

“Ready for Renewal”: A Content Analysis of *Washington Post*  
Coverage of Gentrification in Petworth, Washington, DC

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“READY FOR RENEWAL”: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *WASHINGTON POST*  
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BY

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**ABSTRACT**

Some scholars argue that gentrification is driven by the growth machine—the coalition of elites who stand to benefit the most from urban redevelopment. Sometimes overlooked in this coalition is the role of the news media. For the past 30 years, with the dawn of the post-industrialism, city-center neighborhoods have been the metropolitan areas experiencing the most redevelopment and demographic change, thus placing news readership in the center city as well. How does the media’s framing of a gentrifying neighborhood change over time? How is neighborhood desirability constructed in gentrified areas? This study uses a content analysis of selected *Washington Post* stories from 2000 and 2008 to examine how the paper’s framing of Petworth, Washington, DC changed as the neighborhood experienced gentrification. The study found that media framing in key categories such as general descriptors, community, businesses, and housing shifted from 1999 to 2008, the latter emphasizing the neighborhood’s further potential for redevelopment. The study also revealed that the DC government had a major hand in shaping redevelopment in Petworth in both 1999 and 2008, as well as through earlier efforts.

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## **THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING**

### Gentrification in DC

In late 2010, an al-Jazeera documentary refocused the spotlight of gentrification on Washington, DC, leading many people to step back and examine at the immense changes underway in the nation's capital. Called "There Goes the Neighborhood," the 20 minute documentary offers a overview of the ways in which Washington, DC neighborhoods have traditionally been divided, and shows that the heart of DC has changed over time from a collection of vibrant, middle class Black neighborhoods, to isolated lower-income neighborhoods, to what are now increasingly white neighborhoods with a significant population of young professionals (al-Jazeera 2010).

Previously a city with a 70% black population, the percentage of black residents dropped to about 51% in the 2010 census and is poised to drop below 50% with the next. As these population shifts occur, neighborhoods that were previously ignored or intentionally avoided have become some of the most desirable neighborhoods in which to live, with restaurants, bars, boutique shops, and other signifiers that DC is turning into a preferred playground for young white professionals (al-Jazeera 2010). Some see this gentrification process as either a byproduct of the economic system in our post-industrial society or a culture-driven population shift as people begin to tire of the suburbs and flock back into the city (Smith 1996:15).

Gentrification is not a phenomenon exclusive to DC. It has been documented in cities around the world since the 1960s, but the process is constantly evolving. Given the large black population that Washington, DC has maintained for decades, gentrification is perhaps

an even more contentious issue in the District than it is in other cities. Certain neighborhoods in Washington gentrified early, such as Adams Morgan and Dupont Circle. Others, like Columbia Heights and Petworth remain the sites of major change and much debate.

### Petworth, Washington, DC

Situated in Northwest Washington, DC, Petworth was originally the country estates of two wealthy Washington residents. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the estates were purchased and developed by a number of real estate moguls, and Petworth became one of the city's largest and earliest suburban subdivisions. It sat outside of the City of Washington, but within the borders of the District of Columbia. During the real estate boom and housing shortage of the 1920s, developers turned their attention to Petworth, building apartment buildings and the rowhouses that DC is known for, and the neighborhood's population expanded rapidly.

While history places Petworth outside of the DC city limits, Petworth now sits just northeast of redeveloped Columbia Heights, with its big box stores and condominium developments. Like Columbia Heights, Shaw, and other neighborhoods along the 14th Street corridor, Petworth suffered from disinvestment and middle class flight in the aftermath of the April 1968 riots following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. However, many of Petworth's residents did not leave, building a stable community. While revitalization of the U Street Corridor began in the 1990s, change in Petworth has occurred mostly within the past decade, after the opening of the Georgia Ave-Petworth Metro Station in 1999. The opening of the Metro Station reconnected Petworth with the downtown core and the Maryland suburbs. Since, the area surrounding the Metro Station on Georgia Avenue has been the heart of new development in Petworth.

Demographically, Petworth was almost entirely white, and had a large Jewish population that moved in with the development boom of the 1920s. Petworth remained an almost exclusively white neighborhood up to the 1950s. The 1960 census, however, put the number of “non-white” households at 77%, quite a dramatic shift in just ten or so years. By 1980, the demographics shifted even more, with the neighborhood being over 90% African-American. Since then many Latino families have moved into Petworth, similar to patterns in the neighboring Columbia Heights and Mount Pleasant neighborhoods. Because of its history and the sense of stability that Petworth retained over the years, it is an interesting case study for gentrification in Washington, DC.

### Research Questions

Focusing on the Petworth Neighborhood of Washington, I will use *Washington Post* stories from 1999 and 2008 to explore the ways in which the Post framed and marketed Petworth to the wider metropolitan readership. The study also aims to show how the media framing of gentrification changes over time, as well as what role the news media play in the gentrification process. After collecting and randomly selecting news stories, I used the data to answer the following questions: in gentrifying areas of Washington, DC, how is neighborhood desirability constructed and framed? How has the *Washington Post*’s framing of Petworth changed as the neighborhood gentrified?



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

One of the main debates in the gentrification literature, over time, has been the nature of the process itself. Is it economic? Cultural? Policy-driven? The majority of scholars account for each of these facets in theorizing the gentrification process (Hamnett 1991; Zukin 1987) but where they differ is what they consider to be the driving factor behind gentrification. Much of this comes down to two frameworks: that gentrification is a production-side process, or that gentrification is a consumption-side process. Economic and policy explanations are production-side, while cultural explanations fall to the consumption side. However, as the process changes, its definition and characteristics change as well.

### Production-side Gentrification

#### Economic framework

Economic explanations are perhaps the most common framework for understanding gentrification. While the term began as a way of understanding the renovation of housing stock at the city center by middle class people (Glass 1964), in the past few decades definitions have shifted to focus on the economic forces at play, perhaps showing a more Marxist bent to the literature than there previously was. Neil Smith, one of the most prominent production-side gentrification scholars, defines gentrification as “the reinvestment of capital at the urban center, which is designed to produce space for a more affluent class of people than currently occupies that space” (2008:9). So, in production-side theories of gentrification, the flows of people follow the flows of capital into the city center. Smith refers to this as the Rent Gap, or the concept that disinvestment at the city center ultimately

led to its revitalization, because it became more profitable for developers to build in the city rather than in the suburbs, where land prices and rents are already high (Smith 1987).

John Logan and Harvey Molotch, in their work *Urban Fortunes*, also view gentrification as a market-driven process. Their approach merges both Marxist and human ecological models of examining neighborhoods but it definitely addresses economic and policy arguments more than the consumption-side arguments. They argue that gentrification is one of the ways in which exchange value, or economic value, threatens the use value, or sentimental value, or a neighborhood. The importance of neighborhoods differs for those who live there and those who own property or businesses in the area. The contentious relationship that this creates also spurs resistance to perceived gentrification by community organizations and individuals (Logan and Molotch 1987; Cox and Mair 1988; Andrews and Caren 2010). In this framework, profit and growth clearly drive the gentrification process, and over time, tend to win out over sentimental and community attachments. In part, this is based on the assertion that gentrification is a process of the growth regime. The city itself generates growth, and the desire for growth influences every decision that the government and developers make (Molotch 1976). In production-side frameworks, gentrification is a process that, above all, fulfills the city's role as a tool for economic gain.

### Policy-Driven Framework

Economic frameworks of gentrification often go hand-in-hand with policy-driven frameworks, and they are the two main production-side gentrification theories. Wyly and Hammel identified and tested this phenomenon in their 1999 study of gentrified neighborhoods in major US cities, finding that low-income housing policy has much more to

do with gentrification of the late 1990s than it did with any of the previous waves of gentrification. They say that “contemporary gentrification has become mutually constituted with housing policy” (1999:763). In other words, governments advocate for poverty deconcentration policies. These include mixed-income housing developments like HOPE VI or voucher programs like Section 8 that move people into subsidized private housing, allowing for redevelopment of former public housing sites.

A contemporary argument inside the realm of policy-driven gentrification is whether or not new-build gentrification is, in fact, gentrification. The argument arises due to the fact that a significant portion of urban growth and redevelopment is occurring at former industrial areas, reclaimed Brownfield sites, or other non-residential areas. Scholars continue to argue whether or not this is gentrification mostly because it does not take the form of traditional gentrification as defined by Ruth Glass—the rehabilitation of existing housing stock—and it seemingly displaces fewer people by occurring in industrial areas rather than densely populated neighborhoods. This argument is especially relevant to the current literature—this debate grows as cities continue to develop reclaimed industrial areas and Brownfield sites.

New-build gentrification is an aspect of a larger process at work, argue Lees, Slater, and Wyly. They identify this as fourth-wave gentrification, a phenomenon unique to the United States. Beginning in the early 2000s, local governments began to push for economic development in previously underserved urban areas, while the federal government turned its attention away from domestic affairs, and therefore away from welfare and other safety net programs. Peck describes this process as “state-assisted efforts to reclaim the city for business, the middle classes, and the market” (Peck 2006:681). Unlike when gentrifiers were

seen as “pioneers” or “urban homesteaders” for their choice to move back into the city, in this framework, they are without agency; tools in a game of neoliberal urban restructuring that are drawn back into the city by structural forces.

In some ways, this differs from traditional forms of gentrification because it is not explicitly profit-driven. Rather it comes from public, governmental regulations and redevelopment decisions, or from non-profit businesses like community development corporations. It is an extension of growth regime politics in that it promotes value-free development—the assertion that urban growth is good for all involved (Logan and Molotch 1987). In the 2000s, Newman and Ashton say that growth regimes are “supported by a neoliberal policy regime that emphasizes poverty deconcentration, mixed-income neighborhoods, homeownership, and the reliance on the private market” (2003:1169). Policy-wise, this is done through block grant programs, public housing initiatives such as HOPE VI, and other means. Some call this “positive gentrification”, as it is being used as a way to drive urban change rather than respond to it (Davidson and Lees 2010).

On some level, though these two production-side explanations are inextricably linked, and it can be difficult to determine if market forces or public policy drive gentrification, and which responds to the other. Wyly and Hammel address this, saying gentrification is “used either as a justification to obey market forces or as a tool to direct market processes in the hopes of restructuring urban landscapes in a more benevolent fashion” (2005:35). So, while the two are closely linked, for the purposes of this project it is important to acknowledge the distinct roles of both public policy and the market in the gentrification process.

### Consumption-side Gentrification

In addition to the market and policy driven frameworks already discussed, other scholars argue that gentrification is a cultural phenomenon (Ley 1980; Ley 1996; Zukin 1982), meaning that gentrification is driven by the preferences of gentrifiers themselves. In this framework, gentrification “is a consequence of changes in the industrial and occupational structure of advanced capitalist cities” (Lees, Slater & Wyly 2008:90). In 1980, Ley argued that a shift in liberal ideology was responsible for changing the landscape of Vancouver in the 1970s. He argues that this ideology grew out of the New Left radicalism in the 1960s and created a “leisure class” or new, urban middle class whose role in gentrification he articulates further in *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City*. Ley deals directly with the production of gentrifiers themselves—again, arguing that the 1960s counter-culture and the hippies’ desire for “authentic” urban areas shifted into the yuppie desire of “festive” central cities. In other words, he explains gentrification as coming from the consumer rather than developers, government policy, or other actors (Ley 1996). Ley also argues that the new middle class often fights against the traditional growth machine, supporting limited, well-planned growth and redevelopment rather than serving as boosters for growth (Ley 1980).

Others identify the cultural side of gentrification with certain professions and lifestyles, specifically, artists, writers, and other creative professions. They also associate gentrification with certain types of architecture or housing, sometimes called the “gentrification aesthetic” (Ley 1996; Jager 1986). Sharon Zukin argues this at length in her book *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, in which she examines the

phenomenon of loft apartments in former warehouses or industrial areas, a facet of gentrification that has stuck around over the years (Zukin 118). She identifies artists (the original inhabitants of New York City lofts), as first wave gentrifiers, whose “living habits bec[a]me a cultural model for the middle class” (Zukin 1989:14). In other words, the artistic/bohemian lifestyle became desirable to the middle and professional classes, leading to the further gentrification of neighborhoods like SoHo in New York. This “gentrification aesthetic” of artistic lofts and studio apartments became a commodity, and continues to shape how gentrified areas look and feel.

In popular depictions of consumption-side gentrification, gentrifiers are sometimes reduced to the stereotypical “yuppie”—young, white, single, and professional. However, it would be inaccurate to reduce all gentrifiers to young, white, professional people. In many cities, there are Black gentrified or gentrifying neighborhoods, including Kenwood-Oakland in Chicago, which, while remaining an almost entirely Black neighborhood, has seen a major influx of professional and middle class people and homeowners in the past fifteen to twenty years, but not without much controversy (Patillo 2007).

### Perceived Benefits and Detriments of Gentrification

Aside from differing theories on the root cause of gentrification, scholarly findings on the value of gentrification differ widely as well. In particular, those operating from a Marxist framework tend to emphasize the negative effects of gentrification—namely, displacement of long-term residents, their community, and their informal support networks. Moreover, some say that gentrification further concentrates poverty and moves people into potentially worse

housing. Others, however, argue that gentrification, on the whole, is beneficial to a neighborhood and a city as a whole, as it upgrades neighborhoods without displacement. For example, in an analysis of New York City housing data, Freeman and Braconi found that gentrification did not displace large numbers of people, and that those who did move, moved to different housing in the same neighborhood (Freeman and Braconi 2004). Using the same data set, however, Newman and Wyly found that gentrification did displace the long-term residents of gentrifying neighborhoods, but that it did so over a longer timeframe that Freeman and Braconi studied (Newman and Wyly 2006). If nothing else, these studies show the complexity of the gentrification process and the difficulties that arise with studying it.

### Media and Gentrification

In the early 2000s, more scholars began to study the media representations and framing of gentrification. Before this, it accepted as fact that the mass media's representations of gentrification and neighborhood change would be almost entirely positive—echoing the opinions of the growth elite and cementing the news media's status as a growth booster (Logan and Molotch 1987; Croteau and Hoynes 2006). According to recent studies, the media coverage has been more varied than one would assume given the literature (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf 2011). In fact, studies from the mid-2000s suggest that the media framing of gentrification as a neutral or negative process has made gentrifiers self-conscious about their role in neighborhood change processes and the potentially negative effects that they have. Interestingly, the majority of the literature on media framing of gentrification is from before 2008, which raises questions about the how these studies translate to gentrification processes that continued after the economic recession hit in 2008.

This past year has seen several new studies of gentrification framing, including both published pieces from academics (Brown-Saracino and Rumpf 2011) and dissertations (Schoene 2011). Those studies, though, only use data from 2006 and earlier. Due to this gap in the literature and research, it is important to replicate studies like this in a more current timeframe, as well as in difference cities. Particularly, studies should now turn to cities that have continued to experience gentrification and growth despite the recession and the collapse of the housing market. Washington, DC is perhaps one of the best examples of this—the city’s population has steadily risen for the past ten years, and the demographic shifts in the metropolitan area during the same timeframe are dramatic.



## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Growth Machine Thesis

In 1976, sociologist Harvey Molotch first theorized “the city as a growth machine” in his article of the same name. He and John Logan revisit this subject in their 1987 book *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*. Since then, it has become one of the most popular frameworks through which to understand urban redevelopment. Molotch and Logan argue that the growth coalition is run by those for whom “the city is their business” (2007:x). The most powerful have the most political influence, and therefore, are heard more often than other voices. The growth coalition consists of business owners, lawyers, realtors, developers, unions, utilities companies, and others that make sure the most pertinent goal of local government is growth. Molotch says the growth coalition determines “who, in material terms, gets what, where, and how” (Molotch 1976:313). Even when their visions differ, growth is the goal (Logan and Molotch 1987:51). Since those in the growth coalition are elites, they have the most influence over government through zoning policies, funding, and other regulations relating to growth.

The role of the news media in the growth coalition is unique. Like certain businesses and institutions like universities, they have a vested interest in growth due to their ties to place (Logan and Molotch 1987; Cox and Mair 1988). However, they have more influence over the general public than other members of the growth coalition, because they create the news that people read and accept as fact. In other words, the news media construct day to day reality in the city, influencing opinions on growth, particularly for those unaffected by said growth (Molotch and Lester 1974). According to Logan and Molotch, newspapers participate

in growth “boosterism” (1987:70) to a greater extent than other growth coalition members. At the same time, though, their interest in growth is not tied to an industry or a neighborhood—as long as the metropolitan area grows, the news business will be successful. For example, the *Washington Post*’s success depends on readership in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, because they could not successfully relocate to another area. But, business does not depend on the growth specifically in say, Petworth, rather than Silver Spring. This is a key theoretical concept in the growth machine thesis. Because of the stake in growth, in the context of this project, one assumes that they would discuss gentrification and redevelopment (two means of achieving urban growth) in Petworth in a positive light, ignoring dissenting views or portraying them as unpopular opinions. Logan and Molotch put it well: “the newspaper has no ax to grind except the one that holds the community elite together: growth” (Logan and Molotch 1987:71).

While the growth machine is an old concept, it remains important in the present moment. As cities continue to redevelop industrial areas and as neighborhoods continue to gentrify, the growth coalition remains relevant, even if the news industry turns more and more to online and broadcast forms rather than print. One of the reasons this remains important is that gentrification scholars argue that the latest wave of gentrification—starting in the late 1990s and early 2000s—is more policy-driven than previous waves (Lees, Slater, Wyly 2008:180), and, as noted above, the growth coalition holds the most influence over policy change.

### Media Theory and Framing

A central tenet of most media theories is gatekeeping. This concept states that news editors and reporters have the power to decide whether a story is newsworthy, thus determine whether a story receives media coverage or not. Shoemaker and Reese put it well, saying “the media gatekeeper must winnow down a larger number of potential messages to a few” (1996:105). With regard to this study, the media acts as the gatekeeper to information about neighborhoods and neighborhood change, selecting which narratives are presented to the public. This is important because the news media is thought to be a neutral party, reporting the news as fact and informing public opinion on the matter. (Logan and Molotch 1987; Molotch and Lester 1974; Cox and Mair 1988). In contentious issues such as gentrification and redevelopment, there is often more news coverage than with mundane events, but the stories that are published favor established, insider groups (such as those within the growth coalition) rather than marginalized or outsider groups. This, again, suggests that the news coverage of gentrification would favor the interests of the growth coalition over the interests of long-term neighborhood residents or those organizing to resist gentrification in their neighborhood.

Another common framework for media analysis is frame analysis. Because of the amount of news there is to sort through, and the ever faster news cycle, the media often relies on framing to get their point across. Ryan, Carragee, and Meinhofer say that “frames organize discourse, including news stories, by their patterns of selection, emphasis and exclusion” (2001:176). This, as mentioned earlier, is a way of examining the media’s role in the construction of reality as well as the production of meaning in the news. Recently, frame

analysis has been used extensively in studies of social movements, looking at how social issues such as abortion or environmental protests are presented in the mainstream media. Frame analysis, though, is also the study of public discourse on an issue, and therefore is a relevant framework for this study. Earlier studies have found that a group's resources matter for whether or not their side will be represented in the media, with the most marginalized groups being ignored most often (Ryan et al 2001). While I am reluctant to lump the study of gentrification into the study of social movements, the sentiment is relevant to gentrification as well. Growth boosters are thought to be represented more widely than other voices, meaning that those with resources, political power, and/or ties to the media are those represented in the news discourse of gentrification.

## METHODOLOGY

The central research method of this study is a content analysis. I analyzed newspaper articles from the *Washington Post*, examining the way in which Petworth was framed and presented by the media, as well as who the *Post* interviewed and on what the article focused. To complete this analysis, I compiled a collection of every newspaper article mentioning Petworth from both 1999 and 2008, narrowed it down to those that mentioned the neighborhood's change, and then randomly selected ten articles from each year for analysis. This method allowed me to investigate the changes in media framing over time, and the latent meanings that that framing held.

### Definition

For the purposes of this study, I used Neil Smith's definition of gentrification from the 2001 *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. This definition states that gentrification is "the reinvestment of capital at the urban center, which is designed to produce space for a more affluent class of people than currently occupies that space." (in Lees et al 2008:9). I use this definition because it encompasses forms of gentrification beyond housing renovation, such as new-build condominium developments and the redevelopment of former industrial areas.

### Limitations of the study

There are, of course, issues in using this method. One, in particular, is the fact that newspaper articles, while a good basis for determining the desirability of a neighborhood, cannot tell us everything, specifically they do not tell us what on-the-ground sentiments and realities in the neighborhood were in either 1999 or 2008. Because the media relies on specific frames to discuss gentrification, newspaper articles cannot show us the variety of opinions and sentiments of residents in Petworth during these years. However, analyzing news sources is an appropriate way to determine neighborhood conditions and opinions because we cannot go back in time to determine what the opinions were. Moreover, analyzing news articles also shows how an important local institution, the *Washington Post*, views changing neighborhoods, as coverage itself can further shape the opinions of others. Another issue with using a content analysis of how the construction of neighborhood desirability might change if one were to use a different metric, such as a content analysis of advertisements, a survey of residents, interviews with real estate experts, or another method.

As with any content analysis, there can be issues with reliability, validity, and generalizability of the results (Matthes and Kohring 2008). I do not intend for this research to be generalizable to all gentrifying neighborhoods or all neighborhoods in DC, if only because of the extremely limited timeframe and sample size. Overall, it will serve as exploratory research into the intersections of gentrification and the news media in Washington, DC.

### Sampling Frame

For the sampling frame, as mentioned above, I collected every article from the *Washington Post* that mentions Petworth from the years 1999 and 2008 using the Lexis Nexis

news database—a digital news archive of full-text articles that allows the user to access all articles that contain a certain term within a designated timeframe. Within the search for Petworth, I narrowed my search to articles mentioning “gentrification”, or any of the gentrification synonyms or related terms that I came across in the literature, which include “redevelopment”, “revitalization”, “revival”, “transformation”, “upscale”, and others. From the narrowed archive, I randomly selected ten articles each from the two selected years using a random number table. From there, I coded each article according to the schematic described below. Then, I compared the two sets of articles to determine how the framing and presentation of the neighborhood and the neighborhood’s change shifted over time. Randomly selecting articles to analyze helped to minimize researcher bias in sampling. I chose to examine these two years because they represent different stages in Petworth’s gentrification process. Arguably, Petworth’s resurgence began with the opening of the Metro station in 1999. Therefore, 1999 is an appropriate year from which to begin analyzing the neighborhood’s change. As for 2008, the process was far enough along to gain increased media attention as well as attention from the general public, making it another useful year to study. Theoretically, the late 1990s and onward can be considered the start of the fourth wave of gentrification, during which government policies started to encourage gentrification more and more (Wyly and Hammel 1999; Lees, Slater, Wyly 2008:180). Overall, the two years were appropriate choices for the conclusions I hoped to reach.

### Coding

After reading through the selected articles multiple times I developed a coding scheme based partially on that of Brown-Saracino and Rumpf’s 2011 study on the framing of

gentrification in major US newspapers. Brown-Saracino and Rumpf coded their articles for positive, negative, neutral, and mixed frames, but since this study focused on a single neighborhood rather than all US cities, I felt it was necessary to go deeper than that, and examine changes in housing, businesses and organizations, community, and government and private developers as well. My coding scheme is as follows:

- **Overall Descriptors:** what neighborhood descriptors or buzzwords does the article use? What other terms are used to describe the neighborhood or its change? Are the terms used positive, negative, neutral, or mixed?
- **Businesses and Organizations:** does the article mention the businesses in the area? How much attention is given to neighborhood businesses, and what kinds of businesses are they? Is there mention of new developments?
- **Housing:** Does the article talk about housing or neighborhood dynamics? What types of housing: apartments, condominiums, new construction, detached houses? Does it talk about cost? Controversy? How does it describe housing and housing issues?
- **Individuals and Community:** Does the article mention the kinds of people in the neighborhood? In what way does it talk about them? What words does it use to describe the neighborhood population or their behavior, actions, or demographic profile?
- **Government and Developers:** Does the article talk about the government's role in redevelopment? Does it quote officials, and if so, what do they say? How does the article address developers or builders? How do developers discuss Petworth or Washington, DC in general?

Aside from these manifest codes that look at the general language of the neighborhood, the study investigated some of the latent messages in the articles as well, which, while less precise, are important for understanding how the news media work in constructing the desirability of the neighborhood.



## RESULTS

The data consisted of twenty articles from the *Washington Post*, ten from 1999 and ten from 2008. The articles were then coded using five categories: *General Descriptors*, *Individuals and Community*, *Businesses and Organizations*, *Housing*, and *Government and Developers*.

### General Descriptors

With regard to *General Descriptors*, these were coded into positive, negative, or neutral sub-categories. Petworth and its change were described positively on 39 occasions, negatively 30 occasions, and neutrally on seven occasions. Positive descriptors included repeated adjectives such as “affordable”, “welcoming”, or “stable” as well as positive statements on neighborhood change, such as “my favorite thing about this neighborhood is that it’s changing for the better” (Lee 2008). Within those instances, 80% of articles from 1999 employed the same historical narrative, describing Petworth as an affordable, livable neighborhood with a strong sense of community spirit, despite the neighborhood’s decline and isolation after the 1968 riots that followed the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In contrast, 20% of the articles from 2008 utilized this narrative.

### Individuals and Community

As for themes of *Individuals and Community*, the articles discussed residents on 40 instances. 19 of these were long-term residents, 11 were residents who recently moved into the neighborhood. Of those 11, four instances were quotes from Dan Silverman, the creator

of the popular “Prince of Petworth” blog. Public Officials were mentioned on 17 occasions, with the majority of these, 11 total, being quotes from DC City Council members.

In the same category, on ten instances, the articles explicitly discussed race and racial change in Petworth. Demographic change is a common indicator of gentrification, and it was discussed both positively and negatively in the articles analyzed. Six of the ten instances were positive. An example of this is residents saying “different ethnic groups have moved into the neighborhood and that’s great” (Lee 2008b). However, some of the race discussion was negative, pointing to racial discrimination in the redevelopment process (Layton 1999) or mentioning that new, white residents are “credited with saving the city” (Milloy 1999).

There were also 15 mentions of *Community Spirit* and 13 mentions of *Community Organizing*. Examples of *Community Spirit* included long-term residents inviting new neighbors “into their own home from renovation ideas” (1999), and new residents adapting to the neighborhood by “embrac[ing] the porch culture early on” (Lee 2008a). This “porch culture” was discussed six times in total, in both the 1999 data set and the 2008 data set. This also ties into themes of friendliness and neighborliness, which were 13 out of the 15 total mentions of *Community Spirit*. The articles also discussed *Community Organizing* on 13 instances. All but three of these instances occurred in the 1999 data set.

### Businesses and Organizations

In addition to the categories discussed thus far, the study analyzed *Businesses and Organizations* in Petworth as well. There were five mentions of *Closed-down Businesses*, 15 mentions of *Existing Businesses*, seven instances of *New Businesses* and seven instances of *Potential Businesses*. *Closed-down Businesses* included family-owned corner grocery stores,

restaurants, service stations, pharmacies, and dry cleaners. *Existing businesses* were Safeway, check-cashing outlets, liquor stores, takeout restaurants, a locksmith, a strip club, and a coin laundry. *New businesses* were a pharmacy, a yoga studio, a microbrew bar, and a youth hostel. There were also seven mentions of *Potential Businesses*, three related to the redevelopment of a former car dealership of Georgia Ave and four mentions of the debate over the Central Union Mission homeless shelter. All mentions of *New businesses* were part of the 2008 data set, while all 17 of 20 mentions of *Existing* and *Closed-down Businesses* were part of the 1999 data set.

### Housing

In the *Housing* category, there were 27 mentions of *Existing Housing* and 18 mentions of *Potential Housing*. The *Existing Housing* subcategory included five mentions of abandoned housing and vacant houses, two mentions of boarded-up apartment buildings, one mention of an “upscale crack house” (1999). There were also seven mentions of rowhouses, four mentions of renovated homes, and two mentions of apartment buildings. In the *Potential Housing* subcategory, I found four mentions of condominiums, four mentions of townhomes, three mentions of mixed residential/retail developments, two mentions of mixed-income developments, and two mentions of redeveloping the Park Morton Public Housing development.

### Government and Developers

The largest category, by far, was the *Government and Developers* category. The twenty articles analyzed featured 48 instances of government officials advocating for Growth

and Redevelopment in Petworth. These were either direct quotes from government officials, discussions of government programs or initiatives, or blanket statements saying that DC government officials want growth.

In this category, there were also 18 mentions of *Private Developers*, often by name, and 11 mentions of opinions from other stakeholders, such as residents, or property owners selling their businesses to developers. Mentions of property owners selling their businesses were coded into this category rather than *Businesses and Organizations* because these instances were specifically selling property as part of redevelopment, and either named developers by name or indicated specific government action related to redevelopment.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### General Descriptors

As mentioned above, in the *General Descriptors* category, I found that in both 1999 and 2008, Petworth was described positively more often than it was described negatively. Looking beyond just language, though, it is important to note that the negative descriptions of Petworth referenced the way the neighborhood was in the 1970s through the early 1990s, and how it is no longer like that. An illustrative example from a 1999 article reads “Brown, Williams, and other Petworth residents say, they saw the early signs of what became a long, painful decline in their community” (Lipton 1999). These statements are often followed by positive statements about neighborhood change as well, such as “It aint been right here since the riots. [The Metro] is going to help” (Layton 1999). Therefore, one can argue that these negative statements are positive statements as well, because they legitimize redevelopment in the neighborhood by proving how “bad” it was before government intervention and revitalization began.

These negative statements, particularly those referencing the 1968 riots, are part of a larger historical narrative that the *Washington Post* used to describe Petworth in a total of ten articles. Eight of these articles were from 1999 and two were from 2008, suggesting a shift in the general framing of Petworth in the news media. This reveals that the media’s framing of Petworth has, in fact, changed since the neighborhood began to gentrify. It is not clear why the narrative disappeared from the media, but it is potentially due to the fact that many of the articles in the 2008 dataset were written about specific building projects along Georgia Avenue, and therefore focused more on redevelopment than Petworth as a community.

Also of note in this category, is the fact that the term “gentrification” is used a total of two times in all of the articles. Both instances were in the 2008 dataset, and both were coded as neutral. The relative infrequency of this term is consistent with other recent studies of the media framing of gentrification. In a 2011 study, Brown-Saracino and Rumpf say that gentrification has become a “dirty word” and that has influenced the terms that both the news media and gentrifiers themselves use to describe changing neighborhoods (2011:296).

### Individuals and Community

Other categories showed shifts in media coverage as well. Within *Individuals and Community*, the articles revealed a change in the nature of *Community Organizing* in Petworth between 1999 and 2008. The three efforts mentioned in the 1999 data set—a campaign to improve conditions of the neighborhood Safeway, a neighborhood clean-up effort from children, and block clubs keeping an eye on day-to-day goings on in the neighborhood—portrayed community organizing efforts as attempts to improve the community for everyone who currently lives there. In contrast, the 2008 instances of community organizing focused on the community’s efforts to prevent a homeless shelter from opening on a site near the Metro Station. Arguably, this is an example of “Not In My Backyard” organizing, or NIMBY, a common tactic used in higher income communities to keep out social services and other “undesirable” institutions. Given the presence of NIMBY in higher income neighborhoods, it is possible that this change in community organizing is related to the change in Petworth.

This category also revealed themes of *Race and Ethnicity*, though perhaps fewer than expected, considering the prominence of race in discussions of gentrification in DC. There

were only ten mentions of race, appearing in a total of seven articles. Some of these I coded as positive statements on racial change—“other ethnic groups have moved in and that’s great” (Lee 2008)—and others I coded as negative statements, such as “upscale white residents credited with saving the city” (Milloy 1999). It is possible that these mentions of race were largely conflict-free due to the fact that the growth machine states that neighborhood change will be presented as beneficial to a neighborhood and to the city as a whole, and reporting on conflict would suggest otherwise. However, given that 40% of the mentions of race were coded as negative, it is hard to say whether or not this is the case, especially considering the small sample size of the study.

#### Housing, Businesses, and Organizations

In the *Housing* category, framing shifted from talking about *Existing Housing* (which included vacant, abandoned and blighted property and even “crack houses”) in 1999 to talking about *Potential Housing* such as condominiums, luxury apartments, and mixed-income redevelopment of a public housing. This shows a shift in both the available housing stock in Petworth, as well as the *Washington Post*’s presentation of Petworth, moving from a focus on history to a focus on the future.

Two articles noted the change in *Businesses and Organizations* over time—the first article, from the 1999 set, focused on changes in business during the neighborhood’s decline in the 1970s through 1990s. In that time, the businesses described changed from family-owned corner stores pharmacies and restaurants to check-cashing outlets, liquor stores and takeout restaurants. The second article highlighting changes in *Businesses and Organizations*, from 2008, juxtaposed new businesses like a yoga studio and a microbrew bar

with the other businesses in the area—including a strip club. Like with the *Housing* category, this reveals that the media emphasized the contrasts between the neighborhood’s previous character and its current state. Also prominent were discussions of *Potential Businesses*, which is consistent with findings from the *Housing* category.

In these two categories, the framing changed in similar ways—from what was or is in Petworth to what could be there. By framing changes this way, the *Washington Post* portrayed Petworth as a place in need of intervention and change. I argue this in part because of the people interviewed in the articles that focused on changes in housing and businesses. The articles in this category interviewed developers and government officials rather than residents, suggesting that developers and officials possess an authority on what is good for the neighborhood that the residents do not.

#### Government and Developers

In addition to the changes in framing, both the 1999 and 2008 datasets reveal the extent to which the DC Government has been involved in Petworth’s change, from the 1990s onward. This indicates that gentrification in Petworth is, at least in part, driven by policy. This finding is consistent with other studies of gentrification since the mid-1990s in other US cities as well (Wyly and Hammel 1999, Lees et al. 2008). Some examples of policy-driven redevelopment and gentrification from the 1999 set include four articles showing that the opening of the Georgia Ave-Petworth and Columbia Heights Metro Stations were used as opportunities to extensively redevelop the neighborhoods. These articles discussed the DC Redevelopment Land Agency, a government body that owned many properties adjacent to the new stations, and its efforts to decide how these parcels of land would be sold for



redevelopment. In a 1999 article on the subject, Ward 1 DC Councilmember Jim Graham was quoted as being “disappointed that the land agency acted on only two of the six parcels slated for redevelopment”, (Montgomery 1999) suggesting a push for even faster redevelopment of the area than occurred.

In 2008, examples of policy-driven gentrification and the inner-workings of the growth machine were even more explicit. Within this dataset, the push for growth focused less on the Metro and instead more on encouraging new developments in Petworth. One headline read “3 Developers get \$10 million in subsidies; DC Officials Hope Their Projects Will Lead to Others” (Schwartzman 2008b). Other articles noted DC officials’ “campaign to remake the corridor” (Schwartzman 2008a) by including it in their Great Streets Program, a project that improved public spaces in hopes of spurring private development. Furthermore, one article described an official push for “catalytic neighborhood projects”, with DC Councilmember Muriel Bowser saying “If we can kick-start this, we can encourage other revitalization” (Schwartzman 2008c). In this category, both DC officials and the *Washington Post* serve as growth boosters, presenting redevelopment in a positive light and offering few, if any dissenting opinions. This is evidence of the Growth Machine at work in Petworth. Under the Growth Machine thesis, one would expect that government officials work in the interests of developers, because growth looks good for the city and for their political aims. This aspect of the Growth Machine thesis was supported by the articles analyzed for this study.

## CONCLUSION

There are a number of conclusions one can draw from the results of this study. From the data, it is clear that the media's perceptions and presentation of several different neighborhood attributes—community, residents, housing, businesses, and general descriptors—changed over time, though the different categories changed in different ways. In all categories, however, the *Washington Post* presented Petworth's change as positive, supporting the hypothesis that the news media would act as a growth booster.

While these findings are important and consistent with the Growth Machine thesis, theories of policy-driven gentrification, and other recent studies of gentrification framing, it is necessary to consider the sample used when making these conclusions. Articles analyzed were selected from a larger archive of articles using either “gentrification” or a related word such as “redevelopment”, “transformation” or others. By excluding articles that did not explicitly address gentrification, it is possible that I have missed other frames that the *Washington Post* uses to describe Petworth in other news articles.

### Suggestions for Future Research

This study offers many possibilities for future research. One suggestion is to repeat the study with a larger sample size, incorporating more years into the timeframe. This would give a more complete and nuanced view of how media framing changes over the course of the gentrification process. In addition, future research may be interested in the finding that policy and government intervention were quite influential in Petworth's change. Additional studies of gentrification in Washington, DC should consider local politics as well, particularly the role of former mayor Adrian Fenty in DC's gentrification. During the 2010

mayoral campaign, gentrification was a major campaign issue, and Fenty was criticized both for his close ties to developers and his administration's push to sell off public property. These criticisms arguably led to Fenty's defeat and the election of the current mayor, Vincent Gray.

To better answer my second research question—how is neighborhood desirability constructed in gentrifying areas?—future research should explore other data sources, such as housing advertisements, or interviews with residents of the neighborhood. This would explore demand-side aspects of gentrification, a side of the process that this study did not address. While it does not have much to do with media framing, talking to residents can tell researchers more about the intricacies of neighborhood desirability than a news source can.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Coding Tables

<b>NEIGHBORHOOD DESCRIPTORS</b>			
Subcategory	Terms	Frequency	Total
Positive	Livable	2	62
	Affordable	4	
	Stable	3	
	Welcoming	4	
	Comfortable	1	
	middle-class	2	
	Quiet	1	
	tree-lined	3	
	How it used to be	16	
	Revitalization	11	
	Rebirth	2	
	Revival	3	
	Improvement	3	
	Renovation	1	
	Preservation	3	
	deserves to be fixed up	1	
	change (pos)	4	
	Redevelopment (pos)	2	
Neutral	Change (neu)	3	7
	Transformation	2	
	Gentrification	2	
Negative	Change/Difference (neg)	1	30
	Displacement	1	
	Depressed	2	
	Desolation	1	
	Displacement	1	
	Violence	4	
	riots/isolation	18	
	Redevelopment	2	



INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITY			
Subcategory	Term	Frequency	Total
residents	long-term	19	37
	New	7	
	Problematic	2	
	Dan Silverman, Prince of Petworth	4	
	ANC Commissioners	2	
	Neighborhood Activists	4	
Officials	Jim Graham	5	17
	Phil Mendelson	2	
	Marion Berry	1	
	Mary Cheh	1	
	Vince Gray	1	
	Muriel Bowser	1	
	Other Officials	6	
Race	expanding Latino population	3	10
	racial discrimination in redevelopment	3	
	Whites welcomed into neighborhood	3	
	whites "saving the city" (negative)	1	
Community	Religion	2	15
	informal community centers	2	
	families/children	2	
	Friendliness	3	
	"porch culture"	6	
Organizing	Block Clubs	2	13
	keeping an eye on neighborhood	5	
	children's clean-up campaign	1	
	Safeway improvement campaign	3	
	organizing against homeless shelter	2	

<b>BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS</b>			
Subcategory	Term	Frequency	Total
Closed	family-owned service stations	1	5
	corner grocery	1	
	dry cleaners	1	
	Pharmacy	1	
	family-owned restaurants	1	
Existing	Safeway	5	15
	check-cashing outlets	1	
	liquor stores	2	
	takeout restaurants	2	
	Locksmith	1	
	strip club	1	
	coin laundry	1	
	city pool	1	
	recreation centers	1	
New	Pharmacy	2	7
	yoga studio	1	
	microbrew bar	1	
	youth hostel	1	
	New near Metro	2	
Potential	Curtis Chevrolet Site	3	7
	Central Union Mission	4	

HOUSING			
Subcategory	Term	Frequency	Total
existing	Rowhouse	7	27
	apartment building	2	
	group home	1	
	youth hostel	1	
	blighted or abandoned property	5	
	vacant/boarded up apartments	2	
	Bungalows	2	
	renovated houses	4	
	public housing	2	
	"upscale crack house"	1	
Potential	Townhouses	4	18
	mixed residential/retail	3	
	mixed-income	2	
	luxury apartments	1	
	Park Morton redevelopment	2	
	Condominiums	4	
	homeless shelter	2	
other	Porches	3	4
	eviction/mortgage problems	1	

GOVERNMENT AND DEVELOPERS			
subcategory	Term	frequency	
government	advocating redevelopment	6	48
	Metro	6	
	catalytic projects	6	
	Focus on Georgia Ave	5	
	Great Streets Program	1	
	Homestead Lottery Program	2	
	Zoning	2	
	Subsidies	3	
	loans from city	2	
	city-owned parcels/properties	9	
	changing rules	6	
Private Developers	by name	14	18
	banking on dc as a solid investment	4	
Other	residents wanting development	5	11
	Washington Economic Partnership	1	
	redevelopment dispute	2	
	growth boosterism	3	

## Appendix B: List of Articles Used

### 1999 Dataset

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## 2008 Dataset

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