverfront was being defined by the industrial processes established there" (Wennersten 2008, 122), and so it became harder to develop the land for homes. This was especially true as the areas surrounding the river were considered inferior due to health hazards and their proximity to industrial activities. This meant that the disadvantaged populations in D.C., mostly black and poor residents, were forced to settle along the river while wealthy residents stayed in the western part of the city.

Wennersten writes,

Development of the Northwest and the Anacostia revealed conscious decisions by political and business figures on the matter of how the District was to evolve in the late nineteenth century. The Anacostia, for example received the gas works, the factories the rail yards, the almshouse, the prison, the arsenal and the garbage

disposal sites. The Northwest received mansions, excellent city services, sewer, water, and infrastructure. (Wennersten 2008, 127)

Along with discriminatory housing issues, the constant influx of people moving into D.C. had an adverse effect on the river; urbanization itself “changed how water flowed in the watershed, what was present in the water, and how quickly or slowly water found its way to the river” (Wennersten 2008, 211). As the government expanded and created more jobs, additional people arrived in D.C. and the surrounding suburbs, which led to the need for more housing, put more cars on the road, and, in turn, created more pollution. These increases in the population led to the building of additional roadways and apartment buildings, further taking away from the natural landscapes and adding to the man-made ones. With less earth to absorb rainfall, stormwater runoff quickly became a serious problem.

The arrival of additional people to the area also brought concern over sanitation practices and waste removal. The local government decided the best way to improve the unhealthy conditions of raw sewage sitting in the streets and to advance public health was to build sewers and water works. Beginning in 1810, the D.C. government built sewers that drained wastewater directly into the Anacostia River. The sewer system, which relied on gravity, was inadequate and never functioned properly and continued population growth put additional strains on the already substandard infrastructure. Not until 1908 did the city begin to systematically address the sewer problem, but the solution they implemented simply involved moving the sewage across the Anacostia River by tunnel and allowing it to empty into subsidiary creeks with no thought to the impact on water quality or the communities of people living along the river. Wennersten notes, “the long-

standing issues of sanitation, water quality, and the overall condition of the river only got worse during the 1930s and 1940s and illustrated how precarious the water and sewage infrastructure was in a metropolis undergoing record growth” (Wennersten 2008, 138). The D.C. sewer system, one of the oldest in the country, continues to be problematic today. While there is currently a commitment by the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority (DC Water) to reduce combined sewer overflows by adding to the existing infrastructure, little has been accomplished. Industry and urbanization have completely altered the Anacostia watershed so that it is no longer the river it once was; “after the Army Corps of Engineers’ efforts at reshaping the river, and the immense growth of housing and commercial development in the watershed, the conditions that once made for clean water, spawning fish, and abundant bird life are no longer readily at hand” (Wennersten 2008, 194).

Another development in the history of D.C. that had a significant impact on both the environmental condition of the watershed and social issues in local communities was the decision to beautify the core of D.C. Starting in the 1930s, developers and politicians argued that the capital of the United States should effuse importance through its architecture, public spaces, monuments, and neighborhoods. Additionally, as the government grew in size and more people were needed to staff the various offices, D.C. became crowded each day with commuters and a crisis of transportation erupted. In an attempt to beautify the downtown area, attract tourists, and to gain room for new office buildings, city officials pushed residents from predominately lower class communities out of their neighborhoods by rigging zoning codes and building inferior tenements in

undesirable neighborhoods, like those along the Anacostia River; “the most serious problem was faced by the city’s black population, which was increasingly beset by displacement, especially through government expansion” (Gillette 1995, 147). To accommodate the thousands of people commuting into D.C. each day, the Suitland Parkway and the Fredrick Douglas Bridge were built along the eastern edge of the city, dividing the Anacostia watershed in half. These two roadways united suburban Maryland with downtown, but at the same time they also severed communities from each other and from accessing the river. After the 1956 passing of the Interstate Highway Act, more roads were built that also forced the relocation of many D.C. residents, while at the same time allowing for more cars to pass into D.C. Williams writes, “these highways demolished poor neighborhoods, quarantining poor people from trendy Capitol Hill on the west and from the Anacostia River on the east” (Williams 2001, 420). While housing projects were quickly built to board those displaced, the “development occurred too sloppily and fast, stuffing people next to military bases, and skewering their communities with highways that blocked them from access to the river and each other” (Williams 2001, 420). This redevelopment changed the demographics of entire communities by forcing residents into neighborhoods together at the edge of the city limits and then not offering those communities the same quality of services and resources as the rest of the city. The Anacostia River emerged as an actual barrier between the “city of culture, politics, and wealth, and the area east of the river residents believed to be contaminated by the very processes that had displaced them” (Williams 2001, 422). With more people living within the city limits and more cars entering into D.C. each day, environmental

problems such as managing waste, air pollution, and increased toxins and pollutants in the water and soil, began to increase exponentially.

As the Anacostia watershed was hastily developed for housing and industrial uses, the water quality of the river continued to decrease, and because of the lower socioeconomic status of the communities in the area, the various problems were largely overlooked. Robert Bullard, in his book *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, notes, “institutional racism influences decisions on local land use, enforcement of environmental regulations, industrial facility siting, management of economic vulnerability, and the paths of freeways and highways” (Bullard 1993, 18).

A Well-Kept Secret

It may seem from news articles and other media descriptions that the Anacostia River is completely unusable and that it has been abandoned for decades – but this is not actually the case. Brent Bolin, in a local blog “The Greater Greater Washington,” writes “in many ways the Anacostia River is not forgotten anymore, but rather a well-kept secret for the recreational opportunities it does offer, including biking, paddling, and surprising beauty and solitude” (Bolin 2012). There are community members and organizations that have continued to foster relationships with the river and surrounding lands even when it was overlooked and misused by others. These people and groups have been making use of the river as a gathering place and food source, as well as for recreation. Two such groups that have been utilizing the Anacostia as a source of enjoyment are the Capital Rowing Club and the associated Anacostia Community Boathouse Association (ACBA) and the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS).

According to its website, the Capital Rowing Club was founded in 1988 and moved to the Anacostia River in 1995 with a goal of bringing “rowing opportunities and excellence in rowing to the diverse community of the Anacostia River and the larger Washington, D.C. area” (Capital Rowing Club website). In order to better promote the river and rowing, the group partnered with several like-minded organizations in order to open the Anacostia Community Boathouse. The facility is “now home to two community rowing clubs, four high-school rowing teams, one collegiate rowing team, and dragon boaters and outrigger canoeists” and they estimate that as many as 300 people visit the river every day because of their efforts (Capital Rowing Club website).

The Anacostia Watershed Society was created in 1989 by a group of concerned citizens who resolved the environmental state of the Anacostia needed attention. What began as informal meetings has grown into an organization that is involved in a myriad of enterprises including public policy and advocacy, running educational and stewardship programs, and offering various recreational activities to the public. According to the AWS website their mission is to “protect and restore the Anacostia River and its watershed communities by cleaning the water, recovering the shores, and honoring the heritage” (AWS website). They have been a mainstay on the Anacostia for over 20 years and have worked to promote the river as an important resource for the local community and nationwide.

Current State of River and Surrounding Communities

Once deep enough to navigate ships down, the Anacostia River is now usually less than four feet deep, and depending on tides, can be as shallow as four inches.

Originally surrounded by over 2,500 acres of wetlands, only about 180 acres remain. Because the river essentially functions as a tidal lake, sediment and runoff cannot escape into open water and are trapped within the river. In addition to impacting boating and reducing the clarity of the water, sediment and pollutants negatively affect wildlife and impair water quality. The Anacostia Watershed Society, in their 2015 *State of the Anacostia River Report Card*, which grades the Anacostia on water quality indicators, stormwater runoff volume, and the levels of toxins and trash, gave the river a “C +”, but noted several areas of improvement including water clarity, the amount of fecal bacteria, and amount of trash (AWS 2015). Local leader and environmental non-profits, including Washington Parks and People, Anacostia Riverkeeper, Groundwork Anacostia, and other grassroots groups, have a collective goal of making the Anacostia fishable and swimmable by 2025. City officials, on the other hand, have a more modest goal of simply settling on a plan for cleaning up the river by June 2018. The three most significant impediments to achieving the objective of making the river both fishable and swimmable include: stormwater runoff, the country’s most serious form of water pollution, fecal bacteria and toxins that are introduced into the river due to combined sewer overflows, and trash.

Stormwater runoff is a problem closely tied to sprawl and development; more roads, parking lots, and homes leads to more hard surfaces and, in turn, less soil and vegetation through which water is naturally filtered through. With nowhere to go, rain water gets diverted into storm drains and becomes a method of delivering surface pollutants into waterways, and as a result, heavy metals, bacteria and viruses, and other

toxins are swept directly into the river. In the vast majority of the Anacostia watershed, the storm drains from streets and parking lots are directly connected to the river and its tributaries. Stormwater runoff causes two major problems – contamination of waters that harm wildlife and flooding that destroys wetlands habitats through severe erosion. There are numerous strategies for reducing urban stormwater runoff that are flexible enough to be implemented and developed as site-specific so that the solutions fit into the existing infrastructure of a community. These strategies include: planting beds of native plants, promoting the installation of rain barrels at private residents and commercial buildings, and using porous surfaces when constructing parking lots, sidewalks, and roads. These tools and technologies help rainfall to either evaporate back into the atmosphere or soak directly into the ground, resulting in less runoff polluting the river. In D.C., buildings are being retrofitted for green roofs, investments are being made in permeable surfaces, and discount programs are being created to encourage more environmentally sound management of local runoff. The D.C. DOEE keeps track of all green roofs within D.C. and notes that as of October 2015 there were more than 2.5 million square feet, a total of 58 acres, of green roof infrastructure installed within D.C. (D.C. DOEE Oct. 2015, website).

Toxic pollution and fecal bacteria are two of the leading barriers of a swimmable and fishable Anacostia River. Legacy toxins, chemicals that were dumped into the river long ago but that remain in the sediment of the river, have been identified at various sites along the Anacostia River. The cleanup of this type of pollution is extensive and expensive and requires a coalition of agencies to achieve. D.C. officials have created a

timeline in which they hope to uncover the extent of the legacy pollution – in early 2015 they collected water and sediment samples that will be analyzed so that a cleanup plan can be created. A second source of bacteria and toxins within the watershed is the combined sewer systems. These are sewers that are designed to move sewage and stormwater through the same pipes. During dry conditions, sewage from homes and businesses is moved to treatment plants, where waste is treated prior to being discharged, but during wet conditions the capacity of the combined sewers is often exceeded and the excess flow, a mixture of sewage and stormwater, is discharged directly into rivers. These overflows, called combined sewer overflows (CSOs), often contain untreated human and industrial waste, pollutants, and debris. The sewer system in D.C. was constructed prior to the 1900s and consists of a mix of both separate and combined sanitary and storm sewers. According to DC Water, approximately one third (12,478 acres) of D.C. is served by combined sewers, which when overwhelmed, spill into the Anacostia in fifteen different places, discharging two to three billion gallons each year (DC Water website). Strategies and solutions for reducing CSOs are similar to those for stormwater runoff; by capturing and slowing water before it enters the sewer systems, the chance of an overflow decreases. DC Water has created an ongoing program, called the Clean Rivers Project, which aims to reduce CSOs into all of D.C.'s waterways. The program, which includes an infrastructure overhaul, has pledged to replace the combined sewer pipes with separate pipes and they expect that by 2025 CSOs into the Anacostia River will be reduced by 98% (DC Water website).

The third impediment to the Anacostia's improved health is trash – not only is it visually unappealing, but it also has consequences for wildlife and the surrounding habitats. Studies estimate that approximately 20,000 tons of trash enters the Anacostia each year. Either propelled by stormwater runoff and moved from streets and parking lots into the river system or thrown directly into the river, trash bags along with Styrofoam products, snack wrappers, and bottle and cans make up the largest category of trash. To combat the number of plastic bags that make their way into the Anacostia, the D.C. Council passed the Anacostia River Clean Up and Protection Act (Bag Law) in 2009. The Bag Law “requires all District businesses that sell food or alcohol to charge five cents for each disposable paper or plastic carryout bag – whether or not food or alcohol products are purchased in the store” (D.C. DOEE March 2015, website). Three to four cents of each tariff goes to a fund set up to implement watershed education and restoration programs. According to an article in the *Washington Post*, it is the first of its kind in the country and has generated \$150,000 to \$200,000 a month for D.C.'s river cleanup efforts in its first four years of existence (DeBonis 2014). Data is mixed on whether fewer bags are being used overall, but public opinion of the law itself is positive.

It has been noted that a community's physical environment affects the overall health and well-being of its residents. Many of the communities along the Anacostia, particularly those that lie east of the river in D.C. Wards 7 and 8, reflect the current degraded condition of the river. The communities around the Anacostia have struggled since the early 1960s when many middle class residents left the neighborhoods for the suburbs. Since then there has been an outbreak of urban neglect, poverty, and crime

within the communities. In many of these areas the access to health care and education are limited due to economic and cultural barriers. Social and environmental policies often mirror the power hierarchies within urban communities, meaning that those who are perceived to be the least powerful, often minorities and low income residents, live in the most polluted areas and receive the worst access to social services.

Beyond these social issues, sociologist Robert Bullard notes that “an abundance of documentation shows blacks, lower-income groups, and working-class persons are subjected to a disproportionately large amount of pollution and other environmental stressors in their neighborhoods as well as in their workplaces” (Bullard 1994, 1). According to *NeighborhoodInfo DC*, a local capacity-building website, and 2010 statistics from the United State Census Bureau, the average population of those who fell below the poverty line in D.C. was 18% while for Ward 7 it was 26% and Ward 8 it was 35%. The average family income was \$54,677 for Ward 7 and was \$44,076 for Ward 8, while the average for D.C. stood at \$115,016. Additionally, Wards 7 and 8 have the highest rates of unemployment, persons living below the poverty level, and households headed by single women in D.C. (NeighborhoodInfo DC website). The striking contrast of these statistics show on paper how:

For many people who live east of the Anacostia River, the river literally frames the rest of the city and provides a deeply comparative framework as it does so. It helps people see and articulate social and economic justice in terms of 'this side' as compared to the western bank. (Williams 2001, 424)

Policies and bureaucratic decisions often reflect a bias due to a distribution of power within society that is inherently uneven. This unequal power produces unequal distribution of goods, resources, and social responsibilities. Bullard writes, “social

scientists agree that a multidimensional web of factors operate in sorting out stratification hierarchies. These factors include occupation, education, value of dwelling, source and amount of income...and racial and ethnic makeup of residents” (Bullard 1994, 5). Though these communities are located in our nation's capital and though the Anacostia itself flows within blocks of the Capitol Building, asymmetrical hierarchies have led to the area being largely ignored with regards to the need for social programs and assistance, basic retail and amenities, and the enforcement of environmental regulations.

The discourse surrounding the Anacostia River and its current environmental state has been filled with negative connotations and descriptions for the past few decades. Before redevelopment brought attention to the area, few organized groups were investing in the Anacostia and the local neighborhoods. The unfavorable language used to describe and discuss the river directly reflects the value that people and groups placed on the river – the Anacostia was seen as having little to offer local residents and businesses. The polluted state of the Anacostia compelled many residents to classify natural resources found in urban areas as elements that are inherently dirty and contaminated, entities to avoid interacting with. The related discourse, as well as the negative sensory qualities, the murky water and foul smell, associated with the Anacostia directly influenced how people felt about the river and the surrounding communities. Only when developers and other stakeholder groups began to realize the untapped potential the area had to offer did the discourse, and in turn the value associated with the Anacostia, begin to adjust.

Redevelopment Along Anacostia River

Often called the Forgotten River, the Anacostia itself is polluted and underused, and the communities it flows through are some of the area's poorest. These neighborhoods are physically separated from downtown D.C. by railroads and elevated freeways. With a lack of amenities – currently there are no grocery stores, very few sit-down restaurants and retail shops, and few businesses that offer community services – as well as high unemployment and crime rates, there is little incentive for people to move to the area beyond low property and rent prices.

But within the last ten years, there has been a dramatic change, not only as the river has started to garner more attention with an eye towards cleaning it up, but the surrounding neighborhoods are also amassing the support of non-residents. As some of the last remaining undeveloped space within D.C.'s boundaries, the area has become primed for redevelopment and growth. The communities around the Anacostia have become the newest hot spot in the region due to the areas geographic proximity to downtown, easy access to public transportation, affordable prices, and open spaces. To gain momentum around both the clean-up of the river and redevelopment efforts, government officials and a coalition of for-profit and non-profit entities have created initiatives, completed projects, and attempted to assemble the funding and attention necessary to make changes. While many development projects have already been completed and planning is underway for many more, the successfulness of the initiatives remains questionable as local residents and interest groups grapple with decision-making processes and the general direction of the plans.

The Anacostia Waterfront Initiative (AWI) was formed in 2000 when nineteen regional and federal agency partners joined together to create a unified plan for cleaning the river, creating new parks and outdoor facilities, coordinating transportation projects, and revitalizing the surrounding neighborhoods. In cooperation with citizens and community stakeholders, D.C. OP along with AWI produced the *Anacostia Waterfront Framework Plan* in 2003 to guide the redevelopment of the waterfront. According to AWI's website, a 30-year, \$10 billion multi-level plan is in place in order to "transform the shores of the Anacostia River into a world-class waterfront" (AWI website). The AWI has already realized some of its goals including: the planning and building of Nationals Park and the surrounding Baseball District, the 11th Street Bridge Project, the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail, and several transportation-related projects.

Real estate developers have also begun to plan and implement large-scale projects in an effort to revitalize the neighborhoods surrounding the Anacostia through gentrification. Many urban planners believe that attracting affluent consumers who have a disposable income will attract businesses in which those consumers will spend money, and this chain of events is thought to create a more prosperous community for everyone. The theory is that having a disposable income allows people to spend money on items other than the necessities, which allows money to circulate within a community. Recent development projects that have been completed in the past five years include: townhomes and condominiums, the Anacostia Playhouse, a cupcake shop, an indoor aquatic facility, and several restaurant.

The problem with the current redevelopment is that it does not affect all community members equally – there is an imbalanced distribution of benefits and costs related to redevelopment efforts (Billingham 2015, 78). In the Anacostia redevelopment situation not all residents are looking for business and retail, many are simply concerned with safety and making the neighborhoods livable. Chase M. Billingham, in his article “The Broadening Conception of Gentrification: Recent Developments and Avenues for Future Inquiry in the Sociological Study of Urban Change,” notes that this type of urban change “represents a class-based transformation of the urban landscape that has important social, economic, cultural, and psychological effects” (Billingham 2015, 93). These changes include:

The elimination of stores and services that cater to the needs and desires of members of the working class population; the shifting of public resources away from the provision of social services toward local marketing and tourism campaigns; and a shifting social milieu and typical habitus that can estrange long-time residents from the communities that they have called home for generations. (Billingham 2015, 93)

In some cases of urban redevelopment it can appear as though stakeholders have more of an interest in outside groups than on the residents who already live in the neighborhood. Additionally, not all residents are in agreement over whether they believe that the key to turning around a neighborhood lies in gentrification; some believe that more services need to be offered to current community members, while others postulate that historical preservation will lead to an influx of funds and new infrastructure projects. These differing viewpoints have caused delays and problems with the planning and execution of development projects along the Anacostia. There are several local interest groups that have been created by both local officials (New Communities Initiative) and residents

(Historic Districts Coalition) that stress the importance of local stakeholder involvement in the planning process. With so many opposing opinions on where development should be focused, progress is often slowed down or even halted when community input is required. Community members as a group may not be able to decide on the focus of development, but there is no question that development and change is coming to the Anacostia area. And most agree that an important step is cleaning up the river and surrounding land – both to draw potential investors and new residents and to make the area more livable for current residents.

As stakeholder groups begin to invest in redevelopment along the Anacostia River the related discourse has started to shift so that it carries a more positive tone. Along with the change in rhetoric, a slow moving transformation of attitude has also begun; more people and groups have decided to start investing time, money, and resources in the area with the hope that doing so might increase the economic and cultural value of the neighborhood and natural resources. These shifting social constructions of nature (Hagerman 2006, 286) and the changes in discourse have initiated a revision in the way that nature, especially nature within an urban area, has begun to be recognized.

CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING NATURE AND THE DISCOURSE OF WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT

The previous chapter discussed the history of the Anacostia watershed and the ways that history has been revised and reimagined due to the influence of capitalism. This chapter will focus on nature and the discourse of it due to the redevelopment of landscape along the river. Kear writes, “it is in these waterfront spaces where some of the most dramatic transformations of the relationships between society, nature, and the economy have been experienced” (Kear 2007, 324). The Anacostia waterfront is a contested place that illuminates both the changing understandings of nature and the dialogue that surrounds the redevelopment discussions. Additionally, local stakeholder discourse directly influences the broader community’s understanding of nature. The discussion will begin with how the concept of nature is understood and defined and then turn to how it is redefined and reconstructed by people and capitalist enterprises over time. Once we gain a better idea of how the concept of nature is shaped and remade, the analysis will look at the ways that people are using those concepts to market and sell redevelopment projects along the Anacostia River through an analysis of the redevelopment discourse.

The second half of this chapter will look at the discourse of development by examining the disparate ways that the rhetoric involving waterfront redevelopment is

utilized by different stakeholders within the Anacostia landscape, especially how those stakeholders characterize the river when discussing and marketing development projects. Stakeholders in the Anacostia watershed area, which include government agencies, local residents, developers, and environmental groups, have diverse expectations and seek unique end goals from the local development projects. Because of their contrasting positions within both physical locations and power hierarchies, they often use opposing language in describing the actual projects and their desired outcomes. This area is important to look at because it allows us to examine the specific ways that redevelopment discourse reshapes and remakes our understanding of nature and history and also how nature and history shape our consumption patterns and societal ideals. Examples of redevelopment discourses that will be discussed include: manipulating and sanitizing both history and nature, altering the understanding of the river and its surrounding nature, and the various consequences of redevelopment.

Urban waterfront redevelopment projects bring together a varied group of stakeholders, all who have their own goals and ambitions. Each group has a unique viewpoint and language in which they discuss their projects and disseminate information and their discourse can reveal a lot about the underlying issues surrounding redevelopment. It is important to look at the overall range of discourse as well as the distinct communication used by the various groups. By focusing on discourse occurring within the landscape of D.C. and the Anacostia River, we will be able to gain a richer understanding of how groups talk about redevelopment and also how the public

consumes and digests the discourse. All of which directly corresponds to the ways nature and history are being revised and understood within the context of redevelopment.

Understandings of Nature

Ask any random person to define the term nature and you will get a myriad of responses, it seems that the concept of nature is one that is understood internally, but hard to expound on. William Cronon, in his work “The Trouble With Wilderness; Or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” writes “for many Americans wilderness stands as the last remaining place where civilization, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth” (Cronon 1995, 1). Social scientists and scholars of humanities alike concur that nature is a social construct in that it has been created through cultural practices, so in order to understand what people mean when they use the term nature, one needs to be aware of societal values and traditions. Cronon points out that nature, “is quite profoundly a human creation – indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history” (Cronon 1995, 1), so it stands to reason that as societies evolve and change, so too do their understandings and conceptualizations of nature. Likewise, as redevelopment occurs – buildings are made new, rivers are reprioritized, and people are granted access to greenspaces – the locational and mental viewpoint from which people see the river is also changed. In these cases the perception of what is natural is reconstructed along with the river and surrounding buildings. In much the same way, Bunce and Desfor note that “material forms of nature are constantly re-produced through social processes” (Bunce and Desfor 2007, 3). Social processes, which are both the everyday and large-scale interactions and activities that occur among

individuals and groups within a community, are continually conceptualizing and remaking understandings of nature along with the actual material components of nature. The previous chapter discussed the changing perceptions of the Anacostia; the value people placed on the watershed altered its material form and how it was regarded. Likewise the dynamic disposition of a society is reflected in the complexity of our understandings of what is natural and how something that is natural should look and act.

In order to understand what is meant by the term nature, you have to be aware of where and when the discussion is occurring as its meaning can change over time and place. In his book *The Organic Machine*, Richard White points out that “nature, at once a cultural construct and a set of actual things outside of us and not fully contained by our constructions, needs to be put into human history” (White 1995, x) in order for it to be understood. Cronon discusses the historical usage of the term wilderness and how it has evolved through the centuries. During the 18th century nature was thought of as desolate, a savage place that brought terror to those who visited; it was the unknown and people were scared by it and avoided being near it when possible. By the 19th century society as a whole viewed nature as a paradise they willingly wanted to visit, doubtlessly in a response to the ways the Industrial Revolution was changing their neighborhoods and cities. The 20th and 21st centuries have added a romantic outlook to nature, viewing it as needing to be preserved and reclaimed, a place that is venerated and treated with awe and respect. Over the last 300 years, the concept of nature has been shifted, remade, and recast in ways that directly reflect the values and current events of a society. As the

notion of nature has evolved, so have the ways that humans have engaged with and exerted power over it (Cronon 1995, 3).

The consequences of human interactions and redevelopment on nature have never been more apparent than during current times. Our present understanding of natural is directly influenced by technology and socio-political interests; development is just one of the outside pressures that is materially changing the way that nature is viewed and fundamentally changing the way that nature is recognized. Waterfront redevelopment in particular can drastically alter the landscape – changing the shape of rivers and bays, adding or removing marshlands, and even reshaping shorelines. These changes are often done in an attempt to harness or control natural elements or to reform them in a way that benefits humans. But as Langston writes, “what people do profoundly affects nature, people can never control nature – a critical distinction” (Langston 2003, 169).

Langston also points out, “change is a natural part of ecosystems, yet too much change from introduced sources...can destroy much...value for other creatures” (Langston 2003, 14). Compelled by creating value, humans often attempt to discover something entirely new within a landscape or endeavor to revise the current environment to make it better. In these cases technology plays a role in this reclamation of potential, which occurs when wastelands that were once viewed as valueless are conceptualized into something valuable. The uncovering of value is regularly made to seem as though it is natural, even as it is done to serve human functions (Langston 2003, 56) and often times can have a negative impact on other creatures and processes that once utilize the now revised environment and landscapes.

This idea leads us back to our attempt to understand nature in today's world, on a planet where almost nothing is untouched by human civilization. Many believe that nature, by definition, is pristine landscapes in which the environment has not been tainted by humanity or changed to serve people. People believe that "natural processes should be allowed to function without human management" (Langston 2003, 153), as they did before technology advanced to such a degree that humans were able to manipulate their surroundings environments. But in many cases humans have intervened to such a degree that we have created situations that are not found in nature and, in turn, this imbalance has made it so that certain ecosystems and food chains can no longer function without additional human interference (Langston 2003, 153). In these cases Langston points out the need for reality versus ideological purity – that it might not be possible for nature to exist in the form people once imagined it. This discussion comes back to the point that it is impossible to separate society and nature, no matter how much people want to view the two as a dichotomy. Swyngedouw notes that the relationship between society and nature is constantly being remade, that it is fluid and complex and cannot remain static (quoted in Bunce and Desfor 2007, 4). Just as people and societies are constantly evolving and changing, so too does nature and its landscapes.

Urban waterfronts are places where natural landscapes and ecosystems interact directly with human activities and technologies. It is because of these direct interactions that humans have "not left urban waterfronts as pristine natural places, but, indeed, have heavily influenced their transformation over time" (Bunce and Desfor 2007, 3). But as Langston notes, even though nature has been altered "it is still natural, still alive, just a

different nature” (Langston 2003, 167). These landscapes are not dead or obsolete because of their interactions and interventions with humans, they just tell a different story than before. Further, “nature is an integral component of the history of power relations and economic production on urban waterfronts” (Bunce and Desfor 2007, 3), not only is nature influenced by socio-political and economic power issues, but it directly influences those issues. Analyzing the discourse of the Anacostia’s redevelopment will enable us to view these power struggles, the ways they are changing the concept of nature, and how nature is being manipulated and revised within the context of this specific community.

Discussion of Discourse

The role of discourse in redevelopment projects cannot be overstated – each group of stakeholders uses a specific, carefully crafted set of rhetoric when discussing and marketing their viewpoint of a particular redevelopment project. This is especially true of developers, many who have entire communications and public relations teams whose sole job is to market and sell redevelopment projects. Hoyle notes that all redevelopment must be looked at within a multidirectional matrix of interrelationships involving multiple levels of groups (Hoyle 2000, 408), which is especially true when discussing urban waterfront redevelopment. Within waterfront redevelopment, where there are many diverse interest groups and conflicting goals, and which is set in a unique landscape of natural and historical elements, marketing and discourse play an integral part in the development process: everything from capital fundraising to public backing is influenced by the various ways that the projects are described and discussed. In his book *America’s Waterfront Revival: Port Authorities and Urban Redevelopment*, Peter Hendee Brown

argues that all stakeholder groups “stimulate public debate over access to the water’s edge, equity in the provision of housing, the obstruction of views, and the overall character, purpose, and use of the waterfront” (Brown 2009, 17). It is not just developers who must sell their projects to the public, government officials are also tasked with gaining support from their constituents in order to spend public money and redesign large areas of existing neighborhoods. With waterfront redevelopment projects developers and government officials alike make promises to the public, often with regards to public access, affordability, and environmental benefits, but as Malone points out, “a remarkable contrast can exist between the imagery used to launch a development and the reality of the built project” (Malone 1997, 6). Not only do these two stakeholder groups have to sell their projects to local residents, they also have to create an aura of intrigue and desire to compel consumers who they are targeting as their primary audience to come to the area; both which highlights the importance of imagery when selling redevelopment.

Equally as integrated in redevelopment projects, environmental groups and local residents also have a particular vocabulary and utilize a distinct communication strategy. While often not as polished as government groups and developers, these two stakeholder groups speak definitively about their goals and ambitions for redevelopment projects: for residents it is often about reasonably-priced housing and access to needs-based retail stores such as food markets, while environmental groups focus on restoring and protecting natural resources. Residents and environmental groups alike often have a smaller audience due to their position within the surrounding power hierarchy. For residents one of the only ways to communicate with a larger audience is through social

media and the internet, such as through online newspapers, blogs, online forums or at planned events such as protests. Environmental groups often have websites in which to disseminate information as well as producing literature and getting their message out at subject-relevant events.

Role of Marketing: Sanitizing History and Nature

There are two main ways that imagery is used in marketing and selling waterfront redevelopment projects: through “before and afters” and through an exclusive connection to the environment. Before being redeveloped, urban waterfront areas often present "overwhelming images of isolation and decay as a result of the decline of the port-related activities and years of under-investment in infrastructure" (Gordon 1996, 265). As a result, developers and officials must work to transform not just the landscape, but also the public’s image of the area. Similarly, urban waterfront locations may offer access to greenspace and natural elements that are not commonly found in cities. This proximity allows developers to play up this “green feature” and use it to their advantage as many people, especially those living in an urban area, look for any connection to nature they can find. Developers are not just selling projects, buildings, and properties – they are selling a lifestyle that allows consumers to imagine that they are connecting with nature. Nature can summon and invoke images and sensations from our memories in a way that other types of landscapes cannot (Cronon 1995, 1); developers are not just taking into account current consumer trends, they are also monetizing memories.

In the process of transforming the natural and manmade landscapes in the area of redevelopment projects, both nature and history are being reconstructed and remade;

Hoyle describes this process as a "sanitization of the whole area" (Hoyle 2000, 414).

Redevelopment rewrites the historical narrative by altering structures and landscapes to fit into the new story developers are creating in order to advertise and sell their properties and projects. They reconstruct nature, not just by transforming natural landscapes in order to accommodate new structures and to create access points, but also by selling nature as a consumable brand. By marketing nature as something that can be attained through purchasing an apartment close to the waterfront, providing environmentally-friendly features to buildings, and creating green spaces and access to natural elements, these groups are repackaging and redefining nature in order to sell it to consumers. Kear writes:

Among the forces shaping this struggle, and the networks which entangle it, has been the pull of the market to rebuild and reimagine the everyday function of the waterfront in a way that is in sync with the highest and best uses of that space in the post-industrial city. (Kear 2007, 325)

Developers are peddling a concept of nature that has been controlled, packaged, and commodified into a simulacrum of what nature is imagined to be by urban consumers.

Pre-development urban waterfront properties have a reputation for being vacant, dirty, and dangerous, not adjectives that investors want their projects to be associated with. Gordon notes that "silence and death are not the right images to attract people and investment" (Gordon 1996, 265) and because these areas are not used and seen by many people they are "unlikely to be known or considered meaningful places in the city" (Gordon 1996, 265). Before redevelopment occurs these spaces are often not a part of the imagined city: they are either deserted, not accessible to the public, or not seen as being useful. Though these areas may be close in proximity to downtown areas, people perceive these sites as being far away; they are not located on the mental maps that residents and

visitors have constructed of the city. In order to modify and remake these preconceived notions, developers must work to reshape their site's image by cleaning up the area of garbage, negative associations, and unusable structures through both physical and marketing means. Davidson describes this as "place marketing – marketing activities which seek to influence a target audience's perceptions about a particular place in a positive way" (Davidson 2012). There are two main ways that developers go about changing their sites: "historic preservation and public access" (Gordon 1996, 265). Government officials and private investors alike must work to reconstruct sites in a positive light to ensure that consumers feel comfortable traveling to and spending their money in these locations.

Davidson notes that many of the industrial factories and infrastructure along urban waterfronts "left, and continue to leave, indelible marks on the urban landscape both in terms of impressive built structures and contaminated land" (Davidson 2012). The process of deindustrialization altered both the landscape and dynamic of the neighborhood and its residents; once factories and warehouses are closed, jobs within the community are reduced and with those jobs go a steady income, opportunities to buy homes, and a stable family life (Flanagan 1993, 70). In order to draw in consumers and reignite interest in the neighborhood, these sites must be cleaned up, and one way to do this is to repurpose existing structures to align them with current needs. Developers call this idea "adaptive reuse" (Gordon 1996, 267) and see it as a character-building tool. Buildings surrounding urban waterfronts are often industrial or military in origin and may be associated with negative images connected to their former uses. Developers wipe

clean the history of the area by remodeling the structures into buildings that are perceived as friendlier and familiar to people – former factories become retail stores, one-time barracks become condominiums, and bygone warehouses become meeting centers. Repurposing the existing structures allows developers to sanitize the past: the buildings are separated from their history through the process of adaptive reuse and only the positive aspects of the past are highlighted in plaques and signs surrounding the sites. All of the repurposing leads to the “creation of false historicity” (Breen and Rigby 1996, 115); developers are no longer allowing the buildings to tell their own history, they are narrating the stories for their own purposes. No longer having any connection to their original purposes, these structures are literally just a shell of themselves, having lost their previous identity to take on a new one.

Not only does the man-made landscape need to be made more attractive to consumers, but the natural landscape must also be taken into account. Urban waterfront areas have historically been neglected both economically and environmentally; these areas have often been damaged through decades of misuse and indifference. Reduced water quality, toxic chemicals, and trash make urban watersheds some of the most polluted watersheds in the country. In order to make the properties more enticing to the public, developers must clean them up – working to improve environmental quality and altering landscapes to be more visually appealing to consumers. Government officials and government agencies also use the allure of access to the natural environment to sell waterfront properties to both the public and developers. They see the "strategic use of nature as a public good" (Laidley 2007, 267) by offering urban dwellers more greenspace

and direct access to the waterfront; people who live in cities traditionally see their connection to nature as distant. Not only are government agencies and city officials hoping to gain public support by leading environmental clean ups and creating more greenspace, they also see it as a way of boosting development in areas that were previously considered off-limits or contaminated. Laidley writes, "public sector investment in green infrastructure such as parks and habitat restoration was encouraged for providing environmental benefits, but more importantly [are] presented as a strategic necessity for encouraging private sector investment in new development" (Laidley 2007, 267).

Wakefield notes that in most cases, waterfront redevelopment has been accompanied by a rehabilitation of the area's natural environment (Wakefield 2007, 304), which often includes restoration, replanting, and naturalizing of the landscape. Wakefield points out that while not cost effective these activities bring positive attention to the area. Often times this rehabilitation is based off of a preconceived notion of what nature is supposed to look like and so the effects might be "wilder" in character than the original landscape. Similar to how buildings are repurposed to benefit the needs and images of redevelopment projects, environments are also reimagined to reflect the general public's idea of what nature should look like, thus sanitizing the actual landscape and producing a commodified image. People are only seeing a rehabilitated waterfront, a facade created to sell a development project, something imagined to fit a particular image of what a waterfront is supposed to look like. Rivers, and water in general, have been put to use by

humans for centuries – traditionally for power and transportation, but now also as a marketing tool.

Developers and officials alike are sanitizing the environment in order to sell an image of nature that people find desirable. This is accomplished by rehabilitating areas to increase their naturalness, collecting and reducing trash, and improving water quality so consumers can utilize water access points. Davidson writes, "in an era of neoliberal urban development, the spatial and sensory qualities of waterfront areas have been utilized in order to generate consumption" (Davidson 2012). Access to nature and greenspace are now considered a central component to community well-being in most urban redevelopment projects. The idea of living and working close to nature is a profitable and alluring advantage when marketing properties. As such, developers are packaging the environment to be sold along with apartments and consumable goods, commodifying nature in order to sell it as part of waterfront redevelopment projects.

Specifics to D.C. and Anacostia

"As always, your view of the waterfront depends upon where you stand."
(Gordon 1998, 96)

It is important to consider the differing positionality of the various stakeholder groups when attempting to gain an understanding of redevelopment projects. Why are these projects important to the different stakeholders, what are their ambitions, priorities, and end goals, and how do they use their position to market and sell the projects? These questions are not always easy to answer, especially when they relate to waterfront redevelopment projects, which often involve multiple stakeholders, including various government groups, for-profit companies, and nonprofit organizations. Malone writes, "it

is difficult to untangle the knot of forces behind any waterfront development. Projects can be examined, however, on the basis of their underlying objectives and the power structures that generate and control them” (Malone 1997, 6). A group’s priorities and goals are what determines how and what they chose to communicate, but it is not always a cut and dry exercise in disseminating information. Many of these groups have common objectives, or their main objective can be reached by supporting another group’s actions; Brown describes this as the “enemy of my enemy is my friend theory” (Brown 2009, 123). This theory centers on the debate over “whether waterfront property should be valued for its highest and best use or as an important natural resource to be enjoyed by the broader public” (Brown 2009, 121). Each stakeholder group’s agenda and motives influences which side of the debate they fall on, which inevitably leads to conflict between the two opposing sides over whether a project should focus on economic value or cultural value. These conflicts can sometimes lead to “unusual alliances and strange bedfellows” (Brown 2009, 123) as each group jockey for position. This tangled web of stakeholders, goals, and discourse is illuminated in the ongoing redevelopment happening in and around the D.C. waterfront.

Everywhere you look along the waterfront in Southwest and Southeast D.C. there are transformations taking place. You cannot look at the skyline without noticing multiple cranes, buildings in various stages of development and new infrastructure popping up. Properties and areas that were once considered abandoned or unusable in a post-industrial D.C. are suddenly becoming the focus of intense redevelopment.

DC Appleseed notes:

The Anacostia waterfront is positioned to capture much of the District of Columbia's growth and redevelopment over the next two decades, and a cleaner Anacostia River is at the heart of the waterfront's revitalization. With downtown and western portions of the city virtually built out, development in the District has started to move eastward toward underutilized pieces of land near the Anacostia River. (DC Appleseed 2011, 18)

Nowhere else in D.C. is there more development activity going on than along the waterfront; while many point to the National's baseball stadium as the catalyst for redevelopment in the area, the development tide has been turning towards the waterfront area for quite some time. But since the baseball stadium opened in 2008 redevelopment projects have followed at an astonishing rate – everything from office buildings, apartments, retail and mixed-use building to walking trails and parks. Even a former military installation, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, has been decommissioned and is now a showcase of urban waterfront redevelopment. With a \$10 billion restoration and redevelopment plan underway, the waterfront along the Anacostia River is an ideal place to look at the processes that are involved in redevelopment, the ways that these processes are communicated to a larger audience, and the manner these processes are reconstructing attitudes and values with regards to nature and history.

This section will discuss the goals and discourse surrounding the priorities of three of the stakeholder groups in the Anacostia watershed – local and federal governments and their related departments, developers, and environmental non-profit organizations – in order to gain a better understanding of what is being communicated to the public and how those communications are revising the public's attitudes towards the river and the historical narrative of the area. In order to understand the objectives of each

of the groups, discourse was collected in several ways: through traditional means such as newspaper articles, official reports, organizational websites, and published literature and through less conventional means such as local blogs and the comment section of articles posted online. Using a multitude of sources allowed for a view of both official and unofficial discourse – for example, funded reports versus newspaper polls and participant focus groups versus comments on a blog post – in order to gain a richer assemblage of examples. As there has been pages and gigabytes dedicated to discussing and disseminating information about redevelopment in D.C., the resources used are by no means exhaustive, but they do offer a wide glimpse into the discourse of local redevelopment.

Government

The government stakeholder group offers the widest array of examples of discourse about the redevelopment occurring along the Anacostia River. The discourse from this group, which includes federal, state, and local governments and their associated planning and environmental departments, primarily consists of official reports and press releases as well as some news articles. The priorities of redevelopment for this group, obvious through the many pages of reports and plans, are multifold: to boost economics on both a city and individual level, to increase the cultural capital of the city, to contribute to social causes, and to clean the river. The *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital*, which was approved by D.C. OP in 2006, discusses specific neighborhoods in D.C. and notes, “urban development and natural resource conservation should not be mutually exclusive but should go hand and hand” (D.C. OP 2006, 19-9).

Government stakeholders have determined that all of these issues are interconnected and begin with river restoration – cleaning the Anacostia and making it a desirable destination brings people to the area, people in the area bring money to the area, money in the area bring investments and retail opportunities. This in turn allows for more infrastructure to be constructed, which brings benefits to residents in the form of new jobs, social services, public safety, transportation options, and housing quality. With the river as the focal point from which redevelopment emanates, the government stakeholder group believes actions must be taken to rebrand and reimagine the natural landscape through “improving water quality, restoring habitat, and improving shoreline parks so that the waterfront becomes the centerpiece for new and revitalized communities” (D.C. OP 2006, 19-2).

Recommendations to the government by outside groups all point to the “historic character and its access to the Anacostia River” (Urban Land Institute 2010, 23) as the area’s greatest strengths. In turn, the government discourse reflects utilizing these two points in order to gain public support and monetary investment for redevelopment; “historic Anacostia was born as waterfront community and its identity as a waterfront community should be restored in the future” (D.C. OP 2006, 18-10).

The terms “adaptive reuse” and “historic character” are mentioned multiple times in the reports and plans released and funded by the government stakeholder groups. The *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* notes that groups should “encourage both new development and adaptive reuse of commercial buildings” (D.C. OP 2006, 18-26) and that developers need to “capitalize on the historic and cultural assets” (D.C. OP 2006, 19-12) of the area. The report goes on to recommend that “as the city works to create

distinct waterfront destinations, it should also restore and rehabilitate historic structures” (D.C. OP 2006, 19-9). D.C. OP’s *Capitol Riverfront: DC Retail Action Strategy* plan notes that historic structures should be rehabilitated to house new uses, which will “add architectural uniqueness and authenticity to an otherwise new district” (D.C. OP). Reports and plans suggest rehabilitating current structures to brand the development as a historic riverfront and to highlight the sustainability of using existing buildings. The *Anacostia Watershed Initiative 10 Years of Progress* report notes that utilizing the industrial buildings would be “highlighting unique character of the river heritage and basins, including natural and urban elements” (AWI 2010, 5). Government groups see adding charm and character as a selling point to both investors and possible residents. By promoting the reuse of buildings they are also promoting sustainability and showcasing their efforts to retain the historical narrative of communities.

Another repeated theme that shows up in all of the examined literature is the notion of the river as a connector, link, and unifier. The *Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital* notes:

[The river] should become a unifier and a source of economic opportunity for the neighborhoods on its shores. The waterfront should unite the city physically, economically, and socially. This will require redefining its image and identity, and fundamentally redirecting growth patterns in the city toward emerging waterfront areas. (D.C. OP 2006, 19-8)

Over and over these terms appear in the discourse: over ten times in the *National Capital Planning Commissions 2008 Annual Report* and six times in the *National Capital Planning Commissions 2013 Annual Report* as well as over 30 times in the *Anacostia Watershed Initiative 10 Years of Progress* report. The reports and plans all highlight the

importance of reconnecting the city and its residents to the waterfront, which they believe needs to be done to break down barriers, help residents gain access, and to allow the waterfront to be a destination for visitors. The discourse impresses the importance of utilizing the river to shape and define the identity of D.C., which can only be done by revitalizing and transforming the river and connecting it to the rest of the city. The Urban Land Institute, in their report, *A Technical Assistance Panel Report: Anacostia Gateway*, points out the importance of “connecting to the Anacostia River as a major part of brand identity” (Urban Land Institute 2010, 27). This discourse promotes the waterfront as the solution to the complicated problem of food deserts, poverty, and gentrification, issues that cannot be resolved with the opening of new mix-used buildings and a revamping of the waterfront. The historical and natural assets the Anacostia waterfront possess are communicated by government groups to be the selling point to developers and residents; they posit development to be a quick fix to a myriad of dilemmas surrounding economic, environmental, and social issues. In reality, the discourse this stakeholder group is disseminating is challenging and revising the historical narrative of the area and the natural landscape by attempting to sanitize and rebrand the area into something that can be sold to other groups.

Developers

The developer stakeholder group also offers a wealth of written material, specifically because outreach and communication are part of their job. Development groups pay teams of their employees to disseminate information about future and current development projects and their motivation for participating in redevelopment projects is

straightforward and obvious – economic gains. Keywords like “remake,” “transform,” and “revitalize” popped up again and again in their published discourse. Developers promote their activities as doing a service to the local community by “maximizing underutilized urban sites” (The Yards website) and turning them into world-class destinations. In an online news article concerning development projects along the Anacostia the author writes, “what little commercial or residential presence there is today along the waterfront has sprung up despite so much adjacent concrete wasteland” (Capps 2012). Developers believe they are remaking sites that have been labeled gritty, abandoned, and ugly and transforming them into fresh, colorful, and clean areas that people will want to live and visit.

In a *New York Times* article a major developer along the waterfront is quoted as saying “in some sense we’re recreating everything, but we’re trying to stay true to the authentic roots” (Meyer 2014). Developers view what they are doing as transforming an area that was left to ruin into an area that can be enjoyed by many, and in the process they are working to keep the historic character in order to “undo the urban renewal legacy of the past and recreate the Southwest Waterfront as a great world-class destination” (Meyer 2014). The agenda of developers is not hidden or obscured, people know they are pushing to rebrand and reimagine areas in order to sell them to make a profit. But their obvious goals do not keep their discourse from influencing the ideas and opinions of those consuming it; what they are saying and how they are presenting it have an impact on the way that other stakeholders view the waterfront and its surrounding nature. By pushing their rebranding agenda, they present these areas as needing to be changed and

transformed, displaying their worthlessness in their current state and stressing that the natural landscape must fit a certain image in order for it to be deemed useful and usable.

Environmental Groups

Environmental non-profits, the third of the stakeholder groups being discussed, also have a straightforward goal they are working towards – making the river fishable and swimmable in order to get people and wildlife back into the river – and they have been working to achieve their goal by supporting any realistic endeavors that lead to their supported end result. In the case of the Anacostia watershed, this sometimes means supporting development efforts, as long as they are being planned and executed in sustainable ways that account for increased populations, traffic, and resource needs. In their report on the state of the Anacostia watershed DC Appleseed writes, “today, the once-forgotten Anacostia has been rediscovered and embraced as a precious resource by our community’s residents and by local and regional government leaders” (DC Appleseed 2011, I). Executed and planned redevelopment and revitalization have acted as a catalyst for clean-up along the waterfront and environmental groups are getting in on the action by promoting specific causes. In the Anacostia Watershed Society’s 25th anniversary report it was noted that AWS believes that the improved health of the river played a key role in bringing the baseball stadium and related development to the area (AWS 2014, 8). Once the early development projects were seen as successful, other plans soon followed and with the increased economic development activity came more attention to the river. DC Appleseed notes, “the Anacostia waterfront is positioned to capture much of the District of Columbia’s growth and redevelopment over the next two

decades, and a cleaner Anacostia River is at the heart of the waterfront's revitalization" (DC Appleseed 2011, 18). Unlike the other stakeholder groups, environmental groups do not speak despairingly about the Anacostia, they see it as a source of pride and through their communications attempt to thrust their pride onto a larger audience. DC Appleseed writes,

The Anacostia River was once the natural and commercial lifeblood of Washington. In its natural state, the River and its tributaries were teeming with shad, perch, sunfish, catfish, and herring, and were surrounded by forests, wetlands, and lush wildlife habitats. (DC Appleseed 2011, 11)

They often use imagery of what the watershed used to be in an effort to show residents what it could one day be again. They attempt to reconstruct the idea of a value inherent within nature to show that it does not always have to have an economic value for it to be important to people living around it, instead it can have social value. While the economic argument helps environmental groups to garner attention towards the natural landscape, it also helps to focus the main discourse on why a restored and rehabilitated environment is important and socially valuable to community members.

Another thread that runs through the discourse from the environmental stakeholder group is the idea of using sustainable images to sell development and investment in natural resources. DC Appleseed's report points out, "many businesses want to be associated with green practices, which are currently seen as innovative and progressive, and therefore wish to locate in a place that has invested in green infrastructure" (DC Appleseed 2011, 21). Supporting, rehabilitating, and cleaning the river enhances the reputations of government groups and developers, who in turn continue to promote investing in the Anacostia watershed. In order to draw attention to

the economic value of river restoration, environmental groups try to highlight the ways a cleaner river and the sustainable practices that enhance the health of the river can add to redevelopment projects. In this sense they are adding to the rhetoric of nature having an economic value while also showing people that it can be socially valuable.

An Order of a Different Kind

All of the discourse discussed above rests on the widely-held notion that certain areas need to be redeveloped and revitalized because they are abandoned, derelict areas that are bereft of use. These spaces are neither slums nor open, natural fields but are disused industrial areas, empty lots, and spaces at the edges of developed areas. Gil M. Doron, who discusses this concept in his article “The Dead Zone and the Architecture of Transgression,” describes these spaces as “places that look empty, and appear as ones which do not have any use (any more)” (Doron 2000, 247). The popular discourse in planning and development label these places as voids or nothingness, but no place can be completely empty. The terms and notions surrounding these areas, that these places are dirty, unsafe, and disordered, offer government and development groups justification to go in and redevelop these spaces. Research has been done that shows that these areas are often not devoid of activity and use, it is just that the enterprises are unplanned, informal, and not sanctioned by officials. Doron writes, “the informal activities that were there, were not disordered, but simply an order of a different kind” (Doron 2000, 249). He goes on to note that these areas are not just used by marginalized groups performing unauthorized activities, but that the documentation of industrial history and a return of nature can also be found in these areas. He writes, “the effects of post-industrialism, the

passing of time, wars, the nature of capitalism, and parsimonious speculation are, of course, the things that produced these places” (Doron 2000, 252) and that demolishing these areas will not delete the systems and processes which produced the voids in the first place, but “re-planning, redeveloping, revitalizing, and “Renaissanciation” [sic - of these places] will simply erase evidence of the crime” (Doron 2000, 252). These spaces act as memorials to the historic narrative of the areas, but as they are repurposed and rehabilitated the associated narratives are redefined and amended.

Developers and planners use their associated discourse to rationalize their actions, they communicate that they are transforming and revitalizing areas that are ugly and unproductive into spaces that are deemed clean and useful. Many of these “dead zones” (Doron 2000, 247) have begun to challenge and remake the notion of a division of urban and nature as nature has “started to reconstruct the built or ‘ruined’ environment” (Doron 2000, 255). The city of Detroit perfectly illustrates this as the landscape has transformed from an urban, built environment into a combination of “deserted city and wild nature” (Doron 2000, 255). Nature and urban become intertwined in a way that makes them difficult to separate and define individually – one relies on the other to exist. In this way, “dead zones” (Doron 2000, 247) or the lack of redevelopment, are also revising our understanding of nature and history.

Conclusion

It is clear from the analysis that the three stakeholder groups are all attempting to reconstruct the ways that people currently view the Anacostia River, though they are doing so with different approaches. The river and its history has long been associated

with negative images and in order to gain community support, investment dollars, and funds to clean up the river, those unfavorable images need to be reversed and revised. In a focus group conducted by the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) of local residents and stakeholders the word most often used to describe the Anacostia River was “dirty” (NWF 2012, 8). Other words that people associated with the river included muddy, smelly, and dangerous. The words that people used were overwhelmingly negative and unappealing. The report determined that “with the exception of a few stakeholders who had personal recreational exposure to the river, there was a nearly unanimous opinion that very little of the population appreciated or has any sense of community ownership of the river” (NWF 2012, 15).

It is obvious that redevelopment is altering the ways that people view the river and its natural and historical landscape. The discourse surrounding redevelopment is redefining how people view and value the environment and how the historical narrative of the area is understood. People residing in communities along the waterfront have long seen the river as associated with an economic value, and as that value has waxed and waned so too has their attitude towards the river. In these contested areas nature is treated like a commodity, a resource for capitalism, so current economic trends directly shape nature. Government, developers, and environmental groups alike want to rebrand the river so that residents value it differently, although they have deviating motivations behind their efforts. In the process of revising the image of the Anacostia River, these stakeholders will also be reconstructing the general notion of what is natural and remaking the history surrounding the river. The physical landscape of redevelopment is

specifically made to fulfill a certain image based off of preconceived notions of nature and history. Kear describes waterfront redevelopment as:

A post-industrial landscape crafted to fit an image of ecology, leisure, and liveability which feeds off the consumption preferences of professionals in a service economy; a waterfront which exists in a highly contrived, ideologically controlled and economically commodified reality. (Kear 2007, 327)

Remaking and rehabilitating waterfront areas have greatly altered the original story of the Anacostia and the notion of nature, sometimes to such an extent that people understand both only as an imitation of the real thing.

CHAPTER 4: THE YARDS – A CASE STUDY

Of the many D.C. waterfront redevelopment projects completed within the last decade, none has been more touted than The Yards. Located directly along the Anacostia River, the area was originally an annex of the Washington Navy Yard. Once a bustling industrial area that also housed the city's naval presence, it was largely abandoned after the Navy consolidated its operations in the area in the early 1960s. After years of neglect, the Federal government opted to open up the property for redevelopment in 2000; since the completion of several early-phased projects the redevelopment has brought international attention to a previously unknown part of D.C. While just one of several large-scale development projects, The Yards combines many aspects of redevelopment that have previously been discussed – it offers a blend of mix-used buildings, an award-winning waterfront park that provides green space to the community, and adaptive reuse of some of the industrial buildings located on the site. Looking closer at the area's history, the repurposing of industrial buildings, marketing techniques, and the various ways that both history and nature are being integrated into the projects will highlight the ways that the local history and the notion of nature have been reconstructed in an attempt to fit a sellable, rebranded image.

History of the Site

The area now known as the Capitol Waterfront was once D.C.'s industrial neighborhood, home to refineries, storage facilities, as well as the "U.S. Navy's oldest shore establishment" (Naval History and Heritage Command website). The Navy Yard, which has been in operation since the early 19th century, was originally a shipbuilding center before it transitioned to manufacturing ordnances and then eventually was consolidated to be used for ceremonial and administrative purposes. As buildings were abandoned of their official use and the work population of the area decreased, the area became home to an underground subculture that utilized the neighborhood's deserted nature to their benefit. Starting in the 1990s the area began to transition away from industrial use when the D.C. government began building mixed-income developments in the area (Hoffer 2014). In the early 2000s several large companies, including the U.S. Department of Transportation, moved into the neighborhood and the decision was made to build a new baseball stadium in the neighborhood. Since then a boom of redevelopment has occurred and the landscape looks remarkably different than it did only 20 years ago. Although the neighborhood received a facelift, the history of the area has not totally been forgotten as many industrial and military buildings still stand.

According to the Naval History and Heritage Command website, the Washington Navy Yard was officially established in 1799 and quickly became the Navy's largest shipbuilding and shipfitting facility. During the War of 1812 the Navy Yard played an important role in the defense of D.C., but following the end of the war the area never restarted is ship-related activities due to the Anacostia River becoming too shallow to

allow large vessels into its ports. Industrial activities shifted to ordnance manufacturing and technology which continued from the Civil War through World War II; during its peak, the area employed and housed over 30,000 people (Hoffer 2014). “By World War II, the yard was the largest naval ordnance plant in the world” (Naval History and Heritage Command website) and the ordnance work persisted until finally coming to an end in 1961. Once it was no longer participating in manufacturing, storing, or transporting large quantities of goods, the Navy converted some buildings into office space and abandoned many of the industrial buildings; today the Navy Yard serves as headquarters for Naval District Washington.

Although the Anacostia River was originally a major resource to industrial activities for its transportation benefits, as the river filled with sediment and became shallower activities were forced to change from water-centric to land focused. No longer viewed as a resource to industry, the Anacostia River became a dumping ground which has left a toxic legacy still being dealt with today. As Wakefield points out, “throughout the industrial era, the presence of industry in a community was a source of pride” (Wakefield 2007, 298), but as industrial wastelands were created and water pollution problems became prevalent people began to move away and lose interest in these areas. As with many other similar cases, once the Anacostia became foul-smelling, murky, and unsafe people avoided the areas surrounding the river. After the Navy’s consolidation of its operations, much of the land and many buildings in the area became vacant. Along with the negative opinions of the Anacostia River and the surrounding abandon

properties, the land was almost exclusively owned by the U.S. government, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to purchase or transition to other activities.

Eleanor Holmes Norton, D.C.'s delegate to Congress, described the neighborhood during the 1990s as a "great federal wasteland" (Freed 2013). Beyond the Navy presence that continued in a limited capacity, the area was also known as home to most of D.C.'s gay nightclubs. In his article "How Navy Yard Built Up One of D.C.'s Fast-Growing Neighborhoods," Benjamin Freed notes that the neighborhood had a "cluster of nightclubs that catered to Washington's gay community," but that it was mainly "dominated by crumbling row houses, fading industrial plants, and a rising crime rate" (Freed 2013). Realizing the limited space available for D.C. to grow and the value of the land, the Federal government decided to begin working with investors and the D.C. government to redevelop the area.

What's Happening Now

The area has undergone a vast transformation since talks of redevelopment began in the 1990s. Highlights of projects already completed include: the opening of the Navy Yard Metro Station in 1991, the moving of the Department of Transportation headquarters to the area, and the opening of Nationals Park in 2008. With easier access to the surrounding neighborhoods and an influx of daily and special events visitors, there grew a need for other amenities and housing. According to the Capitol Riverfront Business Improvement District's (Capitol Riverfront BID) website, there are now over 34,000 daytime employees and a residential population of over 4,900 people. The neighborhood has two hotels, a riverwalk, several parks, restaurants, and retail stores. In

a *Washington Post* article about the redevelopment surrounding the Navy Yard, Tammy Shoham, BID's Vice President for Economic Development and Research, is quoted as saying, "we have one of the most exciting developments in the country – a master-planned mix of renovated old factories, new residential and office buildings, retail and 10 acre of parks" (Hoffer 2014).

The Yards is a 42-acre development project located within the larger Capitol Riverfront neighborhood. The development project consists of condominiums and apartments, office and retail space, restaurants, and Yards Park, an outdoor recreation area. Developed by Forest City Washington and managed as part of the Capitol Riverfront BID, once it is completed it will have a total of "5.5 million square feet" of development which includes "2,700 apartments, 1.8 million square feet of office space, and 300,000 square feet of retail, restaurants, and services" (Forest City Washington website). The Yards, and other current redevelopment that is occurring around it, represents a neighborhood experiencing urban renewal and illustrates firsthand how history and the environment are sanitized through the development process.

The Yards, which is located between the current Navy Yard, M Street, and the Department of Transportation headquarters, broke ground in 2008. It is clear from reviewing the discourse surrounding the project that Forest City Washington is using both the Anacostia River and the history of the site as selling features. In *The Yards at Southeast Federal Center Master Plan* the stated goal of the project is to "create a vibrant, distinct, and sustainable riverfront neighborhood in Washington, DC" (*The Yards Master Plan* 2013). In a blog post written by Jordan Goldstein, the co-manager of the

D.C. office of Gesler Design Firm, Goldstein recounts his first visit to the site of the Yards redevelopment:

It was a barren land with dilapidated former factory buildings and a river's edge riddled with debris and rubble of the former piers. Two things stick out in my mind from that day: the surprise of walking down to the river and seeing this wide, curving, largely unused waterway, and the excitement of seeing factory buildings that had so much potential. (Goldstein 2014)

By looking at the specific buildings being redeveloped as well as the discourse related to the overall project, it is apparent that the history of the site as well as the natural elements of the area are being remade to fit within a specifically defined narrative that promotes redevelopment. This narrative includes the appeal of historical buildings and architecture but ensures that the buildings are void of the specific details and voices from the past. It also embraces a closeness to nature, while overlooking the condition of the natural resources and how they came to be in their current state.

Adaptive Reuse

Adaptive reuse is the “renovation and reuse of pre-existing structures (such as warehouses) for new purposes” (*Merriam-Webster*). *The Yards at Southeast Federal Center Master Plan* explicitly states that it “recognizes the physical and cultural importance of the existing naval structures...retention is embraced as a way to add richness and a defining character to the overall development” (*The Yards Master Plan* 2013). To put this concept into fruition Forest City Washington notes that “six existing contributing historic structures will be renovated and adaptively reused, inspiring a defining architectural character for the new neighborhood” (*The Yards Master Plan* 2013). Among those buildings beings reused are “an old manufacturing facility [that] is

now the Boilermaker Shops, an industrial-chic complex of restaurants and stores” (Freed 2013) and “the *Washington Post*’s former printing plant [that] reopened this year as a sleek new headquarters for several DC government agencies” (Freed 2013). Beyond being forced to keep several of the buildings intact due to their status as historic landmarks, developers today see adaptive reuse as a way to sell consumers the “charm” and “character” they desire while still giving those same consumers new construction finishes they consider necessary. Rather than emphasizing the historical narratives of the buildings, redevelopment often keeps the industrial facade and creates a new narrative that fits within the parameters of what their consumers are looking for in neighborhoods. For the middle to upper class urban dwellers this may consist of a clean and safe neighborhood that is close to amenities and offers a unique aesthetic appeal often not found in suburban tract homes; it does not involve having to consider the previous life of the building which may be linked with war, pollution, and social issues associated with industrial jobs and workplaces. This practice is illuminated when looking closer are two specific buildings within The Yards redevelopment: the Foundry Lofts and the Boilermaker Shops.

The Foundry Lofts

The building that is currently known as the Foundry Lofts, which now houses apartments on its upper-levels and retail on the ground-floor, was originally constructed in 1918 and in its former life was a pattern and joiner shop for the original naval complex. According to local real estate blog *JD Land*, redevelopment on the building began in 2008 and was completed in 2011. Currently home to 170 apartments as well as a

furniture store, a Thai restaurant, and a Potbelly's Sandwich Shop, Forest City Washington worked to keep the exterior look of the building unchanged and also attempted to retain the "industrial" feel of the original structure (Dupree website).

Marketing discourse from the Foundry Loft's website reads:

Discover a creative new way to live: in a new loft apartment constructed in a glorious historic structure in one of DC's most interesting urban districts. Where you'll find the drama, the style, the big city excitement of a real, established, close-in neighborhood. It's a place with a glorious past. And now – with the completion of Foundry Lofts – an even more exciting future, a future you want to be a part of. (Foundry Lofts website)

Utilizing the currently popular industrial chic trend as a selling point, the Foundry Lofts emphasize the appeal of a historical structure by playing up the historical narrative without highlighting any of the actual history. Additionally, these conversions "involve an orderly revitalization of useful space" (Flanagan 1993, 71) in which multiple stakeholders reap the benefits: private stakeholders convert unused areas into money-earning spaces while public officials get to preserve historic buildings while enhancing the value of city land (Flanagan 1993, 72). The redevelopment is all about the appearance of history without any of the substance, which exactly mimics the construction practice of leaving the outside of the building historically accurate while completely demolishing and rebuilding the inside. Additionally, even the name of the building attempts to draw attention to its industrial background without giving a true portrayal of what the building was previously used for. Forest City Washington reworked the historical narrative of the building in a way that cleans it of its former use and focuses only on economically valuable components: that it is old and once used for industrial purposes.

The Boilermaker Shops

In its previous life, the Boilermaker Shops building was a “former naval industrial building where boilers for Navy ships were manufactured” (Capitol Riverfront BID website). Built in 1919, the building is now home to office space and retail, including a brewery, a bakery, restaurants, a pet supply store, and a dry cleaner. The building’s past is significant because of the importance the Washington Navy Yard once held in manufacturing ordnance and ship parts during both World War I and II. Describing the building before redevelopment began, Jordan Goldstein writes,

It features a central space a block long, high ceilings and an internal crane that lofted giant boilers and swung them down the assembly line. Massive walls of windows flooded the factory floor with natural light, where workers worked on the pieces and parts of World War I and II warships. (Goldstein 2014)

Even after the building was no longer used by the Navy for war-related efforts, it continued to be utilized when it functioned as an indoor parking lot, a storage facility, and even the backdrop for the horror film, *Hollow Man* (Goldstein 2014). Just as with the Foundry Lofts, most of the history of the building has been wiped away and built over so that the past use of the structure is only recognized from the building’s name and physical appearance. The architectural features that were once necessary in order for the building to function – tall ceilings, large windows, open space – are now quaint aesthetic features used to market the building to potential tenants and consumers. Formerly associated with heavy machinery used to produce goods for wars, the building’s history has been sanitized so that people recognize its former activities only as a far-off, out of context tidbit; it becomes something they may momentarily consider when discussing where to go to dinner with a friend.

Nature

A large component of The Yards redevelopment project is its close proximity to the Anacostia River and the availability of greenspace that can be used by the public. The centerpiece of the entire area is The Yards Park, a 5-acre waterfront park that includes “open grassy areas and well-landscaped outdoor rooms, a waterfall and canal-like water feature, an elevated overlook, an iconic bridge and light sculpture, terraced performance venue, and a riverfront boardwalk” (The Yards Park website). *The Yards Master Plan* describes the park as “a unique nexus between the river, active, and passive recreation, commercial interests and local residents” (*The Yards Master Plan* 2013). But more than just creating a park for residents and visitors to use, The Yards redevelopment project acknowledges that although “long a polluted dumping ground, the fragile ecosystem of the Anacostia River is being reclaimed as an important resource” (*The Yards Master Plan* 2013). Using the close proximity to water as a way to draw people to the area and the popularity of the concept of sustainable-living to entice consumers to invest in the neighborhood, developers are able to highlight certain aspects of the Anacostia while working to change others that do not fit within the image they are creating and selling.

As with many waterfront redevelopment projects, The Yards puts a major focus on recreation and leisure activities that outdoor space and the Anacostia River can offer. The dichotomy between urban and nature is tenuous; many people living in cities seek areas that are quiet and disengaged from the bustle of downtown, qualities that are often associated with nature. Additionally, many people correlate outdoors with being healthy and they view proximity to outdoor spaces as a boast to their well-being. The Capitol

Riverfront BID uses this notion to entice visitors when they invite people to, “unwind or recharge with nature in the Capitol Riverfront, a place for an active and healthy lifestyle” (Capitol Riverfront BID website). By offering people a commodity they believe is missing from their lives, developers can cajole potential consumers to make financial decisions based on emotions rather than on material and economic factors.

Redevelopment by definition requires a physical transformation of the landscape (Wakefield 2007, 305) and the technological activities that are required to make these changes are often the highlight of redevelopment efforts over the river itself. In a section about riverfront revival, the Capitol Riverfront BID website discusses the environmental efforts it has undertaken in order to green the area, they write “here green is more than a color – it is a commitment evident in sustainable development, environmentally conscious businesses, mass transit access, walkability, and active public parks” (Capitol Riverfront BID website). While promoting the sustainable and environmentally-friendly aspects of the project – everything from environmentally-responsible building practices to permeable pavers to increased green space – will have on the environment, they neglect to recognize that the very landscape itself is being altered. Development is cleaning the river so it becomes a draw to the area instead of a feature that keeps people away, and in the process they are editing the river’s story so that it showcases only a positive image while erasing the decades of abuse and neglect. While the Anacostia may be benefitting from these changes, the naturalness that is being created and advertised is just a simulacrum of the actual environment.

The Discourse of The Yards

As with all redevelopment, a major component of a project is the marketing and branding. In order to understand just how the history and nature in the area has been claimed and reimagined, it is necessary to look at the discourse surrounding The Yards. By seeing how the area's history and the Anacostia River are integrated into the communications surrounding the project, we can better grasp the altered narratives and newly defined concepts. On websites and literature for Forest City Washington, The Yards, and associated development projects there are several keywords and phrases that get repeated and emphasized: vibrant, innovation, historic, and urban riverfront. These not only target a certain audience, but they are also one dimensional facets of the overall narrative of the neighborhood.

With so much redevelopment going on in D.C., it has become necessary to focus on distinguishing characteristics to set projects apart from each other. The Forest City Washington website describes The Yards as “a careful blending of adaptive reuse of historic buildings with new construction [that] offers residents and visitors an eclectic, urban, riverfront neighborhood experience with an emphasis on sustainable design” (Capitol Riverfront website). In this description they note the historic character of the buildings but stress the amenities of new construction. On The Yards' website they provide a narrative of the history of the neighborhood:

The Yards gets its rich history – and name – from the neighboring Washington Navy Yard. In the early 19th century, the area now known as The Yards was home to a bustling wharf, sugar refinery, and brewery. Up until World War II, The Yards was an important part of the industrial capacity of the Navy Yard which has since been reduced in overall size. But, that proud nautical industrial heritage has now found new life as The Yards! (The Yards' website)

This description draws on the historical significance of the area and uses the historic narrative as a way to evoke people into feeling a connection with the neighborhood through nostalgia. It captures the public's imagination by calling on consumers to become part of the revised narrative. Additionally, they use place branding to focus on creating a unique appeal, offering something that other development projects cannot.

But history is not the only thing the discourse focuses on, marketing materials also highlight the neighborhood's proximity to natural features not often found within urban neighborhoods – open green space and public access to water. The Yards Park website describes the area by focusing on these facets:

The Front is leading the way in green innovation and the best in city living, with the extraordinary advantages of riverfront living; a distinct industrial heritage, and access to what matters including unique parks and river access, sports and entertainment, exceptional value, and proximity to Capitol Hill. (The Yards Park website)

As noted above, sustainability is a “hot” issue that many consumers feel passionate about investing in; coaxing people to visit and spend money in the area by concentrating on environmental issues is a common tactic used by developers to increase the number of visitors.

While Forest City Washington is the developer of the project, it is the job of the Capitol Riverfront BID to market the project and ultimately sell the space to potential tenants, consumers, and visitors. According to Capitol Riverfront BID's website, they support and enhance the Capitol Riverfront neighborhood through: cleaning and maintenance, employing safety and hospitality ambassadors, providing marketing and holding special events, coordinating improvements, and building a sense of community

(Capitol Riverfront BID website). In reviewing the Capitol Riverfront BID's website as well as their two most recently Annual Reports, it is clear that a similar discourse pattern emerges.

In their *2014 Annual Report* the Capitol Riverfront BID focuses on the idea of selling a lifestyle to the public. They use the word "vibrant" repeatedly and discuss "living life to the fullest potential" through their various unique amenities. They communicate the assumption that nothing of note was happening in the area before redevelopment arrived and they fixate on the concept that they have worked to enliven the waterfront with activities that they associate with excitement and growth. In an attempt to rebrand the area and dispel the many negative connotations D.C. residents associate with the Anacostia River, there is a major focus on safety and cleanliness. In its marketing materials the Capitol Riverfront BID attempts to overhaul the neighborhood's previous image as well as revise its narrative and past by glossing over some parts of the area's history and highlighting other parts.

In their *2015 Annual Report* the Capitol Riverfront BID's focus transitions from selling a lifestyle to engaging with nature and the community. It is not effective enough marketing to convince people to live close to the river, they have also begun evangelizing to consumers the benefits of interacting and engrossing one's self with the river. The 2015 report focuses on convenience, "accessibility, and beautiful open spaces" (Capitol Riverfront BID 2015, 16) and how living within The Yards brings all of those things to your front door. It stresses the idea that when you live in the neighborhood you are in close "proximity to all that matters" (Capitol Riverfront BID 2015, 4), preying on a

stereotypical urban dweller and their desire to be around open spaces and natural landscapes. The discourse glosses over the fact that the bucolic elements people are paying to interact with at The Yards are not natural, but designed and constructed to fit within a certain image.

Conclusion

As redevelopment occurs and new neighborhoods are created from the remnants of older ones we often see that the historical narrative and surrounding landscape are updated and altered. Developers want the vintage charm of the area, they want to market the architectural features of the buildings and boast about proximity to natural elements, but they do not want consumers to be reminded of any of the negative particulars that often go along with post-industrial areas. When attempting to remove the industrial and adverse ecological legacies of these areas, developers may offer replacements that are modeled off of the ideals found within a certain lifestyle. They are revising nature and history to fit within a predetermined mold and using nature as a brand. As Hagerman points out, “the planning and development process creates new narratives highlighting restored ecologies, urban civility and sustainability that overwrite legacies of oppression and pollution and the history of workers and residents within the industrial landscape” (Hagerman 2007, 295). This procedure is illustrated when viewing The Yards redevelopment and the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings within it. Endorsed by developers as the rediscovering of an area that was forgotten, this process can more accurately be described as the revising and remaking of an area that was once considered valueless. Once the value has been realized and redevelopment begins the remnants of

industry are quickly hidden from view and new historical narratives, symbols of industry, and articulations of nature are promoted in their place.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING WITH MEASURES OF SUCCESS AND THE FUTURE

Redevelopment has literally transformed the physical landscape of the river and in doing so it has also shaped our concepts and understandings of nature; Bunce and Desfor write, “the human manipulations of these material forms of nature have not left urban waterfronts as pristine natural places, but, indeed, have heavily influenced their transformation over time” (Bunce and Desfor 2007, 3). Using the Anacostia River and its surrounding neighborhoods as a case study, I have shown how capitalism, in the form of redevelopment along the river, has had a direct influence on the public’s understanding of nature and the historical narrative of the area. In looking at the redevelopment and the related rhetoric from three main stakeholder groups I have demonstrated the myriad of ways that history is reconstructed and nature is repurposed as an imagined entity that is then commodified and used to sell goods. The discourse of these groups has altered the way that residents of these neighborhoods and the general public alike have come to understand the river and have prompted the question: “how should society value an urban river in a modern, developing city?” (Rademacher 2011, 90). I have illustrated how these concepts are actually brought to life by looking at a specific redevelopment project currently being implemented along the Anacostia River; the case study of The Yards has shown that “landscape is a social activity, a social text” (Katz 1998, 55) that is constantly

changing and evolving along with society. Redevelopment alters the corporeal veneer of a neighborhood while also modifying the perceptions of community members.

My research has shown that not only has capitalism had a direct role in the social, ecological, and economic making of the Anacostia River, and its subsequent restorations and reconfigurations, but that the concept of nature itself has been recreated and altered through a variety of capitalist activities, specifically redevelopment. Some argue that capitalism and technology have made it so that nature no longer exists or that if nature does exist, it must do so in a vacuum, completely detached from society. Langston disagrees with this notion and argues,

More and more in modern life, we fool ourselves into believing that human and ecological processes are separate. Urban life may make the connections between people and nature increasingly difficult to see, but that does not make them any less important. We are intimately connected to nature, and nature is intimately connect to us. (Langston 2003, 169)

Society's connection with nature can be seen in just how fervent community members and stakeholder groups can be when advocating for access to greenspace and for improving the health of surrounding natural resources. This connection is directly related to how a society values its natural landscapes and what it is willing to do to ensure protection of the surrounding environment. There is a direct correlation between how nature is viewed and understood and how it is treated during redevelopment; when the emphasis is placed on financial value over cultural value what is best for the natural resources may be placed second to what is best for the financial success of a project.

The debate between advocating for prioritizing a certain type of value relates directly to the objectives and intentions of a development project. In the case of the

Anacostia watershed redevelopment discussed in this paper, each stakeholder group has their own set of goals that they have worked to achieve and their feelings about the success of projects correlates to those goals. This final chapter will consider what it means for an urban waterfront redevelopment project to be successful as well as look to the future of redevelopment along the Anacostia.

Measuring Success

Often when discussing waterfront redevelopment projects the conversation turns to whether projects are deemed successful and how that success is measured. The complex character of urban waterfront redevelopment projects make the discussion about success difficult since many factors and stakeholders are part of the complicated equation and there needs to be a certain type of harmony between the different groups in order for each to feel satisfied by the end-result. Hoyle notes this when he writes, "on the ground, outcomes reflect the balance between commercial interests and social goals, and achieving that balance is often a source of conflict" (Hoyle 2000, 403). The best way to look at success is to break it into different categories; David Gordon observed that "waterfront redevelopment projects must be measured in terms of political, design, and financial success" (quoted in Brown 2009, 110). Impossible to measure against each other, these categories offer a wide spectrum of the ways that redevelopment projects can be viewed and assessed.

Financial success is the easiest of these three categories to discuss because whether a project is considered financially successful is fairly cut-and-dry. If the project meets or exceeds the monetary goals set-forth in the planning stages than the project can

be considered a success. Redevelopment projects and urban waterfront ones in particular, often come with a very complicated network of financial investors and developers due to the high costs and unknowns associated with building along a waterfront, so there are often goals associated with satisfying market demand and attracting consumers. Success may not hinge on just monetary objectives, but may also focus on the attracting and retaining of consumers.

Environmental success, although seemingly straightforward has nuances that make it a little more complex than measuring financial success. Although the stakeholder motives behind this are divergent, it is unquestionable that all involved stakeholder groups associated with redevelopment along the Anacostia want the river to be protected and remediated so that it can be utilized as a resource. The various and differing motives behind the goal of a clean watershed create the need for there to be differing measurements of success. The stakeholder groups who place an emphasis on the cultural worth of the Anacostia aspire for a swimmable and fishable river and they hold hope that redevelopment and the associated attention will provide the resources to make this possible. In this case success cannot be realized until the water quality increases and bacteria levels decrease, but that does not mean that the environmental issues surrounding redevelopment have completely failed. In the case of the Anacostia watershed, some believe that redevelopment has initiated positive changes and the health of the river is slowly increasing with the first return of grasses in a decade, improved water quality, less abundance of trash found in the watershed, and progress being made on addressing legacy toxins and stormwater runoff issues (AWS 2015).

Measuring the political success of a redevelopment project is the most complicated of the three categories due to its convoluted, dynamic, and layered architecture. Determining if a redevelopment project is politically successful involves looking at various political goals that include, but are not limited to: making local constituents happy through both the offering of a wide-array of amenities, the execution of predetermined, community development goals, and through the promotion of the political district as a whole. Other factors such as economic and power issues are also included in measuring the success of a project; in the case of redevelopment in the Anacostia watershed, political success might mean providing the community members with affordable housing options, grocery stores, and the access to the river. Political success means meeting agreed upon community goals while also promoting D.C. as a world class destination to live, work, and visit. Within the realm of politics a successful redevelopment project will have reached or made substantial progress towards all of its promised goals. The perceptible indicators for political success are less tangible than those for the other two categories as they are associated with attitudes and feelings rather than with money and dissolved oxygen levels. In many cases success may be realized when the redevelopment project receives buy-in from community members. In his book, *America's Waterfront Revival: Port Authorities and Urban Redevelopment*, Peter Hendee Brown notes that to achieve political success the stakeholder groups must rely on the need to build "consensus, cooperation, and trust at a local level" (Brown 2009, 109). No matter the category or specific development project, success ultimately depends on the

initial vision of the project, specifically what was promised to the public and community members and if that promise was kept.

Looking to the Future

The accomplishments of The Yards and other nearly complete projects have shone a bright light on the Anacostia River and its surrounding landscape. With some of the only remaining undeveloped parcels within D.C.'s boundaries, redevelopment in the communities surrounding the Anacostia looks as though it will continue at an accelerated rate. AWI's website touts this as a "renaissance of the Anacostia Waterfront" (AWI website) and stakeholder groups share in the excitement of all of the untapped potential within the area. With the understanding of nature being tied so closely with redevelopment along the Anacostia, it is beneficial for us to look to at some future development projects to see how nature may be manipulated as the landscape and community values continue to be altered.

The cranes and construction equipment are evidence of the massive redevelopment project happening along the Water Street neighborhood in Southwest D.C. While not directly adjacent to the Anacostia, this mega redevelopment project runs along the Washington Channel, which empties into the Anacostia River. This project, known as The Wharf, is a redevelopment venture that will include 19 acres of developed land running along just under a mile of shoreline (Clark Construction website). Planned as a mixed-use project, it will include hotels, apartments, office space, retail, and cultural and outdoor amenities. In a nod to the history of the area, the developer plans to include plaques and sidewalk markers to designated historical events (The Wharf website).

Developers and city officials are working together to make the project into a destination that will be unique to the city, somewhere consumers can go that is unlike anywhere else in D.C or the region. They hope to accomplish this by recruiting an eclectic array of tenants and marketing the sites close proximity to the water in order to draw in a wide assemblage of consumers.

Another highly-anticipated redevelopment project is set to be implemented on Buzzard Point, which is located on a peninsula where the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers converge. According to D.C. OP's *Buzzard Point Vision Framework and Implementation Plan*, Buzzard Point is "currently dominated by industrial uses and underutilized parcels" (D.C. OP 2015, 8), so any potential redevelopment in this area would not consist of a single project, but the remaking of an entire neighborhood. This may include a new soccer stadium, transportation infrastructure, and other mixed-use urban amenities. The D.C. OP believes the projects will help spark the area's "long-awaited economic revitalization and overcome its isolated, industrial character" (D.C. OP website) and it will need to include a public investment of \$600 million (D.C. OP website). The beginning stages of the design plan are expected to be implemented within the next five years with the full development completed within 10-20 years.

Though not directly related to redevelopment, looking at the environmental future of the Anacostia River is also important in forecasting how the landscape will be valued and understood by the community in the future and also how that landscape may physically change. Both governmental and environmental organization stakeholder groups have the shared goal of making the Anacostia swimmable and fishable in the

coming years, but they diverge when it comes to agreeing on a timeframe. D.C. DOEE has laid out a plan to accomplish the shared goal of a fishable and swimmable Anacostia by 2032. Initiated in 2008, the D.C. government convened local and federal agencies in order to create what they believe is a realistic timeline for cleaning and remediating the river. Local environmental organizations, specifically the Anacostia Watershed Society, have a more aggressive and optimistic timeframe of a clean Anacostia River by 2025. They believe that the timing and conditions – redevelopment bringing money and attention to the river, multiple local and federal agencies participating in the efforts, the support of the local community, and a large investment from DC Water – are uniquely situated to allow for the targeted goals to be achieved (AWS brochure). Attempting to reverse 200 years of pollution and abuse is a huge task and though their timelines do not converge exactly, having two stakeholder groups working in unison towards a shared vision has allowed community members to feel cautiously optimistic. The reality is that attaining these environmental goals will have a huge impact on the way the community values the river and sees it as a resource. How people comprehend nature changes according to their positionality and proximity to it; having a closer physical relationship with the river may allow for a more intimate understanding and a transformation in the landscape's value.

Conclusion

As advances are made in technology, cities are being transformed, values are evolving, and local communities are changing their understanding of nature as well as the historical narrative of their surrounding natural landscapes. White writes, “rivers

constantly adjust; they compensate for events that affect them. They are, in this sense, historical; products of their own past history” (White 1995, 12). Redevelopment along the Anacostia River will continue into the foreseeable future and as it does it will continue to alter the environmental landscape and the public’s relationship with that landscape. Anne Rademacher, in her book *Reigning the River: Urban Ecologies and Political Transformation in Kathmandu*, notes that a river has a deep connection to past, present, and future collective identities of the community (Rademacher 2011, 160). People and nature are profoundly intertwined in such a way that they cannot be separated from one another when assessing identities and values; they need to be understood in the context of the other. As Hagerman points out, “nature has a social and cultural history” (Hagerman 2006, 289); together the local community and its surrounding natural features tell the story of the Anacostia River, and in doing so, they collectively determine its value. We are able to discern the historical narrative of the Anacostia River from its shorelines, sediment beds, receding and expanding marshlands, as well as the docks, buildings, and the people that gather on its banks. But in order to understand how the river is valued and understood by neighborhood residents, it is necessary to look at both the cultural values of the community and at the river so that the two combine to tell a richer narrative that adds to the discussion of the various ways that a society is a direct reflection of the surrounding nature.

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