Bloomingdale

The Intersection of Gentrification, Aging-in-Place, and Race in a District of Columbia Neighborhood

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with Emily C. Pierson, MArch II/MCRP

The School of Architecture and Planning
The Catholic University of America

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloomingdale Study Area</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloomingdale Demographic Trends</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloomingdale Gentrification</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Dynamics</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: St. Martin’s Catholic Church Community Survey</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: The Summit at St. Martin’s</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wards and ANC districts of DC. Bloomingdale is located in Ward 5 and under the jurisdiction of ANC 5e. Map courtesy of Washington Post Co.
The boundaries of the Bloomingdale neighborhood as defined by historical account and the DC Office of Planning. Bloomingdale is bordered on the south by Florida Avenue NW, the west by North Capitol Street, the east by 2nd Street NW, and on the north by Bryant and Channing Streets NW. The surrounding neighborhood boundaries are approximate and relatively fluid as the neighborhood construct is based on identity and history rather than hard edges or jurisdictional borders.
Executive Summary

1. Many of the aging are vibrant and engaged, even while some are frail and impaired.

2. Innumerable benefits are derived when the aged can take advantage of existing programs and activities with both old and young learning from formal and informal interactions.

3. African-Americans succeeded in purchasing homes in Bloomingdale, and LeDroit Park to the west and Eckington to the east, in the late 19th century. Shockingly the restrictive deeds in force and Jim Crow legislation, embedded in covenants prohibiting them from becoming resident owners, remained in force up to the early 20th century.

4. After precipitous declines in the 1970s-1990s, Bloomingdale's population increased in the first decade of the 21st century, an indication of the area's emerging growth potential. Millennials in the 20 to 44 age bracket expanded appreciably and spurred this gain, even as those over 65 declined sharply.

5. In parallel with city-wide trends, the neighborhood's racial mix shifted dramatically. Blacks made up slightly more than half of the residents in 2010, down from about 90 percent in 2000.

6. Concurrently the area has been gentrifying economically, by age, and racially.

7. Despite substantial differences in median income, significant numbers of both Black and White households earned over $100,000 in 2010. Contrary to classic gentrification theory, Bloomingdale is part of another, nascent example and presents wider implications for the nation's urban policies.

8. Millennials have transformed the erstwhile American Dream, forgoing a suburban home with a white picket fence on a quarter to half acre in favor of inner city living, many without a car, and commuting to work by bike.
9. Bridging the gentrification and aging divide, St. Martin’s Church, and its dynamic priest, Father Michael J. Kelley, have forged links and bonded older residents with newcomers, virtually dissolving and/or mitigating former racial barriers.

10. The substantial influx of well-off Black and White households, sharing secure economic futures, contrasts with the ingrained multi-generational poverty and corollary racial strife that once again has riven our cities.

11. Ferguson, North Charleston, Staten Island, and Baltimore, a few recent poignant tragedies, evolved to “flash points” despite an infusion of substantial national financial resources directed to improving inner city neighborhoods.

12. Sorrowfully, that remains a challenge for our time, and most assuredly the polar counterpoint to the promise of successful regeneration witnessed in Bloomingdale.
Introduction

Aging, and more specifically aging-in-place, can be viewed from countless perspectives, one of which is “What constitutes The Good Life?”. Were that to serve as a more focused surrogate for the natural accretion of years as we age biologically, the literature is replete with a myriad of ideas, milestones, and opinions. At the core one might establish expectations for enjoying the amenities of life as foundational, with corresponding opportunities for joining the “leisure class”.

Indeed the phenomenon evolved in many forms. By the mid-20th century “within the memory of living Americans the dream began to come true. The work week has fallen from six days (72 hours) to five (40 hours)…on the job half-hour coffee breaks are common….a three-week vacation is standard…a new national law has juggled traditional holidays to create mini-vacations.”1

A view of Suburban Gardens, an amusement park that operated in Northeast Washington’s Deanwood neighborhood from 1921 into the 1940s. (Courtesy of Scurlock Studio Records/Archives Center/National Museum of American History/Smithsonian Institution)
Whether one quarrels or quibbles with the “precise accuracy” of these descriptors, there is little doubt that conditions then and today far surpass those of our immigrant and first generation forebears. And even in the aftermath of the hair-raising recession of 2008-14, as a nation we have come to expect and accept these changes as immutable entitlements.

While remaining committed to a work ethic and enjoying the benefits of a shorter work week, individuals elect different paths to follow. Some thoroughly enjoy “time off in hobbies and other pursuits” while others retire. And for some, withdrawal from familiar structured days and years leads to...
confusion or aimless patterns such as vegetating in front of the television for hours on end.

In recent decades a more pro-active approach has emerged, one directed to what has been termed this “waste of human resources.” A cornucopia of possibilities has been identified. At the federal level government has engaged retired persons capable of providing social and/or mentoring services that might not otherwise be affordable. At the local level, seniors have participated in day-care centers and nurseries. And the list goes on exponentially to seminars in small business, legal aid and Big Brothers Big Sisters in ghetto areas, and more widespread service in the Peace Corps.

Even as these potentials have emerged and opened new vistas, the profound issues related to our elderly have been long known and only partially ameliorated. Housing, health, caretaking, financial status, transportation and access, are but a few of such matters. Acknowledging those for what they are, and the agenda for addressing these desperate problems at best as a work-in-progress, the patent value of seniors for our society remains of prime interest.

One aspect warranting greater effort and initiatives is directed to self-improvement. “Leisure 101” should become a required course; in fact, education may become a life-long activity dedicated to the development of the whole person.

Another aspect, and one of critical
importance to Bloomingdale and other neighborhoods where gentrification is taking place, is the recognition of intrinsic values and resources that can and will enhance the urban (and/or societal) experience. Simply put “where feasible and desirable the aged must be granted the opportunity to take advantage of existing programs with both old and young learning from one another.”\(^5\)

Casper “Aram” Garrett and his grandmother in the 1940s, descendents of longtime Bloomingdale residents, the Simons family. (Photo Courtesy of the Simons/Nicholson family accessed in Bloomingdale by Rosemarie Onwukwe.)
In other words, the formal and informal learning and intermixing between and among generations has enormous value for each individual and group. That goes directly against the prior and possibly still to this day believed phenomenon that has treated the aged in our society as a subculture. And the neighborhood, where households live beside and interact with one another, is an immense resource to begin and sustain such outreach for the benefit of all.

An aging coda viewed from the perspective of a single elderly person speaking, perhaps, for her collective cohort

Theoretical discussions aside, what thoughts and feelings, trying to capture the emotional and intellectual universe of humanity, may assist younger and mid-life individuals toward a wider comprehension of the passage of years.

Aging, as framed by this discussion can’t be fully grasped without some insights reflecting introspectively, both the texture and realities confronted.

While no one party can be endowed as spokesperson, Florida Scott-Maxwell might well serve as a surrogate or representative of this ancestral population. In “Measure of My Days” she opines “We who are old know that age is more than a disability. It is an intense and varied experience, almost beyond our capacity at times, but something to be carried high. If it is a long defeat it is also a victory, meaningful for the initiates of time, if not for those who have come less far.”

Amplifying those feelings we are told “being old I am out of step, troubled by my lack of concord, unable to like or understand much that I see. Feeling at variance with the times must be the essence of age, and it is confusing, wounding. I feel exposed, bereft of a right matrix, with the present crime, violence, nihilism heavy on my heart. I weigh and appraise, recoiling, suffering, but VERY ALERT (Researcher’s emphasis). Now that I have withdrawn from the active world I am more alert to it than ever before. Old people have so little personal life that the impact of the impersonal is sharp. Some of us feel like sounding boards, observing, reading; the outside event startles us and we ask in alarm, ‘Is this good or bad’? To where will it lead? What effect will it have on people, just people? How different will they become? I fear for the future.”

These churning, riveting questions seem to have a two-fold meaning. The first of these is to realize the searching, quandary, and amorphous sense of one’s self---almost driven to a feeling of despair or possibly the essence of a possible contribution an individual might make to humanity; the second, perhaps more profound, is the likely lack of any significant grasp of others as to the internal struggle surfacing for all individuals as their late years evolve.

Framed in that fashion, what more vivid potentials for mutual exchange can be afforded
than an appreciation for aging in place and pro-actively seeking substantive connections between generations.

Not content by that waystation alone, Scott-Maxwell goes on with retrospective perceptions that benefit from a more granular sequence. "Age puzzles me. I thought it was a quiet time. My seventies were interesting, and fairly serene, but my eighties are passionate. I grow more intense as I age. To my own surprise I burst out with hot conviction. Only a few years ago I enjoyed my tranquility, now I am so disturbed by the outer world and by human quality in general, that I want to put things right as though I still owed a debt to life (Researcher’s emphasis). I must calm down. I am too frail to indulge in more fervor."9

Allowing for her desire for the serene and tranquil, the intrinsic engagement, indeed passion, with which external events hold her attention hints at another “platform” where she and her younger compatriots can interact and learn from one another.

Every individual sees and interprets life through their own eyes. Were all of us capable of looking back a lifetime after seven or eight decades chances are Scott-Maxwell touches on some fundamental, lasting impressions. All the more reason for those who follow to absorb these insights both out of sensitivity for those threatened by gentrification, and for the very same feeling that will accompany the length of their days.

Then change inevitably ushers in an optimistic note blended by relentless doubt as Scott-Maxwell muses “good things have gone, good things will always go when new things come, and we mourn. We may mourn rightly, for the outlook is uncertain, perhaps very dark. Destruction is part of creativity, that is the terrible truth we shrink from, knowing it may be misused. This truth is everywhere, almost too obvious to be felt. It is leaden in the old who are being destroyed by time, and I admit that it takes more courage than I had known to drink the lees of life.” 10

No matter the prevailing sentiments at any given time, the ambiguity and underlying quest Scott-Maxwell has enunciated will undoubtedly be the yeast of many spirited chats in neighborhoods where the outreach between young and old is at hand and awaits only a spark to begin the dialogue.
History of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood

The origins of Washington, D.C. are rooted in the unique circumstances of establishing a federal district to serve as the capital of the United States.

A number of political forces, beginning in 1783, sparked an evolving search for a balanced solution to meet several conflicting concerns between the northern and southern states.

Philadelphia and New York were among the contenders in a debate which spanned many years. Criteria aimed at defining a “central location” invariably raised contentious issues as to either geographic or population “centrality” and the inevitable result of winners and losers. Not to be overlooked either was access to the country’s future burgeoning western regions.

As the range of arguments grew, slowly but surely a location on the Potomac River took hold by virtue of its west to southwest orientation; one that would anticipate the nation’s westward expansion. Ultimately during an otherwise unassuming dinner, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Madison, who collectively personified the disparate views in play, formulated a compromise that packaged southern states agreeing to help pay Revolutionary War debts in return for a location of the U.S. capital convenient to the south on the banks of the Potomac River.¹

Once established, George Washington assigned Pierre L’Enfant the awesome task of

Surrender of General Burgoyne by John Trumbull (1821), which currently hangs in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. (Photo credit unknown.)
designing the nation’s new capital. Integrating traditional Greco–Roman architectural themes into a monumental city plan, L'Enfant’s spider-web street layout for Washington in the 1790s remains a foundational concept to this day.²

Despite being outside the original boundary delineated by L'Enfant in 1792, residential development began in the Bloomingdale neighborhood over a century later. Located just east of LeDroit Park, one of Washington’s earliest suburban areas opened in 1877, a variety of light industrial uses mixed with adjacent homes. Florida Avenue (then known as Boundary Street) was the dividing line between paved, planned roads laid out in the colonial city plan, and the country beyond. To the east a small community of Eckington was beginning to emerge, simultaneously with an upgraded LeDroit to the west.³

The rural character of these extended corridors changed with that of other nearby locations. The influx of workers and freed men over decades following the Civil War gave
rise to this shift, as did the new interest of developers and land speculators keen on gaining advantages of outward growth pressures. Correspondingly, the city’s grid system was improved, curbed and paved, together with the extension of popular trolley lines, all of which opened the sector to major residential additions in the late 1890s.

Though the origin of the name can be confused contemporarily with a retail emporium, it emanated with a more prosaic basis; that of beautiful spring flowers and elm, maple, crepe myrtle, and gingko trees. Amidst the existing expansive orchids and interspersed estates and commercial properties, blue-collar workers began to move in during the late 1800s. The area was also a transportation hub and accommodated one of two large flour mills in the city.

During World War I, as the District expanded rapidly, African Americans secured purchased homes in Bloomindale despite covenants prohibiting them from owning, renting, or occupying their units in any way. Shockingly, these covenants were added to deeds during the wave of segregation and Jim Crow legislation in the District of Columbia up to the early 20th century. What is more, some areas of the community remained exclusively white until the mid-1950s.
"Homes of a Hundred Ideas."

The ideas of a great many women have been incorporated in these nine-room homes. In every part of the structures clever contrivances appear. In the entrance hall is a cedar chest with a full-length mirror and a half seat with a box to stow away umbrellas and rubbers—an incentive to tidiness. This is just one of the ideas.

Each alternate building is of different design, the structural plan being so modified as to present a variety in front elevation. Broad porches. Lots, 20x140 feet.

THE MAN WHO CONTINUES TO RENT AFTER ALL THE OBSTACLES OF HOME BUYING ARE REMOVED, AND THE OPPORTUNITY GIVEN HIM TO MAKE HIS RENT—AND THAT ALONE—PURCHASE HIS HOME, LOSES A CHANCE TO BECOME INDEPENDENT AND DOES HIS FAMILY AN INJUSTICE.

You know the difficulty of renting a desirable nine-room house under $40.00 or $50.00.

WE WILL SELL YOU ONE OF THESE "HOMES" ON MONTHLY PAYMENTS OF ONLY $37.50, INCLUDING EVERY DOLLAR OF INTEREST—AND AN AVERAGE OF OVER $25.00 GOES TOWARD PAYING FOR YOUR HOME.

TO ILLUSTRATE: Suppose your grocer would say, "I will give you $37.50 worth of groceries each month, but I will arrange it so that an average of over $25.00 will come back to you as money saved." You would accept that. Our proposition is the same thing.

It only requires a cash payment of $850 to secure the advantages of these remarkable terms.

The sample "home" is the only one we have finished. Come and examine it; examine it carefully; if you like it, if you think it is the best value in the city, you can then make an appointment with us to give you the facts and figures on these terms. Don’t put your visit off. These homes are not going begging.

Open Until 9.

$5,850.

Nos. 16 to 46 Bryant Street N. W.

A neighborhood populated by a class of people who can afford to own their own homes. The kind of people you will like to know.

To inspect take North Capitol street car to Bryant st. nw. (two squares north of W). The North Capitol st. cars run cut G st.

Middaugh & Shannon, Inc. Owner.

In parallel Bloomingdale gradually evolved into one of the first stable African American communities in Washington, home to lawyers, teachers, pastors, physicians, dentists, Howard University professors, and a range of other black professionals.\(^7\)

In short order a wave of community facilities began. Churches were at the forefront, with the Rhode Island Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church occupying their elegant structure at the First Street NW corner in 1902. Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor, had his 2100 First Street home in 1900, a site now declared as a landmark on the National Register of Historic Places. Several homes along the unit block of Rhode Island Avenue joined the M.E, church in 1903, and in the ensuing decade the surrounding area rapidly infilled as the then famous Washingtonians, Harry Wardman and S.H. Meyers aggressively capitalized on the neighborhood’s new found potential.

The years, as with all in-town urban settlements, have witnessed many other changes. The Gage School, on Second Street, NW, constructed in 1904 has since been closed and is now

*Rhode Island Avenue Methodist Church in 1907 (left, on historic postcard) and in 2015.*

*Historic Washington, DC, builder Harry Wardman. (Image credit unknown).*
The Gage School architectural drawing (above) and in its current iteration as high-end apartments (below). (Drawing courtesy bloomingdaledc.org, photo by Emily Pierson 2015.)
scheduled for use as senior citizen apartments. Another prominent feature is the McMillan Park sand filtration and reservoir, along the northern edge of the neighborhood. Notably, this area is among a chain of open spaces established by the famed 1901 McMillan Plan for beautifying Washington. Equally as significant, it was designed by America’s foremost landscape architect in his day, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. Listed in 1991 as a historic landmark by the DC Historic Preservation Review Board, the site currently is under community review for a mixed use development project.8

Two other notable additions are found in the neighborhood although obscured from the thousands of travelers along the areas main boundary and key city artery, North Capital Street. They are polar opposites in physical characteristics, but nonetheless important segments of the area’s fabric.

One is the Bryant Street Pumping Station. As reported on October 25, 1908 in the Washington Post, the accolades were almost unbounded. “One of the most striking …
(places)...is the magnificent new (water supply facility), not only one of the largest and most efficient, but also one of the handsomest buildings for such a purpose found in the United States.” Though somewhat euphoric, as the accompanying photographs attest, the praise is not exaggerated.

Much more subdued, but nonetheless ingrained as a major area amenity is the Crispus Attucks Park. The site of an annual community day and Yard Sale, featuring the Taste of Bloomingdale, hundreds of area residents gather to enjoy music, learning about community organizations, and pledging their support for the maintenance of and upkeep of this “green gem,” at the neighborhood centrum, completely isolated from the hustle and bustle of surrounding urban life.

As recounted by the park’s newsletter, when the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone closed a switching station and cable yard, it also abandoned a 8200 square foot building and a one-acre cement and asphalt pad, which remained neglected for nearly a decade. Then neighbors campaigned to have the property transferred for use as a community center and training facility for youngsters. Their effort succeeded, and together with corporate donations and assistance, operations began in earnest in 1978.

District budgetary constraints in 2004 ushered in a new opportunity as full site control was conveyed to a Bloomingdale community organization. Since then, despite funding vagaries, the park has remained a resource for both the youth and adults of the community.9

Despite a history rooted in a relatively stable African-American neighborhood character, contemporary changes just over the horizon as the 21st century dawned dramatically and altered what was to come. The nature and magnitude of this transition is highlighted in the section which follows.
Satellite image of the Bloomingdale neighborhood with Crispus Attucks Park highlighted (Image Courtesy Google Maps 2014).

Entrance to Crispus Attucks Park from the alley on the western edge of the park. (Photo by Emily Pierson, 2014).
Bloomingdale Demographic Trends

Much like the vagaries of the District of Columbia, Bloomingdale’s population continued to decline in the late 20th century before the downward trend was reversed in the first decade of the 21st century.

Census tract boundaries as of the 2010 U.S. Census. The Bloomingdale neighborhood encompasses tracts 33.01 and 33.02. Tract 33.01 also includes the McMillan Sand Filtration site which is currently uninhabited. (Source: U.S. Census Bureau.)
Residents in the neighborhood, which consists of two census tracts, 33.01 and 33.02, went from about 6400 at the beginning of the period to approximately 4500 twenty years later, as shown in Table A below.

The gains for 2000-12 equated to almost one percent per annum, and were uniform for both subareas. In other words the influx of newcomers found acceptable housing in the northern and southern sectors, that provided underlying support for a broad base resurgence in the neighborhood’s future fortunes.

As an emerging receptive area in the District’s market place, the overall Bloomingdale age pyramid tended to be younger than in the past. The 2012 median age by subarea in Bloomingdale declined to about 35 years, compared with approximately 38 years in 2000.
Table A: Population trends from 1980-2010

<table>
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<tr>
<th>District of Columbia Census Tracts</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Change in Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tract 33.01 (north)</td>
<td>3,659</td>
<td>3,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tract 33.02 (south)</td>
<td>2,818</td>
<td>1,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for Bloomingdale</td>
<td>6,477</td>
<td>5,092</td>
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<tr>
<td>DC Average per tract</td>
<td>3,566</td>
<td>3,391</td>
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</table>


Chart A: Population by Census Tract for 1980-2010

More telling, however, were the sharp differences that emerged among key age cohorts. Those under 19 years old and those over 65 years of age declined sharply from 2000 to 2010. The Millennials included in the 25 to 44 bracket expanded by over 1000 persons, or 62 percent. Doubtless they had sufficient earning power to absorb an upward movement in rents and/or the increasing sales prices associated with an appreciating in-town neighborhood. Though declining numerically, seniors continuing to reside in the area likely benefited by District homeowner occupancy provisions. Specifically the lower property taxes that apply represent a substantial form of real assistance to those with limited incomes. Consistent with criteria related to age (over 65), ownership, and gross income below $127,000, a senior citizen can obtain a 50 percent discount on his or her property taxes.

**Chart B: Population by Age Cohort by Census Tract for 1990-2010**

<table>
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<th>Age Cohort</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>228</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-17</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>787</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
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<td>849</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>792</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
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<td>55-64</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>536</td>
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<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>743</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>5092</td>
<td>4537</td>
<td>5332</td>
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Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1990-2010.
Table B: Population trends by Age Cohort from 1990-2010

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<tr>
<th>Age Cohort by Census Tract</th>
<th>DC Census Tracts</th>
<th>Total for Bloomingdale</th>
<th>DC Average per Census Tract</th>
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<td></td>
<td>33.01 (north)</td>
<td>33.02 (south)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ages 0-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>108</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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<td>107</td>
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<td>Ages 5-17</td>
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<td>147</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>536</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 65+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>3101</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>5092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2707</td>
<td>1830</td>
<td>4537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3198</td>
<td>2134</td>
<td>5332</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1990-2010.
The Inexorable Decline of Seniors

Unlike national trends during the latter half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, the percentage of elderly within many inner city neighborhoods have been on a gradual, but nonetheless pronounced downward spiral.

One need not look too far for an explanation; limited numbers of seniors without recourse to other geographic housing solutions in combination with a finite life span inevitably results in a fading if not diminishing age cohort.

Those over 65 in Bloomingdale have declined sharply. For the three decades from 1980 to 2010 their proportional representation has been halved, moving downward rapidly in recent years.

The effects of gentrification and/or mortality have been especially dramatic between 2000 and 2010. As shown in the table below, for the respective neighborhood census tracts the relative percentage of seniors went from 13 to 7.5% in tract 33.01, and 11 to 6.0 percent in tract 33.02.

Stated in other terms, the relatively gradual pattern of times past has accelerated to the point where this cohort likely will become a decidedly minor group in the immediate and long term future.

Two long-time Bloomingdale residents stuff envelopes at St. Martin’s Catholic Church on North Capitol Street. Linda (right) lives in the house her parents purchased in the early 1950’s. Her daughter lives on the same block and is proud to be a third generation Bloomingdale resident and St. Martin’s parishioner. (Photo credit: Emily Pierson 2015.)
**Table B1: Senior Population as Percentage of Total Population 1980-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senior Population by Census Tract</th>
<th>DC Census Tracts</th>
<th>Total for Bloomingdale</th>
<th>DC Average per Census Tract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.01 (north)</td>
<td>33.02 (south)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ages 65+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1980-2010. Neighborhood Info D.C., Census Tracts, Urban Institute, a Partner of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership; Revised April 1, 2015.*
Much as with city-wide trends, the racial mix in Bloomingdale shifted substantially. After years in the majority, neighborhood Blacks remained as slightly more than half of the residents in 2010, down from almost 90 percent in 2000 given a loss of over 1000 persons in that period.

Whites, on the other hand, increased by over 1200 persons (476%), and were widely distributed in both the neighborhood’s northern and southern locales. And while Hispanic and Latino gains were not quite as substantial, their numbers almost doubled from 2000 to 2010.

The picture that emerges is that Bloomingdale is undergoing Gentrification along both age and racial lines. In addition changing earnings among the area’s household also contribute to this new outlook.

“Boxer Girl” was installed on the side of the Bloomingdale home of an art collector in May 2009, to mixed reactions. As the blog dcist.com states: “Some neighbors love it, but others just plain hate the thing, for reasons ranging from generalized complaints that it’s an “eyesore” to it being “ghetto,”... The piece, which was funded by a grant from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, depicts a young woman wearing boxing gloves, sporting a black eye, amid some rainbows and stars.” (Photo credit: Emily Pierson 2015.)
Table C: Population trends by Race from 1990-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Composition by Census Tract</th>
<th>DC Census Tracts</th>
<th>Total for Bloomingdale</th>
<th>DC Average per Census Tract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.01 (north)</td>
<td>33.02 (south)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>White</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Black, Non-Hispanic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>91.0%</td>
<td>91.0%</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>90.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>64.0%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hispanic/Latino</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Asian/Pacific Isl.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 1990-2010.

Chart C: Population by Race by Census Tract for 1990-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Isl.</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the vibrant earlier regional economy and District of Columbia job growth, and a moderate fall-off during the severe recession beginning in 2008, the differences between Bloomingdale Black and White households in 2013 are striking.

In tract 33.02 the median for the latter was over twice as high as that for the former; $143,400 compared with $71,000. This range was muted slightly but nonetheless still substantial for tract 33.01; $129,400 versus $76,200.

Notwithstanding that often familiar pattern, perhaps more astonishing were both the Black and White households with incomes above six figures. In tract 33.01 those with income above $100,000 were approximately 30% and 50%, respectively. While not a precise “match”, gentrification in the northern 33.02 tract had a parallel impact with about a 29% of Black households at these elevated levels and their White compatriots at a higher ratio of more than 75%.

Patently the fundamental conclusion drawn from these data is that gentrification has surely been in effect for some time. Yet another corollary finding is salient; viz. that this in-migration, unlike that of more classic case examples often cited in the literature, encompasses a diverse racial division. To that end Bloomingdale likely is part of another genre warranting more deliberate thought and analysis as to wider implications; a point we shall turn to later in this monograph.
### Table D1: Household Income in Black Households by Census Tract 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Income Black Households</th>
<th>Census Tract 33.01 (north)</th>
<th>Census Tract 33.02 (south)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $25,000</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000-$34,999</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000-$44,999</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$45,000-$59,999</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000-$74,999</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$99,999</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-$124,999</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$125,000-$149,999</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000-$199,999</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over $200,000</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$76,180</td>
<td>$71,039</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2009-2013, 5-Year American Community Survey.*

### Table D2: Household Income in White Households by Census Tract 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Income White Households</th>
<th>Census Tract 33.01 (north)</th>
<th>Census Tract 33.02 (south)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $25,000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000-$34,999</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000-$44,999</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$45,000-$59,999</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000-$74,999</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$99,999</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-$124,999</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$125,000-$149,999</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000-$199,999</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over $200,000</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$129,475</td>
<td>$143,424</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2009-2013, 5-Year American Community Survey.*
Bloomingdale: Gentrification and Aging in Place

Home Values

Consistent with the influx of newcomers and constraints of supply, coupled with a robust expanding economy and a radical shift for inner city preferences among Millennials the price escalation in neighborhood homes has been exceptional.

Tracing the three years from 2011 to 2013, median levels increased by 40 to 75%, going from about $500,000 to $700,000 in tract 33.01, and $400,000 to $700,000 in tract 33.02.

By comparison the median value for District of Columbia homes was higher in 2011 ($547,000) and equivalent to all intense and purpose in 2013. In other words, whatever market conditions and purchaser perceptions about a declining and less desirable area may have been present in the last years of the 20th century have faded or are long forgotten; Bloomingdale has advanced to an in-town “hot-spot” and a magnified demand from affluent Whites and Blacks which has propelled an enormous increase in home values no matter the obvious need for upgrades and rehabilitation in many instances.

“Pop-ups,” such as the one on this rowhouse (left), have helped to fuel increasing home values in the area by adding amenities and oft-needed improvements to older homes. The practice has also fueled contention between neighbors who see the additions as unsightly and destroying the historic character of the neighborhood. Above, a lawn sign protesting pop-ups. (Photo credits: Emily Pierson, March 2015.)
Table E: Median Sales Price In Bloomingdale 2011-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Median Sales Price</th>
<th>DC Census Tracts</th>
<th>Total for Bloomingdale</th>
<th>DC Average per Census Tract</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.01 (north)</td>
<td>33.02 (south)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$497,000</td>
<td>$407,000</td>
<td>$452,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$622,000</td>
<td>$611,000</td>
<td>$615,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>$695,000</td>
<td>$700,000</td>
<td>$697,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2011-2013. Disparate U.S. Census Reporting. Neighborhood Info D.C.; Census Tracts; Urban Institute, a Partner of the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership; Revised April 1, 2015.
Bloomingdale and Gentrification

Over two generations ago a new phenomenon, gentrification, was coined in professional journals. British sociologist, Ruth Glass, in 1964 described the term as the influx of middle-class people displacing lower-class residents in urban neighborhoods; her example was London and its working-class districts such as Islington.¹

While clear at the outset, this concept has evolved and become more complex in the ensuing years. A variety of indices have been advanced in an effort to reach a more comprehensive understanding, concurrently with another less heralded effect, viz. aging in place.

The convergence of these two factors, i.e. gentrification and aging, has become more pronounced with the rapid “greying” of America. In Washington, D.C., another overarching concern comes to the forefront; to wit, race. The nation’s capital is among several vibrant major United States cities witnessing a “Millennial” surge, consisting generally of those born between 1980 and 2000. Their ethos reverses an

Beaconsfield Buildings in the Islington neighborhood of London, 1960. Built for laborers and artisans in 1879, the tenements were demolished in 1970 due to severe disrepair (Image credit: English Heritage.NMR, AA073048).
established post-World War II trend to the suburbs, rooted in ultimately realizing the American dream -- a single family detached home on a quarter or half acre lot, surrounded by a white picket fence.

Demographically, the dual age cohorts at the gentrification forefront vary from city to city. In larger metropolitan areas, such as New York, another sublayer is discerned. Here, Single Room Occupancy buildings (SROs) which have long served as an important source of affordable housing for poor single, elderly and non-elderly persons have declined sharply owing to redevelopment and changing rent stabilization policies. Concurrently the availability of these units has diminished in many gentrifying urban neighborhoods. Still another recent cross-section states that gentrification is not as widespread as perceived up to date. In their study, Joe Cortright
and Dillon Mahmoudi tracking the persistence of poverty over the past four decades in the 51 largest U.S. metropolitan areas, observe it is more common to find that poor neighborhoods stay that way over time or that they grow poorer.3

Among the multiple theories formulated to “explain” gentrification, the “rent-gap” carries appreciable currency. Typically, areas impacted are deteriorated and old, though structurally sound. Correspondingly, the aging residents likely have not reinvested significantly, though some modest improvements may have been made along the way. A “trigger” for turnover is the value newcomers assign to an obscure or immediately evident underpriced amenity.

Once again while innumerable indices may bear on this judgment, in Washington and more specifically the Bloomingdale neighborhood, area character, market forces reflecting sale values in comparable in-town choices, and housing stock are all cogent factors.

In their work, Lees, Slater, and Wyly, and Atkinson and Bridge, amplify the horizon beyond these fundamental and distinct influences. Theirs encompasses corollary considerations related to existing owners improving their properties, reduced crime, stabilization of...
prior declines, increased values, and greater social mix, among other trends.\textsuperscript{4} No matter how narrow or wide the criteria, the intrinsic economic gap between current use and an emerging rise in appreciation relative to start-up market levels, clearly propels new interest and “gentrification”.

The obverse of an influx of newcomers focuses on either the outmigration of present residents or their continued occupancy of homes purchased many years ago.

For those who remain in place, many emerging concerns have become clearer. With more extended lifetimes, frequently termed the “greying of America”, these include the health, and ambulatory nature of “active adults”, and the corresponding dependency of other senior citizens.

In these times of increased demands on limited governmental resources, the shift to non-profit organizations, faith based communities, and other support groups has become more pronounced. Sadly, the nation and its cities (including Washington, D.C.) have just begun to address these issues, and for the moment it remains at best “a work in progress”.

Caregivers, Adult Day Care, financial assistance, Meals on Wheels, and an array of other outreach efforts are representative initiatives.

Even as these are addressed city-wide, they resonate especially for long-standing Bloomingdale residents.
Map of the District illustrating average household incomes as of the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census. (Map credit: DCgrather 28 March 2013.)
Community Dynamics

Transitioning from one era to the next often reflects a gradual change rather than a sharp departure from the past. All of which makes perceiving and understanding the subtle shifts harder to recognize at the outset. That set of imponderable circumstances is more difficult to trace in micro-neighborhood terms, when comparable foundational movements are underway at the macro, or city level, as has been the case for the District of Columbia.

Harking back two generations, Washington’s population began a steep decline, exacerbated by the racial strife, manifest in riots or what was referred to euphemistically as “civil disturbances”, of the 1960s. In the aftermath, certain bastions of stability remained, but many more residential enclaves were stricken by violence, crime, drugs, and a pathology of negative forces.

Simplistically, carving out the core or central employment area (downtown and immediate environs), one could trace a clockwise arc from the west to the east encompassing wholesome living areas (Cleveland Park, Chevy Chase, etc.) before proceeding to the downtrodden sections of Southeast and Southwest, ultimately arriving in Anacostia. Like all generalizations, some exceptions to this broad brush sweep were noted, but by and large the compass characterized a bifurcated community in geographic terms of “haves and have-nots”.

Then as the vagaries of the late 20th century began to take hold, dramatic departures emerged. For one, the Millennial generation effectively turned away from their suburban roots and embraced the city, a pattern that appears to have intensified into the early 21st century. As that evolved, the living options for this cohort were prescribed either by price or supply, creating a classic pressure point in need of alternative answers. The logical outcome was increased interest in previously by-passed locations, mindful that idealistic
dreams about what constituted a “perfect” home might be placed on hold in concert with the passage of time to “get things right”.

So the march to Bloomingdale, the margins of Capitol Hill, Ivy City, Southeast, and other “less desirable” possibilities, began as a trickle and now might be cast as opening either a floodgate or in more tempered parlance, a sustained major flow.

One level beneath this city-wide phenomenon a cadre of household pioneers came forward. They scoured new “hot spots” like Capitol Hill and Columbia Heights, and when inevitable “pocket-book” issues raised obstacles, widened their peripheral vision to the then quiescent nearby venues both in search of a “bargain” and/or investment to be enhanced by “sweat-equity”.

Respondents to this study have traced this now familiar road-map. One recounts seeking an “affordable” prospect in vicinity to Pennsylvania Avenue, NE before turning, by suggestion of a knowledgeable friend to the then “sketchy” Bloomingdale choices. The economic gaps were vivid, starting with a sale price of $550,000 in the former for a two bedroom, undersized unit, compared with their actual purchase at $450,000, for 3500 square feet, and the potential for delineating a lower level rental apartment to measurably help with both the financing and operating budgets. There were of course other trade-offs, as in a unit without running water and electricity, and the ultimate step of gutting “the shell” and refurbishing it completely. Part of that was a learning experience, dealing with a skilled Baltimore contractor, creatively selecting appointments allied with the household’s tastes, and sitting back now, sifting through letters from Florida and other places, soliciting an opportunity to “buy your house immediately”.

Having gone through the purchase-renovation baptism, one gingerly began to enter a new social scene. In addition to Bloomingdale’s older residents, an added stream of new ones came forward. Some were of similar background, others were
among the significant number of gay and lesbian couples who found a receptive, non-judgmental audience that favored the urbanity of diversity.

Within this matrix extending for eight years from 2007 forward, broader neighborhood interactions have varied, as might be expected. Some have spoken about a perfunctory greeting on the street, while others have recounted sharing life cycle events such as weddings, enjoying informal front or back yard gatherings, and deeper acquaintances.

Of particular interest has been the relationship of Flagler Market on the corner of W and Flagler Streets NW. This type of “corner store”, once prevalent throughout the Bloomingdale environs, has recently been replaced by more upscale retail options such as those below. (Photo credit: Emily Pierson, March 2015).

New retail storefronts along 1st Street NW. This strip includes Aroi Thai restaurant, the upscale DC Mini Market, Yoga District, and, in the foreground, the highly popular Italian restaurant, The Red Hen. (Photo credit: Emily Pierson, March 2015).
Black teens to the new White households. There is no single pattern that can be discerned, but an anecdotal tale is valuable nonetheless. When parking his car off the back alley a new White householder appeared to have reached an informal, mutual understanding with the kids on the block. Play and enjoy your games so long as “you don’t urinate in my back yard, or throw your butts and garbage there”. And in a reciprocal fashion, he’d alert them when a police patrol was in the vicinity, much as to say don’t do anything unnecessarily foolish. Perhaps as a sign of rapport as well as respect, the individual in question was always addressed as “Mister [Name Withheld]”.

One other aspect of these budding relationships, beyond merely a sidewalk greeting, a respondent indicated that a neighbor aspiring for a new position in a highly regarded and desired Federal position asked permission to use their name as a reference in connection with the rigorous vetting process for that agency. That patently attests to a melding of the old and new, moving well beyond a casual contact derived by the serendipity of propinquity.

All living areas confront unanticipated issues and Bloomingdale is no exception. In this case Sunday parking is usually in short supply owing to several principal churches with congregants living further away now from the nearby blocks where they grew up. While possibly viewed as a local matter, this is a familiar point of discussion/tension in communities across the nation, that has often lead to court cases in which religious institutions have prevailed under an act of Congress that enhances their rights over those of local jurisdictions. Bloomingdale continues as a significant a faith-based neighborhood and one not likely to change in that respect for the present and possibly future generations as well.

No more striking example is found in St. Martin’s, the Roman Catholic Church at 1908 North Capitol Street, NW.

Before considering this robust and pulsating congregation, it is well worth examining the broader “fabric”
of Washington's inner city neighborhoods. While boundaries in the form of major streets are typically used to designate names and locations, they often have little or no bearing on a person’s interests and activities. Bloomingdale is no different, so to some, particularly in the historic Black community, growing up in adjoining Le Droit Park meant enjoying the music and entertainment venues of the legendary Howard Theater, and the youth dances at St. Martin’s. And those cherished gatherings introduced teens to their counterparts from Eckington and other proximate communities.

Even though time has moved on, the church continues to bridge artificial or virtual divides under the leadership of its dynamic pastor, Father Michael J. Kelley. He has instilled countless outreach programs including a major nearby development in conjunction with Catholic Charities of 182 affordable apartments, regular gatherings of impoverished individuals and families to distribute food and clothing, and a welcoming hand to newcomers, consisting primarily of younger white households.

While this profile of a charismatic clergyman might be considered coincidental, that is far from the case. Father Kelley, serving in this post for 23 years, previously “apprenticed” with Geno Baroni at St. Augustine’s across town in what is and was a more affluent parish. During that tenure and experience he was “trained” in vibrant social justice values that coincided with church tenets. “Geno” as he was known, was at the forefront of

St. Martin’s Catholic Church on North Capitol Street NW. The church was established in 1901, expanding several times as the congregation grew. The main church building was added in 1939 (St. Martin’s website). (Photo credit: Emily Pierson, March 2015.)
On the south side of the entrance, St. Martin’s has installed a handicap-accessible ramp as a gesture to its elderly and mobility-challenged parishioners. (Photo credit: Emily Pierson, March 2015.)
Washington’s and the nation’s activist priests, ministers and rabbis, having gone on to serve as assistant secretary for consumer affairs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, upon leaving his flock on 15th Street NW.

So one comes to expect and deeply appreciate Father Kelley’s ministry, as do his parishioners, both old and new. And even more so since there is a dual mission playing out at St. Martin’s; one related to the needs of long term residents both aging-in-place, along with their relatively young counterparts with little available for other options, and the other offering a welcoming to newcomers, often whites choosing in-town living.

That sense of serving and rebuilding is manifest on many fronts, and represents typical transitions found in inter-generational communities, as it does the acute struggles of Bloomingdale’s poor and Black population. In that persistent and intense cauldron Father Kelley has worked his magic; an admixture that has knitted, but by no means completely overcome, differences among these cohorts.

Initiatives with governance, civic associations, youth groups, inculcating leadership interacting with local and city-wide organizations, and retreats involving veteran residents with the parish’s newly arrived worshippers have forged a series of reinforcing bonds, all of which position St. Martin’s to continue its role as a community “building block”.

Father Kelley preaching to his devoted congregation in 2014. (Photo credit: St. Martin’s Church.)
This is especially pertinent given the internal changes among church parishioners, with about a third living in Bloomingdale, another third inside the Beltway, and the balance outside that landmark highway in more distant suburbs. Despite their distance, those who have carved out higher standards of living remain loyal to the church and its evolving mission, contributing both human resources and financial wherewithal to maintain the historic goals of social justice and amity among disparate age, racial, and economic groups.

Those differences established in the past and accentuated by recent changes are not likely to “disappear overnight”. Older folks perceive a lack of respect when casually encountering new white residents. There is also the familiar resentments of feeling pushed out by others “taking over”, once again a pattern often experienced in countless situations across the land.

And while not explicitly addressed by St. Martin’s, a surrogate of its multi-religious and multi-cultural programs has and will continue to engage these points of tension. Father Kelley’s traveling gospel choir that performs two large concerts on Christmas and Pentecost, counseling for a broad cross section of economic and police related issues, promotion of increased recreational outlets for new and old residents, and persistence in “meeting folks where they are” is a constructive long term formula for embroidering Bloomingdale’s rich diversity.

Or as he displays in a banner arcing across the church’s iconic entrance, partially tongue in cheek yet clearly focused on an open invitation, “Welcome All Sinners”.

*The gospel choir is comprised of 25 voices and 6 musicians. They perform during Saturday and Sunday masses as well as for special events. (Photo credit: St. Martin’s Church)*
The front entrance of St. Martin’s Church on North Capitol Street. (Photo credit: Emily Pierson, March 2015.)
Bloomingdale: Gentrification and Aging in Place

Contemporary Transition

A rising tide lifts all boats.

Having been mired down in the late 20th century by the invidious problems that affected inner cities across the nation, Bloomingdale’s entry into the 21st century has been a symbolic “rebirth”.

The prior era of random shoot-outs, drug dealers and users, suspicious individuals “hanging out at the corners” now seems a distant, fading image. Residents of all ages openly declare with vigor and enthusiasm “our neighborhood is safe”, where walking home after dark one doesn’t feel exposed to imminent threat or danger.

Since this widely shared perspective of a new reality is almost universally held, what factors have brought about so dramatic a change?

Invariably the responses lead to contrasting perceptions among older and newer generations, and discernible underlying tensions between them. Those who have suffered the long-standing degradations of the 1960s to the 1990s are quick to announce that their community was by-passed as poor and inconsequential as Washington’s nadir bottomed out and its fortunes began to rise. That resident population, however hard working, some hold was less attuned to political infighting and gaining its rightful place for city resources while other more “savvy” and influential neighborhoods made their mark.

Whether this is an accurate portrayal of interactions past and present, it gives rise to a persistent feeling expressed at several levels. In conversation, older residents speak about being “disrespected”, or subject to casual disregard when dealing with or observing their newer counterparts. As happens often in such instances, this gives rise to mounting frustration that might either be generalized toward a particular group, or focused on more menial, but often important personal matters, like having one’s parking space monopolized by another.

Lest this be carried too far, it is immediately evident that a multiplicity of reactions has been prompted by the area’s vibrant new dynamics. Notwithstanding an influx of newcomers, there are those whose roots extend back three or four generations, and remain firmly committed to their familial history. This “area loyalty” is especially notable in light of the other options that have played out.

Bloomingdale’s real estate market has figuratively “broken through the roof”. Two decades ago prices began to drift higher, possibly starting at $400,000 or more, and then—in recent years—accelerated to incredulous levels of $700,000 plus. No matter those attenuated price points, the phenomenon replicates that elsewhere in the District of Columbia. So it is obvious that each household confronting change has taken this emerging market to heart.
More often than not, the natural recourse has been to sell a family’s homestead after a matriarch or patriarch has passed away. Even though some may elect to rent the premises, that introduces the need to maintain and manage the property, or reinvest and upgrade, rather than dispose of it immediately and “cash out”. While there are no definitive data accounting for relinquishing family homes, the anecdotal evidence suggests this has been proceeding in the majority of cases.

This pattern therefore reflects a transition that has been underway for some time, and likely one that will deepen in the period ahead. It also reflects another aspect of change; one in which the “familial memory” of two or three generations of Bloomingdale households will largely vanish, absent the continuity of occupancy from grandparents to parents to grandchildren. As captured by an upcoming youngster, her poignant comment is that “History is losing itself.”

If that quality of “institutional recollections” is subtly moving away, what will take its place?

Here one quickly encounters two distinct consequences. Perhaps most pervasive of these is the “progress” associated with “gentrification”, that of enhanced property values, increased development, pop-up McMansions on streets with two-story row houses, and
the inevitable by-product of these forces, traffic.

Those corollary issues have confronted the District’s past administrations, and are already coming front and center for the new Mayor Muriel Bowser government.

Directly counter to the inexorable march to “bigger and better” is one that appears to resonate within a portion of Bloomingdale’s youngsters, both those with deep family roots here and those recently taking up residence in the area.

In clearly articulated views they decry the changes that have brought dramatic, and for them, undesirable changes in neighborhood character. Theirs is almost a spiteful rejection of what is perceived as the new “status quo”, detaching an elusive “soul” of this outstanding neighborhood from its physical attributes. When challenged to consider how they might engage in the political arena to make their voices felt, the matter becomes too formidable to encounter, given all the other learning and employment experiences so central to their lives now.

And yet, one wonders if this dormant-at-present outlook, might find another voice at another time in this or any other of Washington’s burgeoning, yet venerable neighborhoods.

Father Kelley jokes with the young volunteers, keeping the atmosphere light and enjoyable. (Photo credit: Emily Pierson, April 2015.)
This faint, but nonetheless remarkable sentiment is far from an academic curiosity. There is another profound new expression of aging-in-place, albeit on the part of the newcomers taking the baton from their older forebears. The heart of that may be a myriad of random actions, but this research has demonstrated – as has been true throughout history – the enormous value of institutional life.

One is struck by the strides taken by Father Michael J. Kelley, the spiritual leader of St. Martin’s Roman Catholic Church. From his radical “Sign of Peace” opening of the Mass which goes on until virtually everyone in attendance has embraced one other in a gesture of love, to an array of outreach services in support of the poor and distraught he has shown a way.

Most importantly he has inspired.

Among those have been a remarkable group of young people in their late teens and early twenties. Their community fellowship is directed to service and assisting those in need. Calls to shut-ins, delivering meals, reaching out to civic organizations with comparable missions, all constitutes an exceptional altruistic value that redounds to society’s benefit.

More to the point, the program these youth have embarked on has heightened their intrinsic feelings for the aged, their community, and what they view as the “worth” of Bloomingdale, now under threat by changes in the area and city-as-a-whole.

It may be that other, as yet unidentified individuals will subscribe to similar initiatives, but for the moment it is appropriate to note this unheralded resource in the passage of time from generation to generation. They are a formative wave of “youngsters”, with views shaped by the church’s social conscience, together with a feeling of deep and abiding camaraderie. And as soon will be seen, one that reflects an impressive cross-section of racial and ethnic heritages.

Unexpected, Revealing Backstory

Young in-migrants to inner city neighborhoods are typically drawn by lower priced housing, smaller units adoptable to their immediate shelter needs, proximity to an evolving leisure/cultural hub, and location in relation to their job prospects.

All these factors were at play when one study respondent arrived in Washington for an internship that ultimately lead to full time employment. Her choice of residence clearly was influenced by considerations comparable to peers, but another deep rooted experience; viz. personal background.

Having grown up in a traditional southern state of the confederacy, at first glance nothing could be farther from a plausible option than inter-racial socialization. That simple aphorism
Bloomingdale: Gentrification and Aging in Place

seems incontrovertible except... not everyone’s upbringing complies with that criterion.

Rather in this case, the paternal family history encompasses a line of American descendants, infused by European roots on the maternal side. That familiar blend, matching patterns prevalent since the beginning of our land, was receptive to welcoming a broader cross-section of neighbors. Moreover, this extended to an unusual instance in the deep-south of a bi-racial child both accepted and brought up by the nuclear family.

Unfettered by conventional prejudice this young person never looked back when searching for an apartment upon arrival in the nation’s capital. Living among African-Americans was far from the stereotypical “threatening” perceptions that some back home might hold; on the contrary it was a positive value to build upon and nurture.

What makes our respondent’s back story significant in the context of “gentrification and aging-in-place” theoretical research and discussion is a stark realization that urban lifestyles have always been an admixture of complex attitudes and familial associations. And before leaping to precipitous pronouncements of “displacements” in concert with the “influx” of newcomers one is well advised to be more measured and cautious.

More specifically, our protagonist has bonded with a group of young, bright, and worldly Black members of her church’s youth group. Her energetic and enthusiastic experience has stood the “test” of her father’s reaction when he visited to “look-in” on her security and be certain that things were okay.

“Yes” the apartment seems reasonably safe, as does the neighborhood, “but possibly best of all, praying together with the diverse congregants of Saint Martin’s” gave him peace of mind that his daughter’s choice in entering what otherwise would appear as a large and foreboding urban scene, was and is an example of the wisdom that today’s youth are rapidly acquiring.

For the adult population, drawn from the old timers and newcomers, and a range of racial and ethnic segments, that hopefully will serve as useful case example.
Epilogue

At the end of the first decade of the 21st century Bloomingdale already displayed all the attributes of classic gentrification. Its location, housing stock, a fading elderly population, and undervalued properties bolted forward as a figurative siren call for what was termed in the mid-20th century “invasion”.

Unlike that emotionally clad term, depicting displacement of poor, minority communities, the contemporary pattern presents far more contrary and fundamental differences.

Aging-in-place, while sustained at a modest level earlier, has fallen precipitously over the last few years, implying a cohort overtaken by the young and wealthy. Partially accurate from the standpoint of a numerically significant inflow of newcomers, and the relatively ratios between these two age groups, it fails to capture the impact of two forces: viz. the neighborhood’s seniors had reached an inflection point and were now passing on at a rapid rate; and the inexorable “zero-sum” game introduced when a finite number of vacated units were filled by millennials, eager to take their place with their counterparts throughout the nation’s major cities for in-town living.

This phenomenon was all the more striking when comparative racial characteristics are “layered” into the mix. When a residual low-income Black population (below income of $20,000) remained, their proportion was “drowned” by the African-American professionals and executives earning in excess of $100,000.

Stated in other more colloquial words, the prior concepts of a racial “divide” no longer comported with “your grandfather’s world”.

Even though some theorists might dispute this key finding, for others the more salient question focuses on the import of that conclusion, if any, for the nation. In other words does Bloomingdale reflect a “model” or a “stand-alone” example; is there something beyond the initial issues posed at the outset of this study related to aging and gentrification that warrants enhanced emphasis?

On a wide macro, simplistic accounting the answer appears to be “yes”, but on a more measured, nuanced approach additional thought is called for.
Here both the scale of existing conditions and inhabitants found in inner-city neighborhoods, and the strength of the local economy in the cities where they are located patently have substantial effects of each case example. Washington, often classified as the nation’s fifth or sixth regional growth leader is far different than, say, Detroit or any other middle-tier urban area struggling to restore and reverse sharp recent economic declines.

So all boats rise when the tide goes up, the opposite can be expected when unfavorable factors are encountered.

Another issue also arises in this link between successful job creation along-side of stabilized neighborhoods representing an inter-racial equilibrium. Policy makers and students of cities must pose and answer whether these phenomena result in peaceful conditions going forward?

Here the authors acknowledge that question goes beyond the original intent of this research. Nonetheless it remains significant in light of a string of poignant recent national tragedies marked by Ferguson, North Charleston, Staten Island, and Baltimore, to name a few.

Lest the issue be misconstrued, this is not a matter of perceived or real police brutality and/or civil unrest. Both of those concerns have to be probed and remedied for the long-term future of our land. On a more granular level, however, we must ask ourselves why the programs infused with an almost unlimited level of financial resources aimed at ameliorating the despair of inner-city neighborhoods like Baltimore’s Mondawmin, previously a model for amicable working and middle class integration, plummeted into an economic abyss accompanied by little or no hope for those left behind?

Sorrowfully, that remains a challenge for our time, and most assuredly the polar counterpoint to the promise of a successful regeneration witnessed in Bloomingdale.
Appendix A: St. Martin’s Catholic Church Community Survey
St. Martin’s Catholic Church Community Survey: Highlight Findings

Designed to obtain indicative, but by no means definitive findings, about 3.5 percent of the church membership responded to the survey which follows.

Most parishioners, about two out of three, are Bloomingdale residents; more than half have lived in the area for over 30 years. Two-thirds rent, and slightly less than half share units with family. Approximately one-third are single person households, equal to the same percentage sharing their residence with non-related persons.

A majority indicate close relationships with neighbors, and among others an occasional acquaintance is the mode. For those over 60 years of age, close contact was expressed by six out of seven respondents, a substantial level of interaction, possibly drawn from both their longevity and long Bloomingdale tenure.

And yet familiar complaints persist as stated in one response: “We (have) lived in this neighborhood for more than 54 years and (have) seen good and bad. Now that we have a large number of the White race as our neighbors, there is no working with them…they don’t even speak when you speak. So how can a neighbor keep our area up and get positive help in the neighborhood for our children.”

About half of those surveyed volunteer. Not surprisingly for St. Martin’s congregants their outreach covers broad food and clothing assistance to internal caretaking, like membership on the collection count committee.

While neighborhood worship retains a loyal following, local cafes and stores also attract considerable leisure time commitments for respondents.

Location, housing choices, and convenience to the work place are principal factors influencing those drawn to the area or having resided there over long periods of time.

Crime and rent escalation remain foremost problems. No matter past gains with respect to the former, all racial and ethnic groups cite security as an on-going concern.

Gentrification and aging-in-place are both evident in polar cross-tabulation ranges. Those
in middle years (45 to 65) and the elderly (over 65) are characteristic of Black/African-American households with long Bloomingdale tenure, while younger Whites and some Latinos in the 20 to 29 year cohort have begun to migrate into the area.

In summary, as a vibrant neighborhood institution, Saint Martin’s congregants are a microcosm of generational change now taking place in Bloomingdale. While certain problems and perceptions persist (crime; resident familiarity and interaction), the service and caring bond forged by volunteerism and a wide age range of membership will continue to contribute to the neighborhood’s future constructive welfare.
Bloomingdale Community Survey

December 27, 2014
Revised February 23, 2015

1. Are you a resident of:
   □ Bloomingdale
   □ Nearby Neighborhood (specify) _______________________
   □ Suburb (specify) _______________________

   ALL PERSONS, NO MATTER WHERE THEY LIVE ARE INVITED TO PROVIDE THEIR ANSWERS BELOW.

2. How long have you lived in Bloomingdale?
   □ Less than 1 year  □ 1 to 5 years  □ 5 to 10 years  □ 10 to 20 years  □ 20 to 30 years  □ Over 30 years

3. Do you rent or own your home?:   □ Rent    □ Own

4. Do you live with family members?   □ Yes    □ No
   Do you share your unit with non-related other persons?   □ Yes    □ No

5. What best describes your interaction with neighbors:
   □ Close weekly contact    □ Occasional contact throughout the year
   □ Seldom in touch besides a brief greeting when passing one another in the street

6. Are you a volunteer in any neighborhood or city institution/organization?   □ Yes    □ No

7. Kindly tell us the groups you volunteer with:
   a. _______________________________________________________________________________________
   b. _______________________________________________________________________________________
   c. _______________________________________________________________________________________

8. Do you worship in the neighborhood?   □ Yes    □ No    □ Not Applicable

9. Please list some of the neighborhood places that you and your family spend your free time:
   □ Senior Center    □ Library Children’s Story Time    □ Local café (specify) _______________________
   □ Bible Classes    □ After School Activities    □ Annual Crispus Attucks Park Festival
   □ Other (specify)__________________________________________________________________________

10. What are the major reasons for you choosing to live in Bloomingdale?
    □ Location    □ Housing Choices    □ Neighborhood Character    □ Convenience to work
    □ Long-standing Family Roots    □ Amenities (specify) _______________________
    □ Other (specify)__________________________________________________________________________

(continued on reverse)
11. What are the neighborhood's outstanding qualities?
   - [ ] Support services for Seniors
   - [ ] Growing body of young people and families
   - [ ] Diverse urban neighbors
   - [ ] Proximity to Downtown Washington Entertainment and Cultural attractions
   - [ ] Other (specify) ______________________________________________________________________

12. What neighborhood problems trouble you?
   - [ ] Crime and Public Security
   - [ ] Increasing Rental Levels and Sale Prices
   - [ ] Inadequate Public Schools
   - [ ] Storm Water Flooding
   - [ ] Other (specify) ______________________________________________________________________

13. What is your age? [ ] Under 19 [ ] 20-29 [ ] 30-44 [ ] 45-65 [ ] Over 65

14. Are you: [ ] Male [ ] Female

15. Before concluding we welcome any other comments you wish to highlight here
________________________________________________________________________________________
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Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Please return completed surveys to ________________________________________________________.
Appendix B: The Summit at St. Martin’s

“St. Martin’s Church has been a key partner in this community for almost 110 years. We have worked with all of our neighbors to build a strong community where hope and opportunity thrive. Over the past decade we have worked very hard to prevent the displacement of hard working residents from our community. We have built 184 affordable apartments on the land that we own across the street from the McKinley High School. This decision was reached based on many months of community meetings, a favorable response of seven Churches of the local Ecumenical Council, and the ANC for our area. In partnership with Catholic Charities over $43 million was invested in building the first affordable rental housing in our neighborhood in well over three decades. This project is grounded in our firm belief that people of all income levels, races and cultural backgrounds deserve safe and affordable housing. St. Martin’s Apartments has: 134 one and two bedroom apartments. Fifty jr. one bedroom apartments, 130 underground parking spaces. A tree lined court yard and meeting spaces for the entire community to use Improved lighting and landscaping.”

-- Source: St. Martin’s Catholic Church website
“Opened Oct. 25, 2010, The Summit at St. Martin’s is a luxury apartment complex providing 178 units of affordable housing to individuals in the Washington, DC, community. Galvanized by a partnership among Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington, the Archdiocese of Washington and various public and private organizations, the facility serves as a housing alternative for individuals who may not otherwise be able to afford to live in the District.”

-- Source: Catholic Charities DC
Playground inside The Summit at St. Martin’s complex.

Model apartment kitchen.

All images are of the Summit at St. Martin’s apartment complex in 2010 prior to opening and are courtesy of Habitat America LLC.
Endnotes

Introduction

2. Ibid., 387.
3. Ibid., 387.
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8. Ibid., 5.
10. Ibid., 86.

History of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood

5. Ibid.
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Bloomingdale Demographic Trends

Bloomingdale and Gentrification

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Introductions

Father Michael J. Kelley; Monica Whatley; St. Martin’s Parishoners: Linda, Linda, Jasmine, Dominique, Nadiath, Sheila, Anonymous.
Biography

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