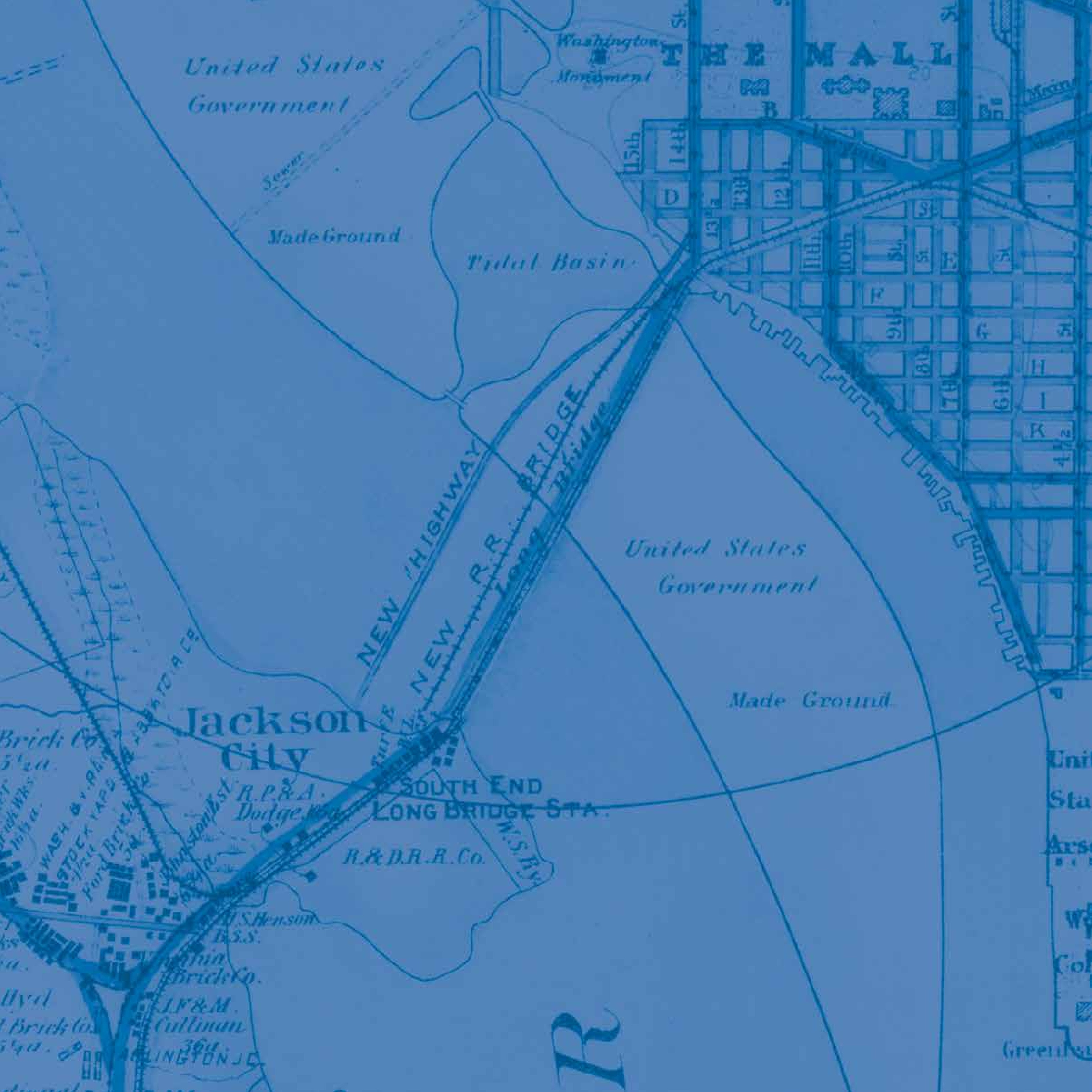
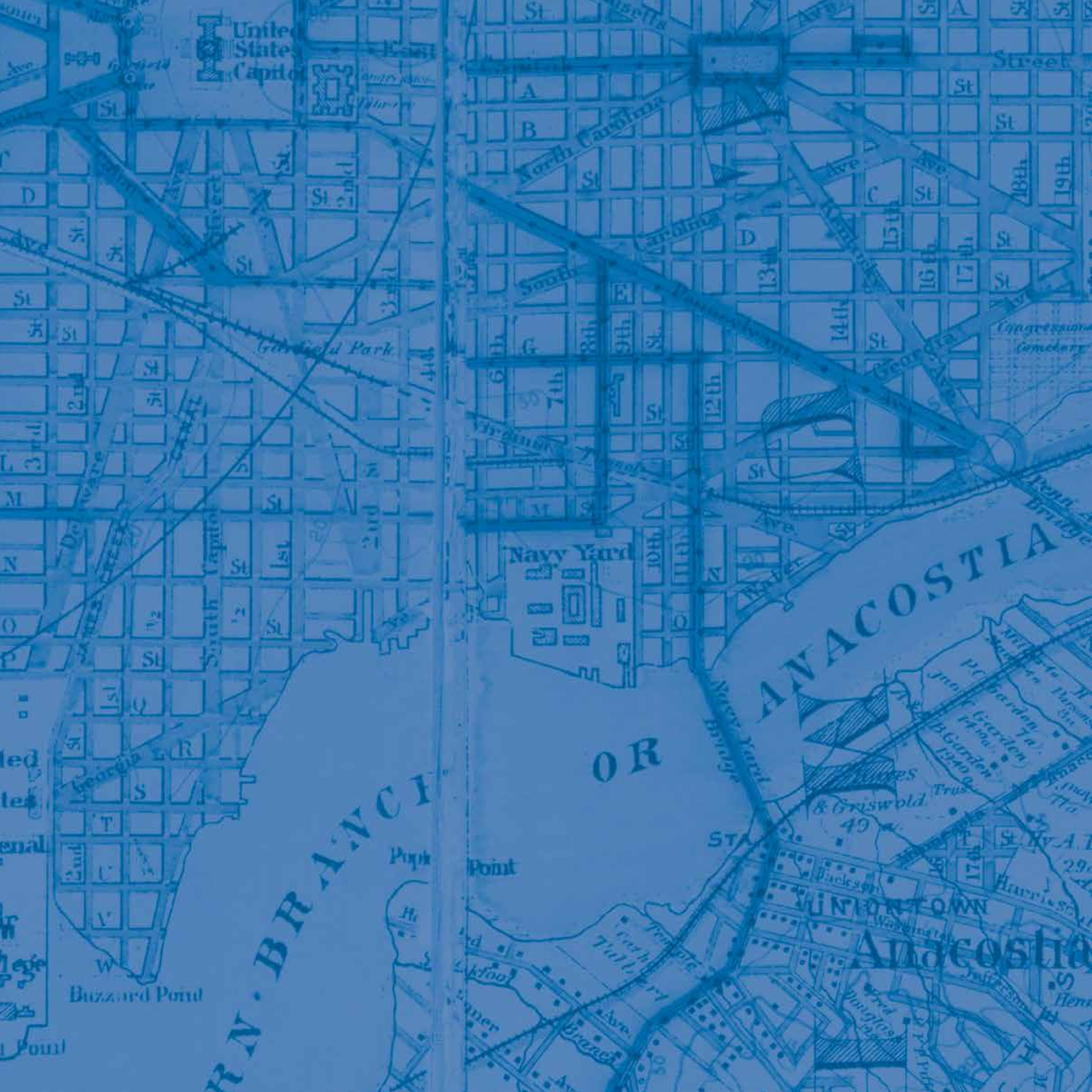
REFLECTIONS

Washington's Southeast / Southwest Waterfront

CAMBRIA HOTEL
Washington, DC
Capitol Riverfront



United States Government
Sewer
Made Ground
Tidal Basin
Washington Monument
THE MALL
20
B
15th
14th
D
13th
12th
11th
10th
E
F
G
H
I
K
9th
8th
7th
6th
4½
NEW HIGHWAY
NEW R.R. BRIDGE
Long Bridge
United States Government
Made Ground
Jackson City
SOUTH END
LONG BRIDGE STA.
R.P.&A.
R.&D.R.R.Co.
W.S.Ry
B.S.S.
J.F.&M.
Cullinan
R


United States Capitol
Street
North Carolina
South Carolina
Navy Yard
ANACOSTIA
OR
BRANC
Buzzard Point
Georgia
Water
Navy Yard Bridge
& Griswold
UNIONTOWN
Anacostia
Harris St

REFLECTIONS

Washington's Southeast / Southwest Waterfront

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Front cover image:
Rendering of the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge. The bridge connects the two shores of the Anacostia River and is named after a former slave and human rights leader who became one of Washington's most famous residents.
District Department of Transportation

REFLECTIONS

Washington's Southeast / Southwest Waterfront

Marjorie Lightman, PhD
William Zeisel, PhD

CAMBRIA HOTEL
Washington, DC
Capitol Riverfront

QED Associates LLC
Washington, DC

Then ... A gardener's residence on the site of the Cambria Hotel. The flat-roofed frame house, 18 feet wide and costing $1,800 to construct more than a century ago, was home to Samuel Howison, a market gardener. The cornice at the top of the building now graces the Cambria Hotel's lobby, and a fireplace mantle accents the rooftop bar.
Peter Sefton

Now ... The Cambria Hotel at 69 Q Street SW, a part of the Southeast/Southwest waterfront's renaissance.
Donohoe

Welcome to the Cambria Hotel

Located in an historic part of one of the world's great cities.

Washington is a star-studded town where money and influence glitter on a world stage of 24/7 news bites. Images of the White House, the Capitol, and the Mall are recognized around the world as synonymous with majesty and power. Washington, the nation's capital, shapes our times and history.

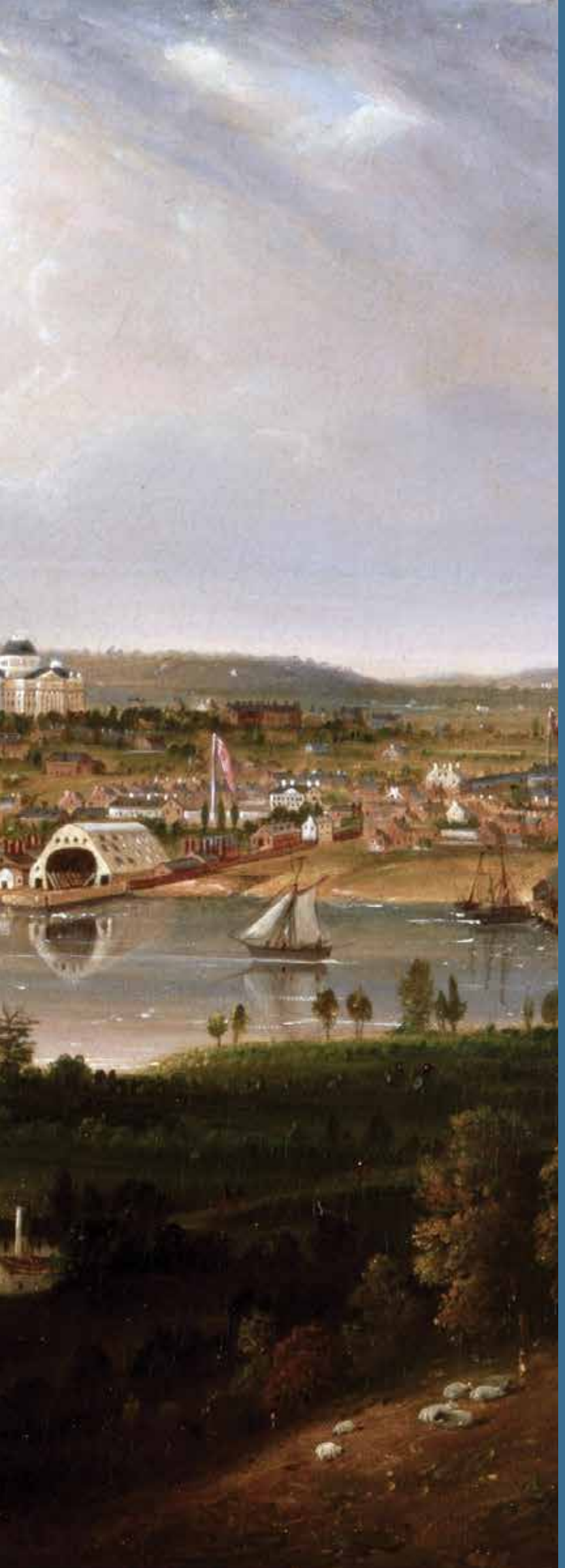
Washington is also home to more than 700,000 residents, who live amid the great, the grand, and the mundane. Around the city, monuments of mounted army generals stand guard over circles and squares where office workers eat lunch and gossip. Taxis, buses, and private cars going about the daily business of city life come to screeching standstills as dignitaries from every corner of the globe race by in police escorted motorcades. On the Mall, where protests and rallies have stirred the nation, Washingtonians lounge, and play soccer and volleyball.

The Cambria Hotel stands on Washington's Capitol Riverfront, at the intersection of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers and scarcely a mile south of the Capitol. Located midway between the historic Washington Navy Yard on the east and the new Wharf complex to the west, it is barely a long home-run from Nationals Park, home to the World Series champions of 2019, and a short walk from the corridors of power.

Over the past two decades the waterfront has enjoyed a renaissance. The Cambria Hotel is prime address for exploring and enjoying the newest that Washington has to offer amid the streets and neighborhoods layered with a past that helped shape the nation.

We would like to thank historians Marjorie Lightman and William Zeisel for using their scholarly and literary skills to make this book a reality.

The Cambria Hotel Team



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View of the Washington waterfront from across the Anacostia River, 1833. George Cooke's painting shows the Navy Yard, Capitol, and White House as defining features. The Arsenal buildings mark Buzzard Point on the extreme left, and beyond the point the Long Bridge crosses the Potomac River.
White House Collection/White House Historical Association


Canal St SW
O St SW
P St SW
CAMBRIA HOTEL
Q Street SW
1st St SW
AUDI FIELD
FORT LESLEY J. MCNAIR
2nd St SW
1st St SW
Half St SW
T St SW
1st St SW
V St SW
BUZZARD POINT PARK
NATIONALS PARK
First Street SE
Potomac Ave SW
The Yards Park
Anacostia Riverwalk Trail
ANACOSTIA RIVER
SOUTH CAPITOL STREET SW
Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge
ANACOSTIA RIVER

Introduction

The Southeast/Southwest waterfront is one of Washington's longest kept secrets. Townhouses, mid-rises, and garden apartments line streets that weave through distinct neighborhoods where a touch of the past mixes with the present. Interlaced among the buildings and streets are offices, restaurants, large and small music venues, world-class theater, and sports from baseball to soccer. Uniting all the disparate elements is the waterfront, which transforms the tensions and dynamism of an American urban landscape into a unique and special environment.

Reflections: The Southeast/Southwest Waterfront follows in the footsteps of change through four walks stretching from the fish market on the west to the Navy Yard in the east. It offers photographs, observations, and ruminations that can be enjoyed equally well strolling the neighborhoods or reading in a comfortable Cambria Hotel room.

Reflections invites consideration of neighborhoods tied to the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, which provide the context of more than two hundred years of change, with shifting values and social patterns that have made the nation, built a capital city, and shaped the waterfront.

When the new City of Washington opened for business as the nation's capital in 1800, sailing ships ruled the waves, and canals were the cutting edge of transportation technology. Then steamships, railroads, cars, and trucks each had their moments of triumph that redefined city life, and each time life on the waterfront changed. New communities appeared and older ones declined. New opportunities for employment went hand-in-hand with the downfall of old industries. Real estate developers built on streets laid bare through demolition.

Nationals Park. The jewel in the crown of the Southeast waterfront renaissance, Nationals Park is one of Washington's most notable family-friendly destinations. Located next to The Yards and across the street from the Navy Yard Metro station, the stadium is surrounded by an entertainment district rich in restaurants, cafes, bars, and parks that hug the waterfront.

Wikimedia Commons

Change does not happen by chance. Government policies, new technology, and the ups and downs of real estate investment formed a powerful triad that reaches back to George Washington and the founding of the city. It defined the old waterfront and promises a bright new one.

Regardless of the historical period or the reigning political, social, and economic rhetoric of renewal, development, and reform, change has usually privileged white residents over African American, wealthy over poor, and newcomer over established. *Reflections* provides commentary on race, poverty, wealth, and the movement of people that shaped the waterfront's human environment.

The federal government has been the biggest single shaper of the city. Until recently, Congress governed Washington directly. Since the city gained limited self-rule in 1974, the federal government has taken a different role as more an enabler, facilitator, and matchmaker, rather than a boss. In the 1990s, Congress enacted the nation's first federal public/private partnership legislation, specifically for the Washington waterfront. It allowed the General Services Administration, which manages the federal government's real estate and buildings, to coordinate with the city's elected council and mayor to implement a 21st-century vision of a renewed Southeast/Southwest waterfront.

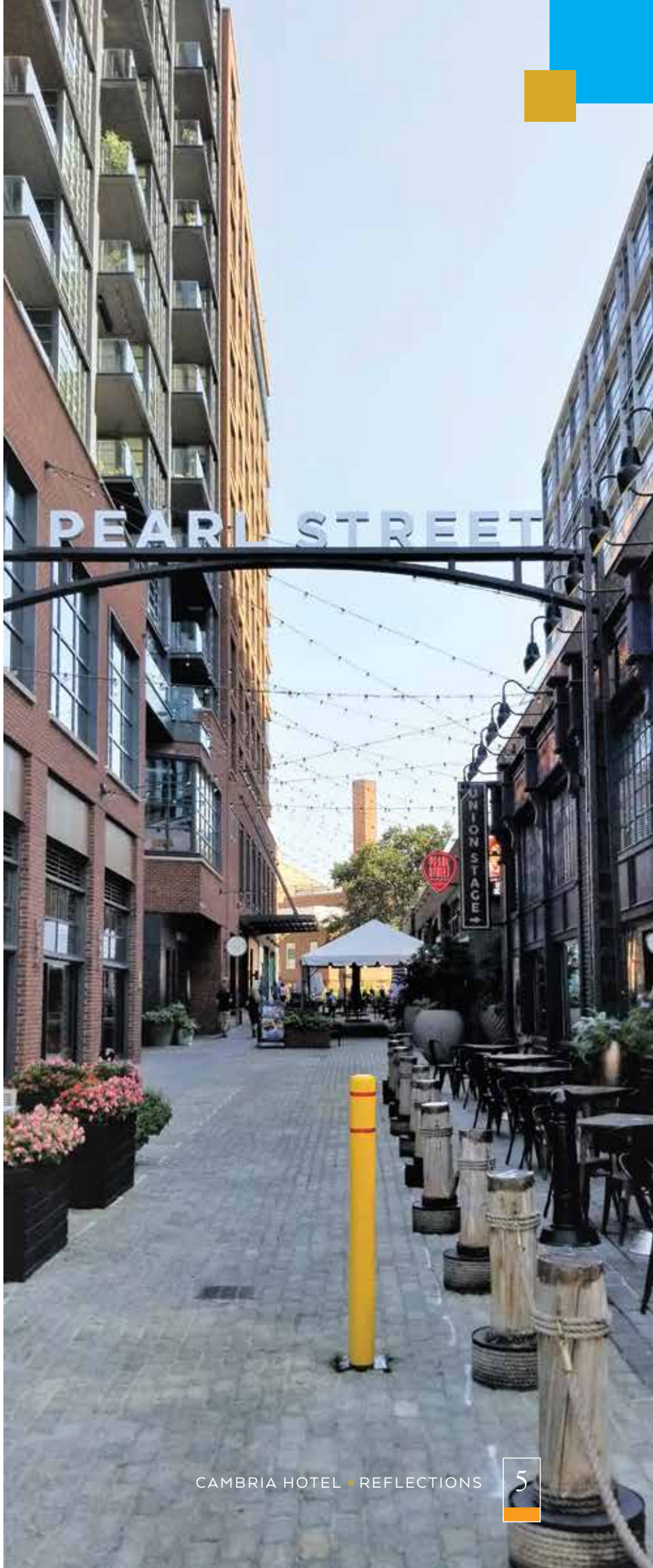
Reflections seeks to capture the excitement of the new waterfront and root it within the story of its past. From the beginning, Washington was a planned city, designed by Pierre L'Enfant at the behest of George Washington. In L'Enfant's first designs, the city's front door was intended to be the point where the Potomac and Anacostia rivers meet, just south of the Cambria Hotel. To this day, the view looking north from the terminus of South Capitol Street, on the Anacostia River, offers an unimpeded and stunning view to the Capitol dome rising from the apex of a not-so-distant-hill, just as L'Enfant imagined.

The Cambria Hotel is almost midway between the eastern and western ends of the waterfront. South Capitol Street, one block east of the hotel, is the dividing line between the Southwest and Southeast quadrants of the city, which together form the waterfront. Each of the book's four walks focuses on a small part of the stretch along the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, from the fish market and the bridges at the western end to the Navy Yard and Historic Anacostia at the furthest point east. The walks can be taken or read in any order and address themes relating

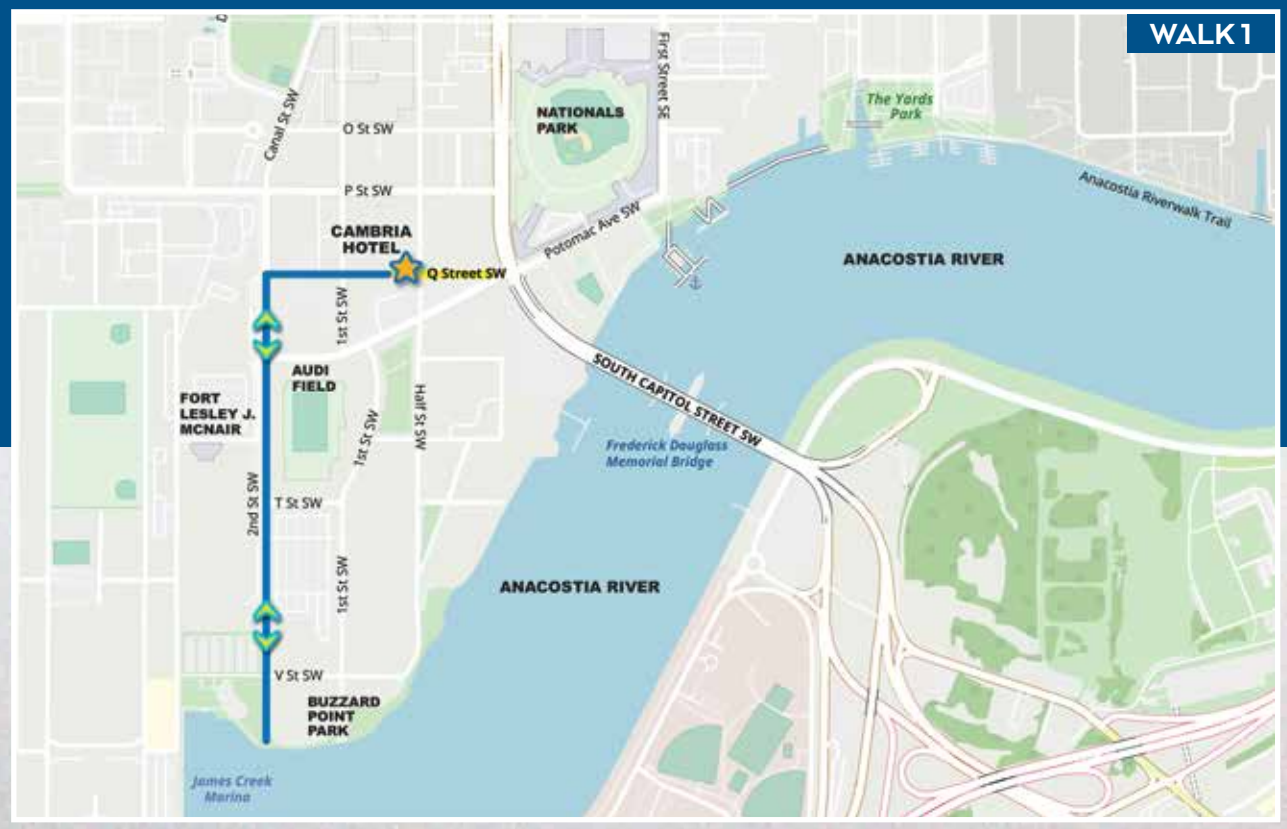
to the immediate physical environment. The photographs, maps, and other illustrative materials make the past visually part of the present, whether walking, reading, or browsing.

The first walk, "Meet the Rivers at Buzzard Point," is a short stroll along the water and terrain on Buzzard Point at the intersection of the Anacostia and Potomac rivers. The second walk, "A Laboratory of Social Reform," describes the repeated efforts by private reformers and public officials to provide affordable housing and housing for the poorest of the poor. Nowhere else in the city is there a compact area that encapsulates the housing reforms of the 20th century more vividly than in Southwest, south of M Street between Half and Fourth streets. Nowhere else are the successes and failures more evident, even decades later.

The third walk, "The Commingling of Centuries," compares significantly different attitudes and styles of waterfront living, from the 1790s to the 2020s. It is a walk along a river of time, from the classic styles of George Washington's day to the assertive, glossy look of today's waterfront buildings. The fourth and final walk explores the territory east of the Cambria Hotel, a stretch of waterfront that has had a different historical experience from the shore to the west. "East of South Capitol Street" takes the Navy Yard as an anchor, and describes how this huge military facility dominated both shores of the Anacostia River, until only a few decades ago, when changing national defense priorities unexpectedly opened up much of the yard's land, not only for private development but for the return of major league baseball to the city.



The Pearl Street arch at The Wharf. Stretching along the Washington Channel from the fish market in the west to the new Waterside Park in the east, The Wharf includes hotels, shops, and residences, as well as piers that reach deep into the channel. Pearl Street is named after a ship that sailed from the 7th Street pier, in 1848, carrying escaped African American slaves in an unsuccessful bid for freedom.
QED Associates LLC



Fort Lesley J. McNair and National Defense University, viewed from the junction of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, 1988. This extensive military base, originally called the Arsenal when established in the 1790s, manufactured munitions and later also became the site of the nation's first federal prison. Early in the 20th century, President Theodore Roosevelt led the creation of the Army War College, now part of the National Defense University, whose imposing main building, on Greenleaf Point, shares the picture with the US Capitol in the background.

National Archives and Records Administration

WALK 1

Meet the Rivers at Buzzard Point

Many cities have a spit of land like Buzzard Point, a place that time and history forgot – until, suddenly, it is celebrated and developed as a new part of the city. Buzzard Point was not supposed to be such a place. The city's early developers saw it full of promise, ideally placed to be a port at the intersection of the Potomac and the Anacostia rivers. History, however, has not been kind, and only now in the 21st century may Buzzard Point possibly realize its potential.

> *Step outside the Cambria and walk west along Q Street. At 2nd Street turn left and walk to the marina at the river. At the foot of 2nd Street look left to the Anacostia River and the Frederick Douglass Bridge; look right to the Potomac River and Hains Point.*

Buzzard Point tells the tale of Washington's two rivers. Slow and lazy, the Potomac flows along the Southeast/Southwest waterfront, indifferent to the human history of which it has been so much a part. While most people associate Washington with the Potomac, fewer think of its smaller consort, the Anacostia River. Known well into the 19th century as the Eastern Branch, the Anacostia runs about 10 miles from Maryland through the city to join the Potomac at Buzzard Point. The mingled waters flow downstream past the memories of Virginia Tidewater plantations that gave tobacco to the world and slavery to colonial America. Finally, they empty into Chesapeake Bay and out to the Atlantic.

> *To the right are the walls of Fort McNair. The old James Creek Canal runs underground along the walls and exits into the Anacostia River at the marina.*

Strictly speaking, Buzzard Point, where the rivers meet, is one tip of a triangular piece of land extending south from M Street to the water. The triangle has another tip, Greenleaf Point, separated from Buzzard Point by a small indentation that was once the exit for the James Creek Canal and later became the site for a marina. These two points are often referred to collectively as Buzzard Point, and so is the triangle of land that they adorn.

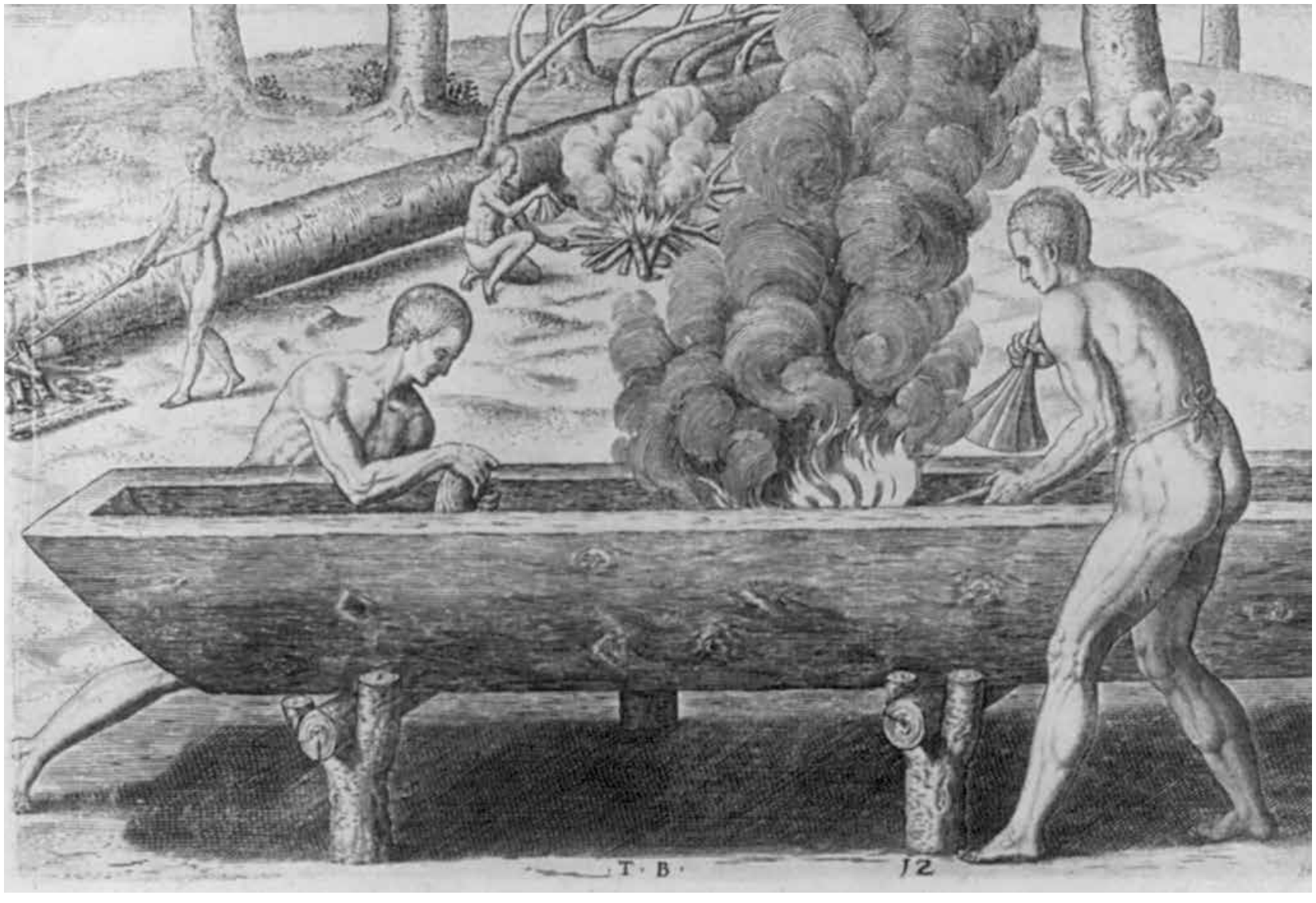
Well before the Europeans came, the intersection of the Anacostia and Potomac made a convenient highway and trading route, as well as offering natural riches like potable water and annual migrations of shad and herring. Members of an Algonquin tribe, the Piscataway, or possibly the Conoy, settled and traded along the Anacostia River, which they called something like "anaquashatanik." European explorers called the people "Anocostines." Early maps often referred to the larger river as "Potomak" or "Potowmac" from an American word possibly referring to the Patawomneck, a group centered further south in Virginia that allied with the English settlers and still has a small presence in the area.

> *Look to the left across the Potomac River to airplanes landing and taking off at Reagan National Airport. The city of Alexandria is just out of sight farther to the left of the airport.*

Though Americans had lived along the rivers for centuries, they made only ripples on the water. Their numbers were few and their needs harmonized with the annual natural cycles. The Europeans, from the moment of their arrival in 1608, saw possibilities for capitalizing on the riches of the rivers. European settlers established ports at Alexandria in Virginia and Georgetown and Bladensburg in Maryland. Bladensburg stood at the head of navigation and tidewater on the Anacostia. Georgetown stood at the head of navigation and tidewater on the Potomac, where the rapids at Little Falls and its upstream counterpart, Great Falls, required a portage.

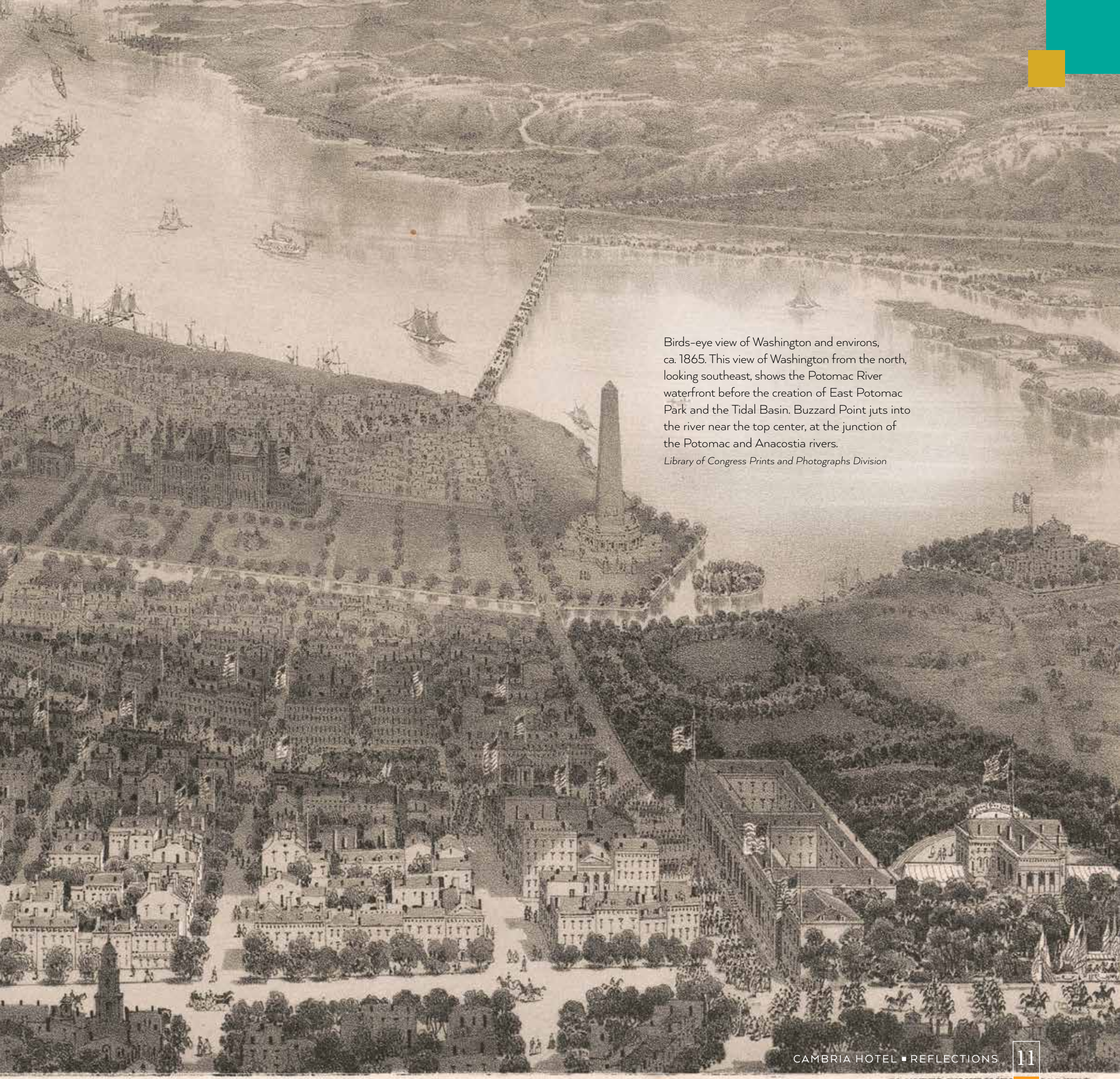
For the first few decades of its history, the city of Washington relied heavily on Georgetown and Alexandria for food, merchandise, and building materials, before establishing its own port facilities on the Potomac and Anacostia. During the decades after the Civil War, it solidified its position as the region's preeminent port. No longer just a narrow beach with a few docks for landing fish and general cargo, the Southwest waterfront became the base for sailing and steam-powered craft that traded in lumber, coal, ice, fresh and preserved foods, and a hundred other items from a thriving intercoastal trade.

As the national capital, Washington was fortified against attack and quickly became the center of the nation's military establishment. The US Arsenal, situated at Greenleaf Point, opened in the 1790s as a manufacturer of munitions. The Arsenal was surrounded with walls and protected with cannon. Nevertheless, it was seized and largely destroyed by British forces in the War of 1812. Soon rebuilt, the Arsenal remained an important military installation for nearly two more centuries. Early in the 20th century, during a period of expansive nationalism under Theodore Roosevelt, the point became home to the Army War College. The complex was renamed Fort McNair after World War II to honor an army general.



Americans making a dugout canoe in Virginia, ca. 1590. Long before Europeans arrived, the Potomac and Anacostia rivers were used by Americans for trade, travel, and as a source of natural resources including fish and furs. Life along the rivers followed a seasonal migration pattern.

Library of Congress Rare Book and Special Collections Division



Birds-eye view of Washington and environs, ca. 1865. This view of Washington from the north, looking southeast, shows the Potomac River waterfront before the creation of East Potomac Park and the Tidal Basin. Buzzard Point juts into the river near the top center, at the junction of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

> *To the left is the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge and beyond it upriver is the Washington Navy Yard.*

Technological change worked both for and against the waterfront. The steam engine brought steamboats, which boosted river commerce until the advent of railroads after the Civil War. Beginning in 1872, railroad tracks south of the Mall connected Washington with the Southern states via Long Bridge over the Potomac at 14th Street SW. Tracks began slicing Washington into residential zones divided by puffing locomotives and long lines of boxcars. As railroads proliferated and became capable of moving more goods faster, the river trade was left only with low-value bulk items like ice, fuel oil, and coal. After railroads came cars and trucks, and with them came more roads and bridges that made the rivers largely irrelevant. By the 1920s even the fish dealers on the Southwest waterfront received much of their product via refrigerated trucks rather than boats.

The march of technology advanced to the tune of toxic chemicals, such as those used at the Navy Yard. Local government began advising residents to limit consumption of river fish, and in 1998 the yard was designated a Superfund site, in need of environmental cleanup. As the rivers became unwholesome and less important to the life of the city, public concern rose about their future. Congressional hearings publicized the economic and social losses, and offered both conventional and innovative solutions, ranging from dredging the shipping channels for greater commercial exploitation to cleaning up and developing the rivers as urban playgrounds.

Southwest waterfront, ca. 1916. The *Three Rivers*, left, and the *Northland*, right, provided passenger and freight service between Washington and landings on the lower Potomac. The relatively shallow draft of steamboats enabled them to access ports unavailable to many sailing vessels. The introduction of steam power revolutionized river transportation, allowing for operators to schedule their trips according to the clock, not the wind and tide.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Finally, in the 1970s Congress passed the Clean Water Act, which mandated that the nation's rivers be made swimmable, fishable, and drinkable. Restoration proved to be more complicated than anticipated. It required a systemic understanding of waterways as interconnected flows that might have effects over widely dispersed areas beyond a given city or county boundary.

Critical federal support for the Washington metro area's rivers came with Congressional passage of the Anacostia Waterfront Framework Initiative (AWI) in 2003. Envisioned as a $10 billion investment stretching over thirty-years, AWI provided a framework and funding for major infrastructure improvements. Vastly improved sewage treatment, better control of storm run-off, and a local law limiting use of plastic bags resulted in cleaner water, heathier wetlands, and increased aquatic and bird life.

> *The Anacostia Riverwalk Trail runs along the waterway and is accessible there.*

Importantly, AWI replaced an older view of the waterfront. Instead of seeing the shoreline as a collection of private properties and docks, it took a holistic view that imagined a single environment stretching across the Southwest and Southeast. It represented an environmental consciousness that valued an engaged relationship with the rivers and

Railroads south of the Mall, ca. 1910. Smoke from steam locomotives in the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad yard on Maryland Ave. SW almost obscures the view of the US Capitol. Washington was one of the first US cities to have a railroad line, in 1835, but did not gain an extensive rail net until the early 1870s. Railroads competed with the river boats as carriers of people and freight. With the advent of refrigerated cars in the 1880s, they could bring meat, fish, and fruit from as far away as California, contributing to the rise of a truly national food economy that displaced many local farms.

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surrounding natural environments. A network of trails for walking and biking from the Tidal Basin to the Navy Yard knitted together the disparate parts of the waterfront and made it possible, for the first time since the colonial era, to move seamlessly along the two river banks.

AWI's most ambitious single project was not on the river or along its banks, but over it – replacing the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge, immediately south and slightly east of the Cambria Hotel. The bridge takes its name from long-time Washington resident Frederick Douglass, a former slave who became nationally known as an abolitionist and distinguished public figure.

The original bridge was built in 1950 to connect downtown Washington with city neighborhoods on the east bank of the Anacostia River and with Maryland suburbs further south and east. With passing time and growing traffic, the bridge became inadequate for the 77,000 vehicles that crossed daily.

> *Walk to V Street and then to the Henson Environmental Center. Look across the river south to Bolling Field and the Naval Research Laboratory's white-domed buildings.*

Construction of the new bridge recognized the growing importance of the city neighborhoods referred to as East of the River. These neighborhoods are called Anacostia, even though the historical village of Anacostia embraced only a part of the eastern shore, across the 11th Street Bridge near the Navy Yard. The area's main thoroughfare, Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, which moves through a large and deeply rooted African American community, connects the roads that radiate off I-295.

> *The view south and west from Buzzard Point takes in a widening Anacostia River and its junction with the Potomac, including Hains Point, a sliver of land poking out from the western shore at the very tip of East Potomac Park.*

East Potomac Park's land was created by the Army Corps of Engineers toward the end of the 19th century, as part of a bigger project to improve and deepen the Washington Channel for larger vessels. Easily accessed by foot, bike, and boat, the park offers a golf course, tennis courts, and paths with spectacular views of the river. At one time it even had a tea house.

The Army engineers regarded the park's recreational delights secondary to its success in solving a perennial engineering problem. Silting, which had become an issue on the Anacostia River, was also making the relatively shallow Potomac River channels a navigational challenge and threatening the vitality of Southwest's port.

The water's edge at The Yards, with the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge in the background. The planking marks the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail, developed as part of the 30-year Anacostia Water Initiative, which integrates the Southeast/Southwest waterfront from the fish market on the Potomac River to beyond the 11th Street Bridge along the Anacostia.

QED Associates LLC

Return to the marina and look to the right, up the Potomac and East Potomac Park.

The engineers reduced the likelihood of silting by reconfiguring the shore west of the port to create the Tidal Basin and accelerate the water flow and the flushing action of the daily tides. East Potomac Park was built from the muck of constructing the Tidal Basin at the western head of the channel. The name Tidal Basin is not just a poetic fancy. Locks were built to control the tide and create a head of water that could be released to flush out the Washington Channel. On a rising tide, water could flow into the Tidal Basin. As the tide turned, the locks would close. When the tide had fallen to its lowest, the locks reopened. The rapid outrushing of water from the Tidal Basin scoured the channel's sediment and carried it into the river's mainstream.

Farther upriver, out of sight from Buzzard Point, is the Tidal Basin with the Jefferson Memorial and cherry trees.

Once the engineers completed the Tidal Basin, others quickly saw possibilities for its use. For a while it served as the city's main bathing beach and a favorite angling spot. Then in the early 20th century Japan contributed a forest of cherry trees. Across the basin from the cherry trees, history-minded citizens promoted the idea of erecting a monument to Thomas Jefferson. They persuaded Congress to build a Greek-style temple around a monumental statue, creating the iconic view of the cherry trees surrounding the Jefferson memorial.

Tide gates under Ohio Drive at the Tidal Basin, ca. 1930. This photograph by the US Army Corps of Engineers shows some of the locks that were designed to regulate the flow of water in and out of the Tidal Basin. Located near the famous cherry trees, the locks are invisible to the car traffic along the Tidal Basin. The system allowed the basin to fill on the rising tide, then released the head of water to create a strong flushing flow to discourage sedimentation in the Washington Channel. The neoclassical design of the bridge boasts ornate details such as gargoyles and classical balustrades.

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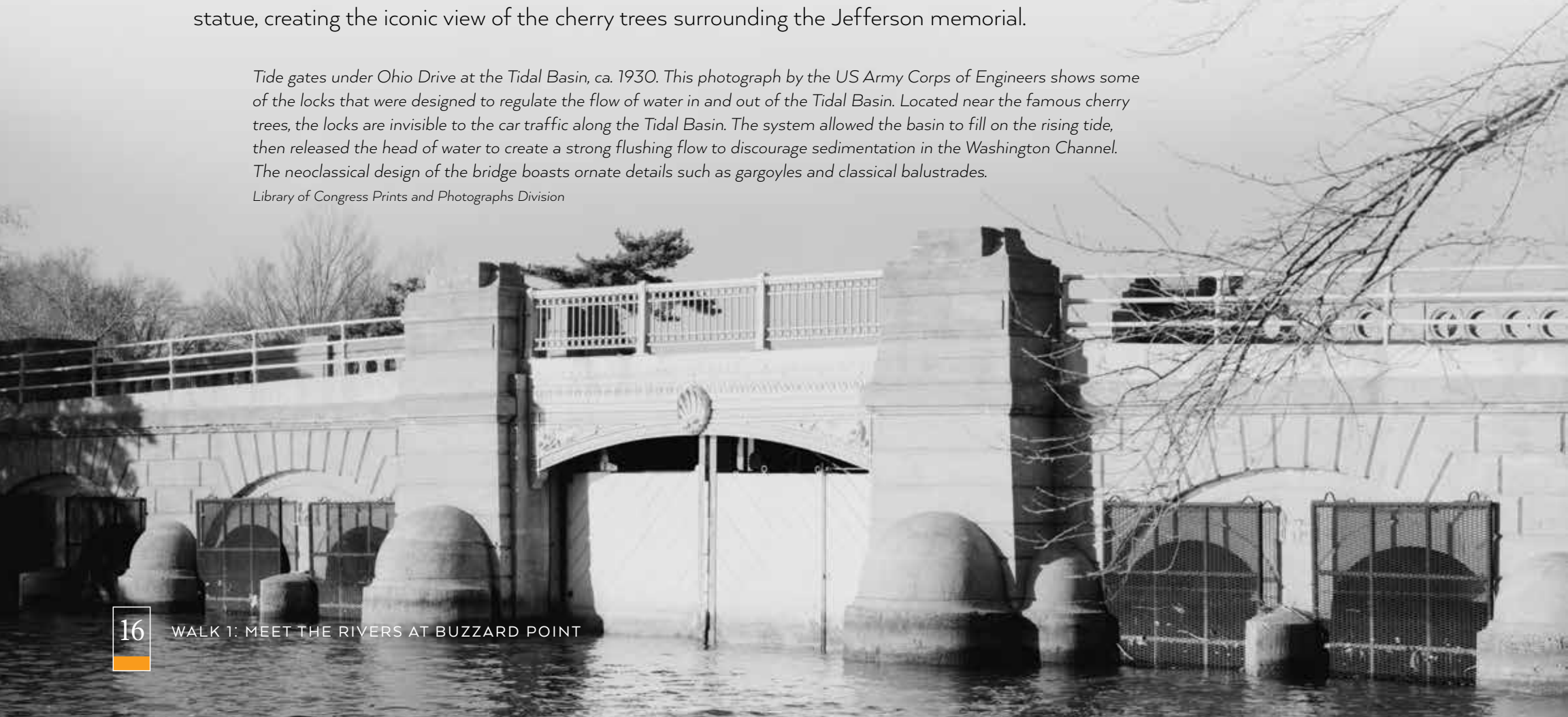

The basin itself, however, is no longer visible from anywhere along the Southwest waterfront. A phalanx of bridges crossing to Virginia blocks the view. These are 20th-century bridges, with one exception, Long Bridge, built in 1809.

Long Bridge was the first bridge to connect the city of Washington with the other side of the Potomac River. It was called Long Bridge owing to its mile-long stretch across the water. At that time, the 10-mile-square federal district straddled the river, and construction of the bridge helped bring the residents of the shores together. Even after the western shore was returned to Virginia in 1846, trade and travel between the two shores remained important, and so did the bridge.

Throughout the Civil War, Long Bridge was an important military route for Union forces operating in northern Virginia, when Confederate units were roaming the outskirts of Washington. The US government garrisoned Alexandria, the city nearest the bridge, and laid railroad tracks across the bridge to speed travel. Long Bridge became even more important after 1872, when the Pennsylvania Railroad completed a rail net south of the Mall that crossed the Anacostia River into Southwest and then over Long Bridge and across the Potomac River.

The original structure lasted until 1904, when it was replaced with a steel bridge dedicated to rail traffic. Modifications and improvements were ongoing as railroad companies merged through the 20th century and control over Long Bridge changed hands. After World War II, railroad mergers accelerated, and in 1991 the Consolidated Rail Corporation assumed responsibility for the bridge and its associated traffic.

Alongside the railroad-owned Long Bridge, Congress built another bridge, in 1906, for streetcars and other vehicles. The two bridges served the city well for more than half a century, when growing needs led to construction of three more vehicular crossings and a bridge for the Metro trains that began running between the city and northern Virginia. Collectively, the three bridges – Rochambeau, Arland D. Williams Jr. Memorial, and George Mason – function as one of the city's main gateways.

On the Washington side the bridges connect to I-395, which travels across the city south of the Mall in a line roughly parallel with the Southwest and Southeast

Diving barge at the bathing beach on the Tidal Basin, ca. 1920. Before construction of the Thomas Jefferson memorial, the Tidal Basin was the city's public beach, complete with lifeguards. It had racially segregated changing rooms and swimming areas.
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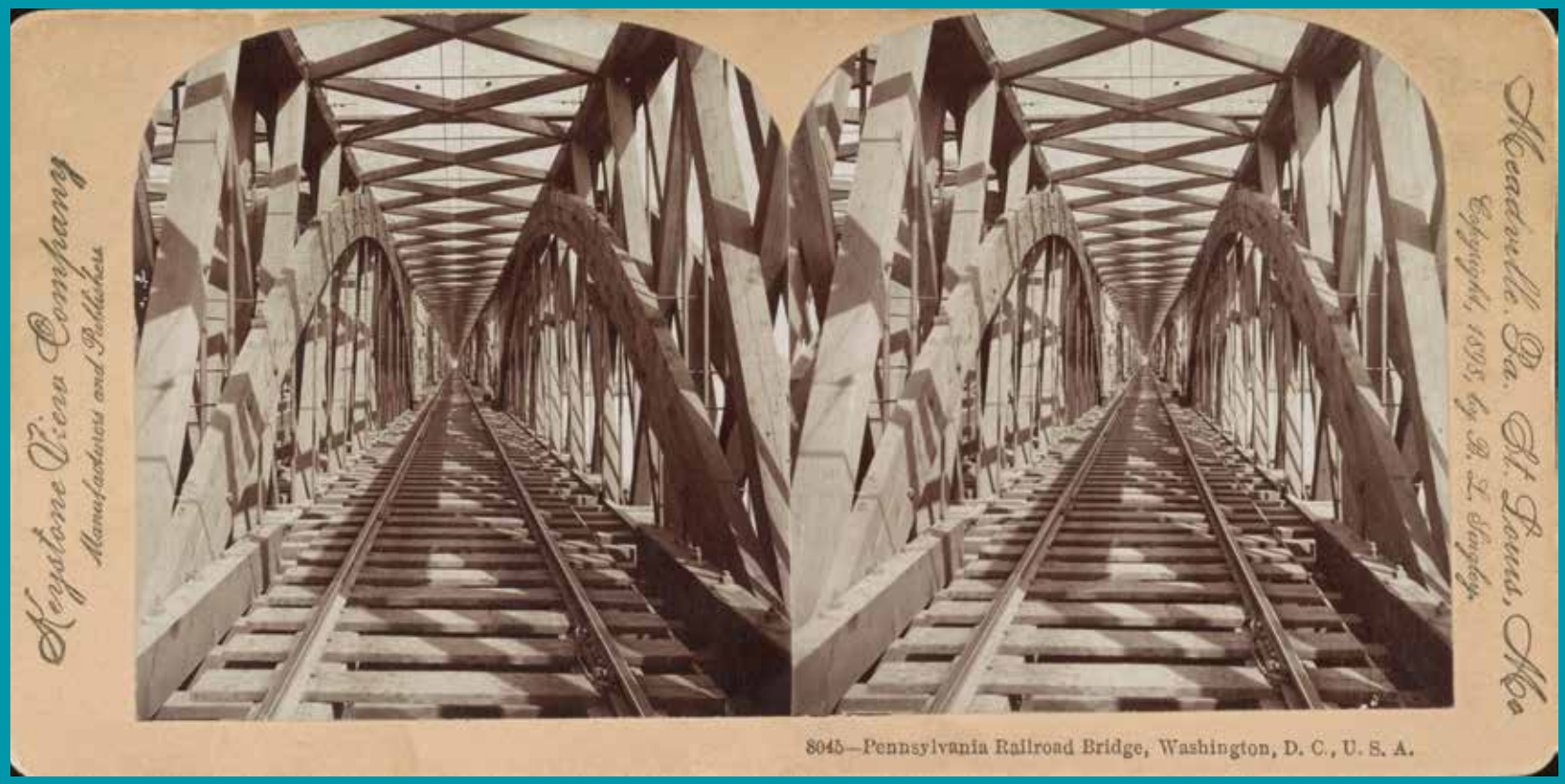

Stereoscope image of Long Bridge, 1898. Originally built in 1809, of timber on stone piers, the bridge carried wagons and pedestrians between northern Virginia and the city of Washington. Repaired and rebuilt numerous times, it was a key transport link during the Civil War. After the advent of railroads it became a vital link for rail lines connecting the South and West to the Northeast corridor. A steel bridge replaced the wooden structure early in the 20th century.

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Highway bridges across the Potomac at L'Enfant Plaza, ca. 1990.The approaches for the complex known as the 14th Street bridges carry vehicular traffic between Washington and northern Virginia. The modernist buildings of L'Enfant Plaza complete a scene of 20th-century urban design. Beyond L'Enfant Plaza the highways head east across the northern edge of Southwest and into the Capitol Hill area. Construction of the highway required demolition of the old fish market on 11th Street. The bridges are named Rochambeau, Arland D. Williams Jr. Memorial, and George Mason.

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waterfronts. Its overpasses visually define inside/outside space, and form a physical cordon around the residential neighborhoods of Southwest. The cordon effect is especially evident where massive bridge approaches pass over Maine Avenue and isolate the Tidal Basin from the rest of the waterfront.

> *Return to Q Street along Fort McNair's red brick wall.*

From the tip of Buzzard Point the view west takes in the red brick walls of Fort McNair and beyond them the brick buildings of the National Defense University and other military facilities. Though it seems a quiet, peaceful place, the grounds of the old Arsenal witnessed many tragedies and dramas, beginning with the destructive British attack of 1814. The Arsenal grounds later became home to the first federal penitentiary, built in 1826 on land purchased adjacent to the fort. It gained a place in national history as the trial and execution site of the conspirators of President Lincoln's assassination in 1865.

An army hospital was added to the fort in 1857, and it was as a medical facility that the base would make one of its greatest marks on history. In his 1896 report on the state of the health of the army, the Army's surgeon-general detailed the prevalence of malarial diseases among troops. The debilitating infections had no known cause, no cure, and were especially pressing at the Arsenal and at Fort Myer across the Potomac in Virginia.

At the time, Major Walter Reed was a faculty member of the US Army Medical School at the fort and had been collaborating with the surgeon general and medical researchers in the new fields of pathology and bacteriology. They were part of an international effort to identify the cause and transmission modes for malarial diseases.

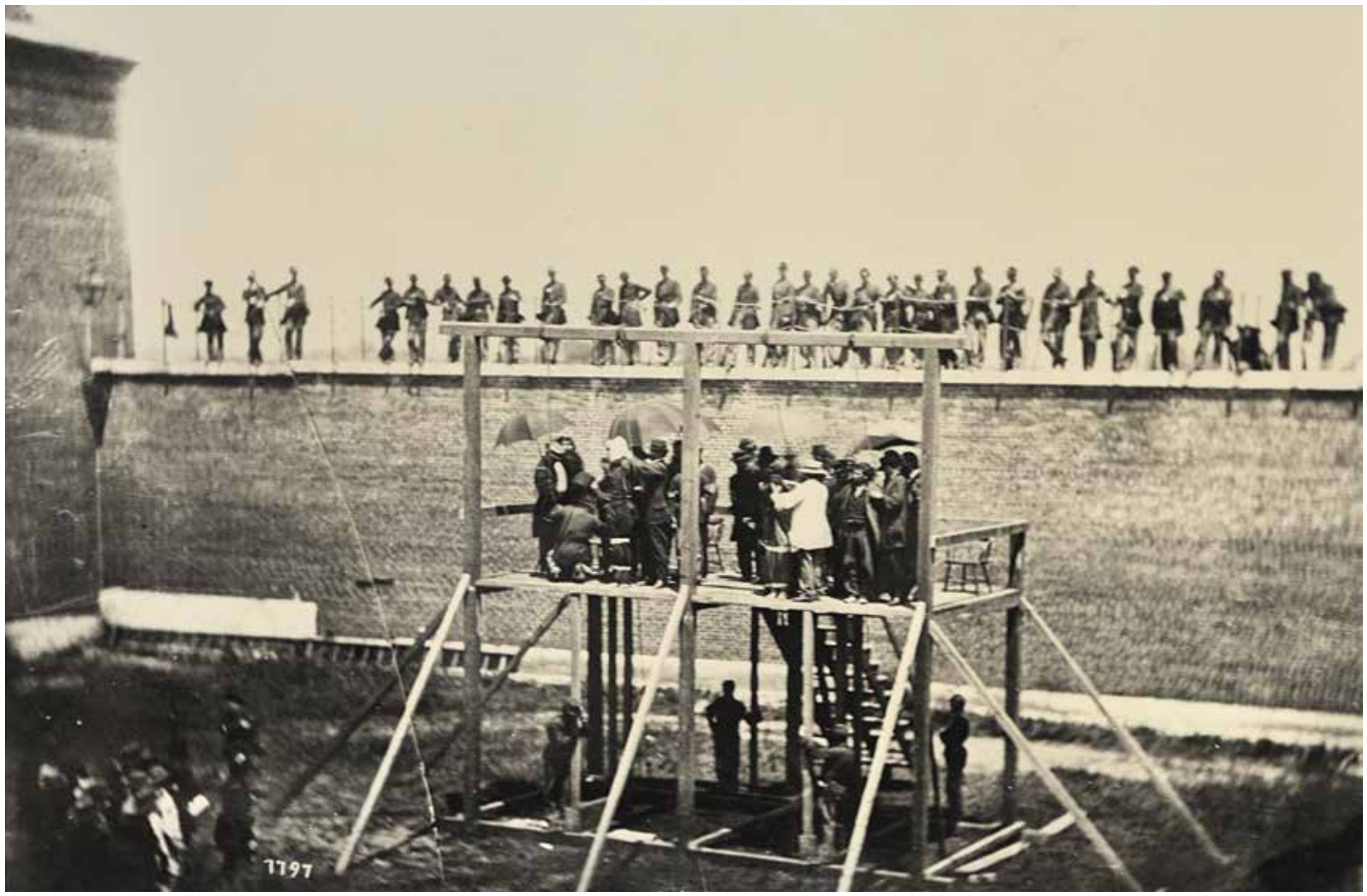
Reed established that the diseases affecting soldiers at Fort McNair and Fort Myer were associated with marshy areas and intermittently submerged river shoals, locally known as mudflats. He could not identify the organism causing the disease, nor the vector, but his insight helped guide research in the right direction. Later, in Cuba, Reed and other researchers discovered that

Wall surrounding Fort McNair. The fort is both a part of the city and an urban island, defined by a high brick wall on three sides and the water on the fourth. Its continued vitality as a military installation has made it a river landmark.
QED Associates LLC

mosquitoes breeding in wetlands were the carriers of another deadly disease, yellow fever. The Army recognized Reed's critical advance when it relocated the hospital from the Arsenal and renamed it the Walter Reed National Military Hospital in his honor.

> *Behind the red brick wall is the National Defense University.*

Clearly visible through the gates in the fort's brick wall is the National Defense University building, Roosevelt Hall, which stands majestically on a low bluff overlooking the river, like a military officer inspecting the troops.



Execution of the Lincoln assassination conspirators at Fort McNair, July 1865. Prison personnel are adjusting the ropes for hanging the conspirators, while soldiers line the wall to witness the event.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

It is an iconic structure that visually defines Greenleaf Point. Designed and built by McKim Mead, the New York architectural firm closely associated with the City Beautiful movement at the turn of the 20th century, it was the military's response to problems of strategic planning, coordination, and leadership that emerged during the Spanish American War of 1898.

President Theodore Roosevelt and Secretary of War Elihu Root spearheaded establishment of what was then called the Army War College. The college offered educational programs focusing on strategy and defense for leaders in the American military, the Department of State, and, later, foreign militaries. In 1976, Congress chartered the institution as the National Defense University, charged with integrating special education programs that had developed over the years. The programs were combined, in 1993, into a single accredited university empowered to issue graduate degrees. The Arsenal, meanwhile, no longer a maker of ammunition, was renamed Fort Lesley J. McNair in 1948 to honor an officer killed by friendly fire in the Normandy breakout of US forces in 1944.

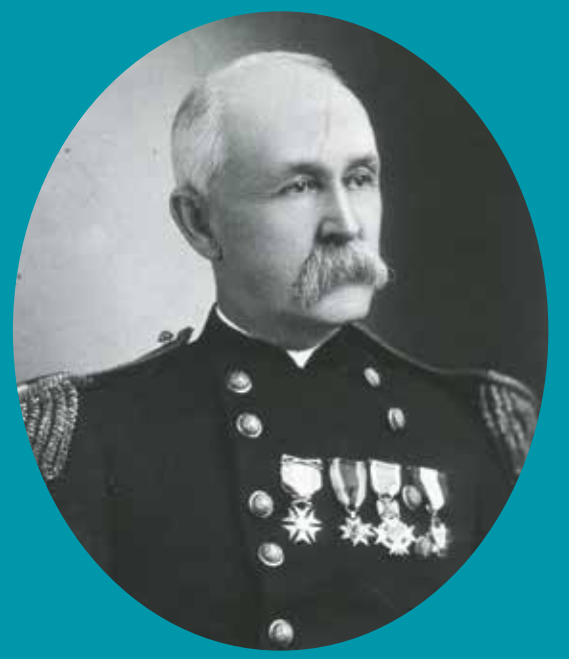
> *Continue walking to Q Street with Audi Field on the right.*

Across the street from the fort's brick walls is Audi Field, completed in 2017-18 for the DC United soccer team. Seating nearly 15,000 spectators, it symbolizes a transformed Washington waterfront and a transformed southern city that has become the hub of a metropolitan area of more than five million multiethnic and multiracial residents.

The advent of soccer marks the coming of age of Washington's ethnic communities, many of which count soccer among their favorite recreations and entertainment. Until recent decades, Washington's population was majority white – usually about two-thirds – and overwhelmingly European-heritage Protestant, seasoned with politicians, bureaucrats, and political appointees.

Most of the city's newcomers who came to settle permanently before the 1960s were African Americans migrating from farther South. Exceptions included German, Italian, and Irish immigrants who came before and during the Civil War. Some

Major Walter Reed, ca. 1900. As an Army doctor based at a hospital on the Fort McNair grounds, Reed conducted important investigations that later revealed mosquitoes to be the vectors for the dreaded yellow fever.
National Library of Medicine



General George M. Sternberg, ca. 1900. As the Army's chief medical officer Sternberg took a keen interest combating diseases like malaria and yellow fever that were afflicting military units in many parts of the country. He was a colleague of Major Walter Reed. In later civilian life Sternberg led efforts to build affordable housing in Southwest and other parts of Washington.
National Library of Medicine

Latin American immigration: the Dominican Festival. From the mid 1960s onward, a growing southern immigration put celebrations of Latin culture on Washington's calendar. Spanish became the city's second language. Latin and Caribbean foods appeared in food trucks and in elegant restaurants.

settled in Southeast and Southwest, where they found employment in brickmaking, stonework, and construction. Others worked at the Navy Yard and the Arsenal, the city's largest industrial employers. A small immigrant Jewish community had become established in retail and real estate, and in Southwest it helped shape the white community on the west side of 4th Street. A famous singer and Hollywood star of the 1920s, Al Jolson, grew up in Southwest, son of an immigrant father who was a cantor at the local synagogue.

Immigration revived in the early 1960s, when refugees arrived from Fidel Castro's Cuba. However, immigration exploded after passage of a revised immigration law in 1965, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society program, which also addressed civil rights, education, and urban revitalization. The Immigration and Nationality Act radically altered the formula for admission to the country. Eliminating the national quota system that privileged northern European countries, the new formula rested on seven categories of family reunification, professional skills, and other specialized determinants. Although the 1965 act set a numerical limit on South American immigration, the family reunification provision allowed a new pattern of chain migration that has altered US demographics.

Today, approximately 14% of Washington-area residents have a Central American heritage. According to the Migration Policy Institute, over 200,000 El Salvadorans, 40,000 Guatemalans, and 38,000 Hondurans live in the metro area. An immigration spike from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, during the 1990s, added to the mix. The Washington area has also experienced inflows from Asia. Many of the new groups come from countries where soccer is the national game, even a passion. They have made soccer into an American game. On any afternoon after work, teams and pickup games of soccer dot the Mall. It is not surprising that professional soccer has found a home on Buzzard Point.

> *Turn right on Q Street to return to the Cambria Hotel.*

Nor is it surprising that Buzzard Point has waited until the 21st century for development. Washington has witnessed an increase of nearly 200,000 residents over the past few decades, transforming thinly populated areas, like Buzzard Point, into modern apartment complexes.

During the 1930s, the local electrical company, PEPCO, built a powerplant, enlarged in later decades, whose three tall smokestacks still recall Buzzard Point's history as a place of warehouses and small industrial plants intermingled with small wooden houses and empty land. By the 1970s it also became home to edgy operations like gay entertainment clubs that would not have been welcomed in other parts of the city. The point often had a feeling of desolate emptiness, broken occasionally by the honking of wild geese overhead.

Then, in the early 2010s, as real estate development boomed all around it, Buzzard Point found itself drawing attention, and everything began to change. Architects and developers showed off plans for mid-rise buildings to replace junkyards and vacant lots. Cracked pavements got fixed, the old Frederick Douglass Bridge was replaced by a glamorous new one, and the point became home to a professional soccer team, making a visual counterpoise to the imposing Nationals Park across South Capitol Street. Buzzard Point was finally gaining its potential. ■

Audi Field seen from the northwest, near the Cambria Hotel. Construction of Audi Field marked the arrival of professional soccer in the sports culture of the city and helped spark development on Buzzard Point.

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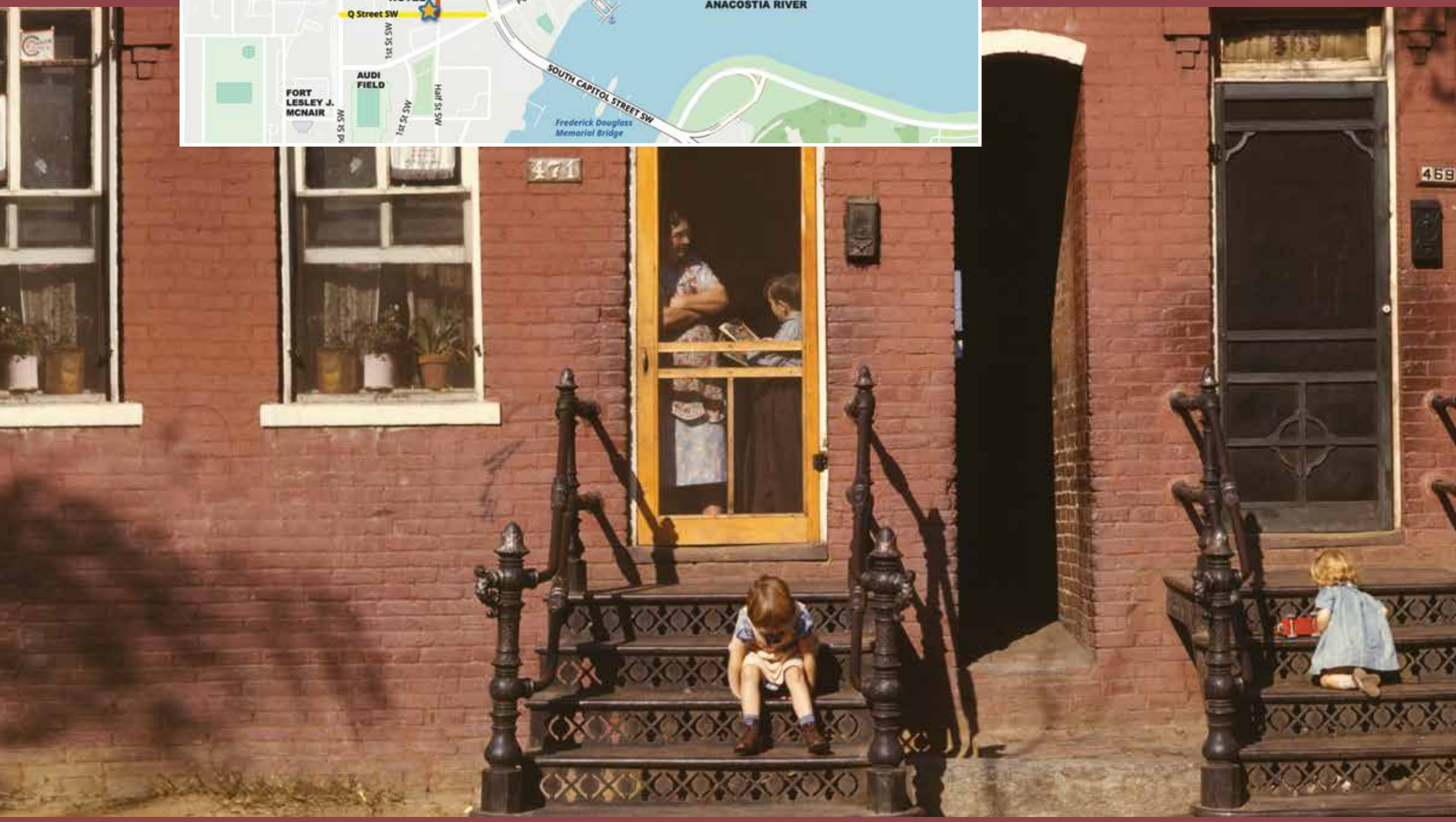


Children playing on row house steps in Southwest, ca. 1942. The more affluent residents lived in substantial, if sometimes cramped, brick row houses.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

WALK 2

A Laboratory of Social Reform

At 1501 Half Street, just south of P Street, stands Syphax Gardens. Constructed in the early 1960s, it was the last public housing project built in Southwest. Also on Half Street, one block before the intersection with M Street, are the so-called Sanitary houses built in 1905 by the privately owned Washington Sanitary Improvement Company (WSIC). These two housing developments bookend more than six decades of tearing down and rebuilding in Southwest, not all at once, but in three distinct waves. The first was early in the 20th century, during the initial campaign to eliminate "alley housing," the second was in the years between the world wars, and the third was during the 1950s and 60s, ending with Syphax Gardens.

> *From the Cambria Hotel walk up Half Street to M Street, passing Syphax Gardens and then the Sanitary houses.*

The Sanitary houses and Syphax Gardens both offered decent housing for those unable to afford market rates, but they have markedly different histories and possibly different futures. The Sanitary houses, neat and trim when new, have been recently updated. They look cared for. The suburban-style buildings of Syphax Gardens are scruffy. The 1905 houses were privately built for rental to the working poor and have benefitted from the area's recent renaissance to become desirable townhouses for owners and residents. Syphax Gardens was

built by the city in the aftermath of leveling wide swaths of the Southwest and evicting its poorest population without adequate alternative housing choices.

The decades between the building of the Sanitary houses and Syphax Gardens saw the roaring 20s, the Great Depression, two world wars, and, in the 1950s, the move to the suburbs, which threatened the city's economic life. Meanwhile Southwest's port declined, the Navy Yard ceased being a major industrial employer, and the rivers became polluted.

Renovated Sanitary houses. Built in 1905 by the Washington Sanitary Improvement Company, these dwellings are the oldest efforts of urban renewal in Southwest. Rents were kept modest and below the market rate by limiting the investors' profits. The houses have stood the test of time and with the Southwest waterfront renaissance have become desirable single-family residences.

Peter Sefton

Against this background of dramatic transformations and changing social expectations, the leveling and rebuilding of neighborhoods in Southwest during the first six decades of the 20th century represented private, philanthropic, and public efforts to help the poor. The reform efforts mirrored changes in dominant white, middle-class views about race and poverty. Walking through this compact neighborhood is an opportunity to explore an urban laboratory of social experimentation.

Like all other parts of Washington at the opening of the 20th century, Southwest's waterfront neighborhoods divided along racial lines. Between South Capitol Street and 4th Street, most residents were African American. From 4th Street west, up to Independence Avenue, most were white. Many whites were native-born persons of northern European heritage, with subgroups such as Germans and Irish who worked at the Navy Yard or Fort McNair as skilled craftsmen or day laborers. There also were some German Jews, who immigrated in the 1840s and 1850s, and Eastern European and Russian Jews who arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Southwest's African American community did not follow the typical Southern profile. Before the Civil War, Washington was home to a large, educated, and skilled community of free African Americans, who established their own schools, fraternal organizations, churches, and charities. In the half-century after the Civil War and emancipation, the city's established African American population expanded. Educators, doctors, lawyers, ministers, and architects built and supported an arts community of clubs, bands, choruses and dance troupes, and an educational system that included Dunbar High School, nationally famed among African Americans for its success in sending graduates to university, including the Ivy League schools.

Syphax Gardens. Located near the Sanitary houses, Syphax Gardens Public Housing Development, completed in the early 1960s, is the newest public housing in Southwest. The project replaced the temporary Syphax Homes, which had occupied a portion of the site. Syphax Gardens has not benefited from the Southwest waterfront renaissance as much as the Sanitary houses.
QED Associates LLC

The city was a magnet for Southern African Americans who wanted jobs and personal freedom. African American women and men arriving at the 7th Street wharf on steamers from Norfolk, with only a few dollars in their pockets or purses and the name of a relative or friend of the family scribbled on a piece of paper, might not go much farther than a boarding house in Southwest. Often lacking formal education, they had limited job opportunities and housing options in a segregated city. Many of the women became maids, nannies, and washerwomen, while the men, at least during good economic times, picked up day work in construction and along the docks. The poorest gravitated to the alley dwellings of Southwest, like those in the neighborhood off Delaware Avenue.

Students leaving Miner Teachers College, 1940s. The Miner-trained teachers who staffed the city's segregated schools were part of a vibrant African American professional class. Miner had a pedigree going back to a school founded to teach young African American women before the Civil War. Until 1955 it was the city's only public institution of higher education for African Americans. It became a core part of the University of the District of Columbia.
National Museum of American History

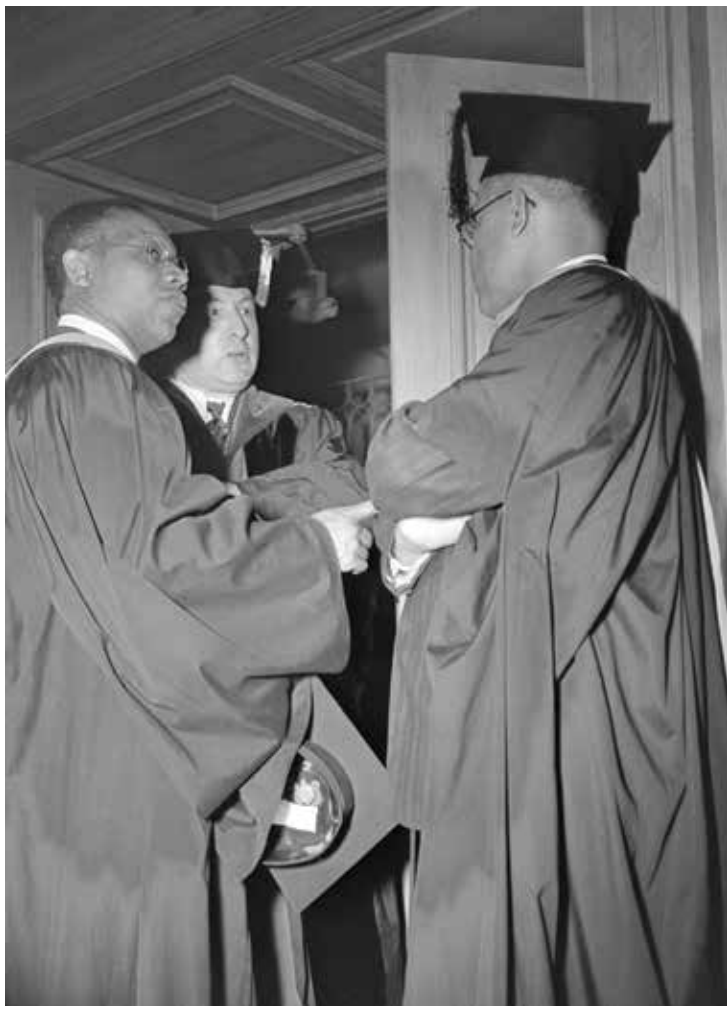
Walk west on M Street to Delaware Avenue and turn left. Pass the modernist River Park mid-rises to Canal Street.

Despite racial segregation, Southwest's white and African American neighborhoods shared similar streetscapes of open lots and small industrial sites mixed among one-, two- and three-storied houses, rowhouses, unattached houses, and small retail establishments or storefronts with living space above. Some were home to a single family; many more were boarding houses renting single rooms or a suite of rooms. Less than half the houses boasted indoor plumbing, even after World War II.

Alley housing, as it was called, dated back before the Civil War, when slaves, free African Americans, and poor whites began living in cheaply constructed quarters adjacent to the stables behind more substantial street-fronting houses. Some alleys were interior courtyards, surrounded by the backs of street-facing houses. Often the alleys shared space and water supply with adjacent stables, which, like horses, were ubiquitous in the city until the 1920s.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Southwest had the greatest number of alleys in Washington, mostly east of 4th Street. In 1896 the progressive South Washington Citizen's Association described one of the most notorious alleys in Southwest as having "twenty-two stables and two tenement houses, one containing ten and one eleven families, and there is not a sewer with which the houses can connect."

Many white Washingtonians professed ignorance of conditions in the alleys. Some even claimed that Washington was unusual among American cities in its lack of "slums," a term that began to appear in the media to describe the most wretched forms of urban housing, like the tenements of New York's Lower East Side. However, Washington's white establishment met its moment of reckoning in 1903, when Jacob Riis, who had made a national reputation exposing the horrors of New York slums, and who was on familiar terms with then President Theodore Roosevelt, spoke before a group of prominent white Washingtonians. Far from being free of slums, Riis argued, Washington had some of the worst. During his visit to Washington, he said, he had counted 298 alleys in the city, "pigsties," as bad as anything in London or New York.



Howard University faculty at convocation, May 1942. Washington's African American community placed a high value on education, despite laws that segregated the schools and colleges and often gave the best facilities to whites. Howard University, established in Washington by an act of Congress and federally funded, quickly gained a high reputation both in Washington and nationally, and contributed many leaders to the local African American community.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Reverend and Mrs. Smith at the Metropolitan Church, ca. 1926. Clergy were among the best educated and respected leaders in African American Washington. Middle-class status came with a certain degree of affluence.
National Museum of American History

Riis's speech came at an opportune moment. Even before the lecture, the City Beautiful movement, inspired by the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, had identified attractively designed and soundly constructed housing as essential for promoting social values. At the same time, a new reform group, the Sanitarians, began publicizing the relationship between the spread of disease and lack of adequate air, light, and sanitation in slum housing.

Newspaper accounts of the speech encouraged Washington housing advocates and city planners and gave them a clear and finite focus: to eliminate the worst of the alleys. The growing political drumbeat to close the alleys gained greater traction a few years later, when Ellen Wilson, then the nation's First Lady, led a citywide coalition of white and African American reform groups. They secured an executive order from President Woodrow Wilson, followed by a Congressional appropriation in 1911, to clean out the most deplorable of the alleys. The initial Congressional appropriation became the basis for the regularly renewed and funded Alley Dwelling Authority, but the demolition was slow, and some alleys in Southwest survived into the 1950s.

Alongside the political effort to close alleys were new private efforts to build affordable housing for the "deserving" poor, defined as working people who upheld the values of sobriety, hard work, marital fidelity, and Christian attention to family. Believing that there was no conflict between capitalism and social responsibility, these trickle-down reformers adopted a model for affordable housing from England that was just appearing in the United States. Eight years before Riis' speech, they formed the Washington Sanitary Improvement Company (WSIC). Instead of demanding the highest possible return on investment, as sought by many real estate developers, they limited the amount of return to 3%, later raised to 5% and then 6%. The lower profit allowed the company to maintain affordable rents with amenities that were consistent with the reform agenda.

The houses in Southwest on Half Street and around the corner on Carrollsburg Place were the company's third venture. They were two-story structures with a separate residence on each floor. The four-room plan distinguished between familial and private spaces. In the front room the family could meet, relax, and entertain guests. Separate bedrooms kept sexual activity within a bounded private space. An indoor kitchen, furnished with stove, sink, and icebox, gave the apartment a modern look, and an indoor bathroom, with a door, afforded proper middle-class privacy.

Southwest streetscape on a quiet day, 1940s. Streets in the less affluent neighborhoods were typically lined with shoddily built clapboard-sheathed frame houses.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Ellen Wilson, first wife of President Woodrow Wilson, ca. 1910. She joined a multiracial coalition of social reform groups dedicated to ending alley housing. She helped persuade President Wilson to sign an executive order for demolishing the alleys, which was later followed with Congressional action.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Jacob Riis, a prominent social reformer from New York City, 1904. Riis awakened Washington's leaders to the plight of the poor and the noxious conditions of the city's alley dwellings.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

> *Walk south beyond the Greenleaf Recreation Center to the intersection with Canal Street. Turn right and walk a hundred feet to the three-way intersection with O Street. A paved segment to the west (right) connects with a small paved oval that leads to the western segment of O Street. The St. James Mutual Homes flank O Street until it bends south and becomes 3rd Street. The parking area covers the old James Creek Canal.*

The success of the Half Street houses spurred a larger venture. Just before US entry into World War II in 1941, WSIC built Sternberg Courts, later called the St. James Mutual Homes, the quadrant's earliest garden-apartment-style houses. As with the Half Street houses, the company sought to limit the return of investment to achieve lower rents. To contain costs, it purchased land adjacent to the James Creek Canal, a site sufficiently undesirable to make the land affordable.

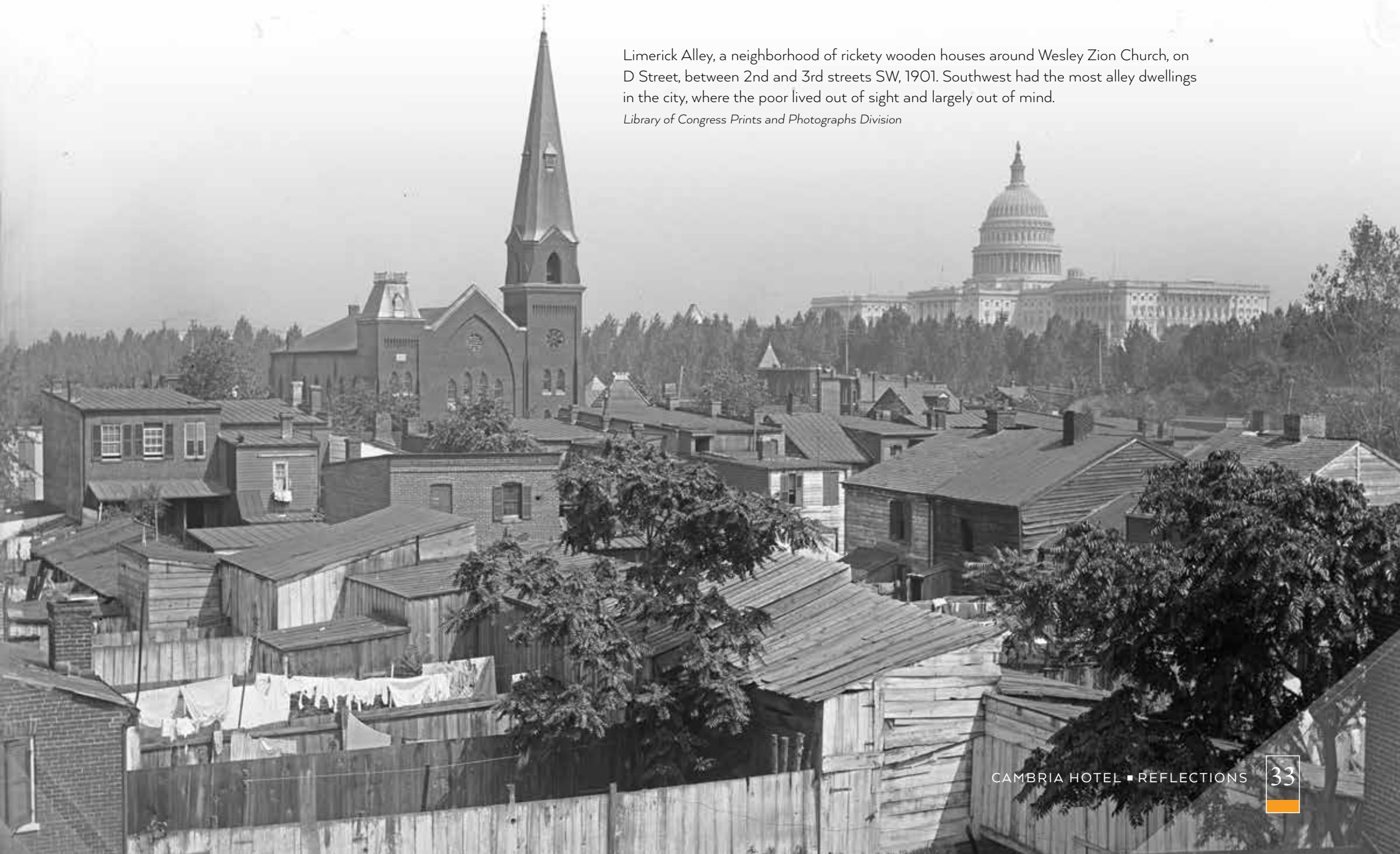
James Creek, originally a swampy stream flowing down from Capitol Hill, emptied into the Anacostia River at the little bay between Buzzard Point and Greenleaf Point adjacent to Fort McNair. The creek became part of a citywide system, the Washington City Canal. It linked with Tiber Creek, which arose in the higher elevations of Northwest DC and flowed along Constitution Avenue on the Mall before joining the Potomac behind the Washington Monument.

Southwest was effectively surrounded by the Washington City Canal and gained a nickname, "the Island." It was not one of Washington's most desirable addresses. The Island attracted commercial operations like coal yards and lumber yards, along with the attendant dust, noise, and migrants and shady characters who were able to find cheap lodgings there. Worse came with the advent of the railroad south of the Mall, in 1872, which brought smoky steam locomotives,

cattle cars, and 24/7 noise and soot onto the streets, all the way from the Navy Yard to Long Bridge and even up near the Mall, while also introducing the risk of being run over at a track crossing.

By the late 1870s, Tiber Creek had ceased to serve the city for transport, and the growing use of the channel as a common drain, for everything from storm runoff to the effluent from the Capitol's latrines, led to a public outcry. The city covered Tiber Creek, putting it out of sight and smell. The James Creek portion south of M Street, however, was not fully covered over until 1915-17.

The WSIC began buying land on the west side of the James Creek Canal, at only 45 cents an acre, almost immediately after the canal was covered. However, by the time the company, reorganized as the Washington Sanitary Housing Company (WSHC), was ready to build, the boom of the roaring twenties was diverting investor interest to more



Limerick Alley, a neighborhood of rickety wooden houses around Wesley Zion Church, on D Street, between 2nd and 3rd streets SW, 1901. Southwest had the most alley dwellings in the city, where the poor lived out of sight and largely out of mind.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Alley house in DC, 1935. Alley dwellings were notorious for extreme poverty and urban indifference. A disproportionate number of their residents were African Americans.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

remunerative options. Then came the Great Depression, in 1929, and the evaporation of investment capital for almost anything, including charitable enterprises like affordable housing.

The economic crisis changed the public perception of government responsibility. The "hands off" and "trickle down" capitalism of the early social reformers gave way to Keynesian-style economics and government programs for subsidies and direct aid. Although government intervention focused on employment, concerns about housing were not far behind. Now government would become a player in the housing reform enterprise.

In Washington, which was administered directly by three Congressionally appointed commissioners, the annual budget since 1911 typically included funds to eradicate alleys, administered through the Alley Dwelling Authority (ADA). After 1934, the ADA's writ expanded to include authority to contract for services with private entities like the WSHC for building new housing, provided the plan included demolishing alleys.

The WSHC obtained support from the ADA in 1939 to build two-story brick residences in Southwest, originally named Sternberg Courts, and two years later to complete five three-story buildings, the Sternberg Courts Annex. Reserved for white residents, the buildings later became the St. James Mutual Homes. The company also leveraged ADA funds to complete a final project, four three-story buildings across the street from the St. James homes, which were reserved for African Americans and later became known as the Tel Court apartments.

> *Walk west along O Street, with the St. James Mutual Homes on either side. Farther south, out of sight, are the Tel Court apartments on P Street.*

The St. James Mutual Homes and Tel Court were a novelty. Unlike the detached houses, rowhouses, and boarding houses familiar to Washingtonians, they were garden apartments, a suburban-inspired style. They were designed by one of the company's directors, Appleton Clark (1866-1955), a distinguished architect who designed the US Post Office on Pennsylvania Avenue, now the Trump Hotel. The buildings were three and four stories with lobbies, stairs, and hallways that led to multiple units. As with all the Sanitary housing, the apartments included the latest amenities. They had large rooms, all with windows, and as many as four bedrooms for the large families typical in the era before widespread availability of birth control.

The St. James Mutual Homes became a cooperative during in the late 20th century, and in the first decade of the 21st century the complex gained historic preservation status. Along with Tel Court apartments, the St. James Mutual Homes remain sound in structure and function, providing middle-class housing for a primarily African American population.

Washington at war, 1942. Concern over the possibility of air attack in the early days of World War II led to the recruitment of local residents as air-raid wardens. This photo shows chief warden Douglas Frederick and recording secretary Mrs. Hunton at a meeting of the wardens of Zone 9 in Southwest.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Real estate developer William Zeckendorf in his office in New York City, 1952. Zeckendorf's company, Webb & Knapp, created the master plan that guided the rebuilding of Southwest after the great demolition of the 1950s.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

The houses around Half Street and Carrollsburg Place also remain sound but had an up and down history. They fell into disrepair, as the neighborhood became increasingly drug-ridden and crime infested, and by the late 1980s were unkempt dwellings. But their good bones, including hardwood floors and high-quality bricks, made them worth a second look. New residents willing to buy in a promising edge neighborhood began moving in and improving the properties. They often reworked the two-story layout to make a single-family dwelling, adding a back porch and remodeling the front façade to remove the now redundant entry door. The houses have gained more in value than their working-class roots would suggest.

> *Cross back over the parking lot to Canal Street. The intersection of Canal Street and Delaware Avenue is where the second wave of housing reform, completed at the beginning of World War II, had its greatest impact.*

Property on the east side of the James Creek Canal proved just as sound an investment as land on the west side. In 1940 the ADA purchased 10 acres of land along the former canal, demolished several alleys after evicting the residents, and began building the James Creek Dwellings. The project consisted of more than 270 units, some having as many as six bedrooms, in clusters around a central lawn. Gardens in the rear were large enough for individualized landscaping and outdoor dining. Paths giving access throughout the complex created an internal network that encouraged walkability and community.

Before the ADA could complete construction, the US Navy requisitioned the housing for its own use. When the first families moved into the complex in 1942, the nation was gearing up to fight World War II and the Navy Yard was employing an enlarged workforce that added to the city's suddenly growing wartime

population. Even after the federal government opened emergency residences on the Mall, housing remained scarce, especially for African Americans constrained by the city's racial segregation. The Navy requisitioned the James Creek complex specifically for African American workers.

After the war the complex reverted to civilian control. The land and buildings became part of the District of Columbia Housing Authority, a city/federal partnership under the authority of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The units were renovated and modernized and became home to a stable community of families with an active tenants' association.

> *Return to O Street via the parking lot and head toward 3rd Street.*

Not until after the war against the Axis did the nation have the political space to address urban housing as a major issue. When the troops came home and Americans could finally enjoy the prosperity that the war had brought, they looked for housing and often decided that their best options were in the suburban developments springing up around towns from Boston to San Francisco. A population exodus, largely white and middle class, produced a wealth exodus, just when cities most needed more revenue.

A consensus developed around the need to expand government power to underpin the urban business core and provide support for below-market-cost housing. Legislation to create housing and save the cities became a new "war." There were powerful political coalitions, some claiming that federal intervention was essential, others that it was a form of creeping socialism in an arena that had always been the preserve of private enterprise. The ensuing political battle resulted in a compromise bill, the

Sternberg Courts, today the St. James Mutual Homes. Built in Southwest during the late 1930s by the Washington Sanitary Housing Company, the complex was originally designated for white residents only. Nearby Tel Court was reserved for African American residents. Both complexes have stood the test of time and are now modernized cooperative developments maintained as modest-cost housing.
QED Associates LLC

James Creek Dwellings, built in Southwest in 1942. On the east side of the former James Creek Canal, the Alley Dwelling Authority built the 278-unit James Creek Dwellings, designed by Albert Cassell, who had recently left his position as Howard University's campus architect. The Navy commandeered the houses during World War II to house African American civilian workers. After the war, the project became part of the city's public housing stock and in 1978 underwent extensive modernization.
QED Associates LLC

Housing Act of 1949. Like the earlier legislation authorizing the ADA, it conceded the validity of direct government intervention while circumscribing it. The legislation limited the government to 800,000 new federally supported units in total, with increases under subsequent laws, and it protected private housing developers from domination by the far greater financial resources of the federal government. Urban renewal projects broke ground around the country.

Washington, however, was unique. It was directly controlled by Congress, and the 1949 Housing Act had to work in tandem with postwar legislation that was specific to the city. After the war, Congress had begun a piecemeal

River Park, across 4th Street from Wheat Row. Designed by Charles Goodman as part of the modernist buildings that formed the 1960s renewal, its unique "town within a town" plan unites town houses and high-rise apartments.
Peter Sefton

process of addressing the city's key issues. It passed the District of Columbia Redevelopment Act and the National Capital Planning Act, which established the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA).

In Southwest the RLA began to assemble a redevelopment site that dwarfed any Washington prewar effort. Most of the relatively recent housing constructed by the WSHC and the ADA would remain, but everything else had to go. In an area encompassing more than 500 acres, from Independence Avenue on the Mall to M Street west of 3rd Street, the plan required demolishing single-family homes, alleys, schools, business establishments, and places of worship. The waterfront would also get a makeover. Buildings along the piers and wharves between Fort McNair and the fish market on 11th Street were to be cleared away, and the many seafood restaurants were to be relocated in new construction on the waterfront or nearby.

> *At the elbow where O Street bends south and becomes 3rd Street, take the path due west and head to 4th Street.*

As demolition proceeded, so did the public debate over the nature of the redevelopment. Plans varied from traditional to bold and new. After a great deal of public discussion, the RLA chose the plan put forth by William Zeckendorf, a legendary real estate developer who ran the New York firm of Webb & Knapp. Not a man of half-measures, he wanted Southwest to be a spectacular visual treat, grand yet elegant, and above all modern, very modern. Zeckendorf's plan even promised low- and moderate-income housing and community amenities that rivaled those of the suburbs.

Wheat Row, 1315-1321 4th Street SW. Built ca. 1794, Wheat Row was possibly the first speculative housing erected while Pierre L'Enfant was laying out the federal city. The houses were incorporated into the modernist Harbour Square development.
QED Associates LLC

Zeckendorf's approach for creating a united Southwest, reaching from the Mall to the river, drew inspiration from European modernist architects whose styles and building techniques were new, economical, and tested in the rebuilding of war-ravaged cities. His lead architect, I.M. Pei, was just beginning an illustrious career. Other distinguished architects who came on the scene included Harry Weese, who designed the Arena State performance center in Southwest, in 1960s, and later the famous Metro stations that dot the city. Chloethiel Woodard Smith solidified her reputation partly on her designs for some of the first modernist complexes to rise in Southwest.

Zeckendorf's highly leveraged, fast drive to monumental achievement ended with the economic recession of 1957-58. His firm, Webb & Knapp, had company among real estate development firms when it filed for bankruptcy. In the scramble to save the Southwest redevelopment project, I.M. Pei, Chloethiel Woodard Smith, and others assumed control over Zeckendorf's plan. During the span of about twenty years, beginning in 1959, they used the original concept as a basis for designing a distinctive neighborhood of award-winning buildings that has few peers anywhere.

> *Before reaching 4th Street, the landscape changes. Beyond the St. James Mutual Homes are the River Park townhouses, a village-like modernist enclave separated from the street. At the intersection with 4th Street a new postwar world stands revealed.*

To discourage the exodus of middle-class families, the planners and developers integrated suburban characteristics into an urban environment. Fourth Street, from M Street to the water, captures much of that vision. On the west end of 4th Street stands Harbour Square, a large complex of cooperatively owned apartments. Toward M Street is Tiber Island, a modernist vision. Across from Tiber Island is Carrollsburg Square, with similar slab concrete construction.

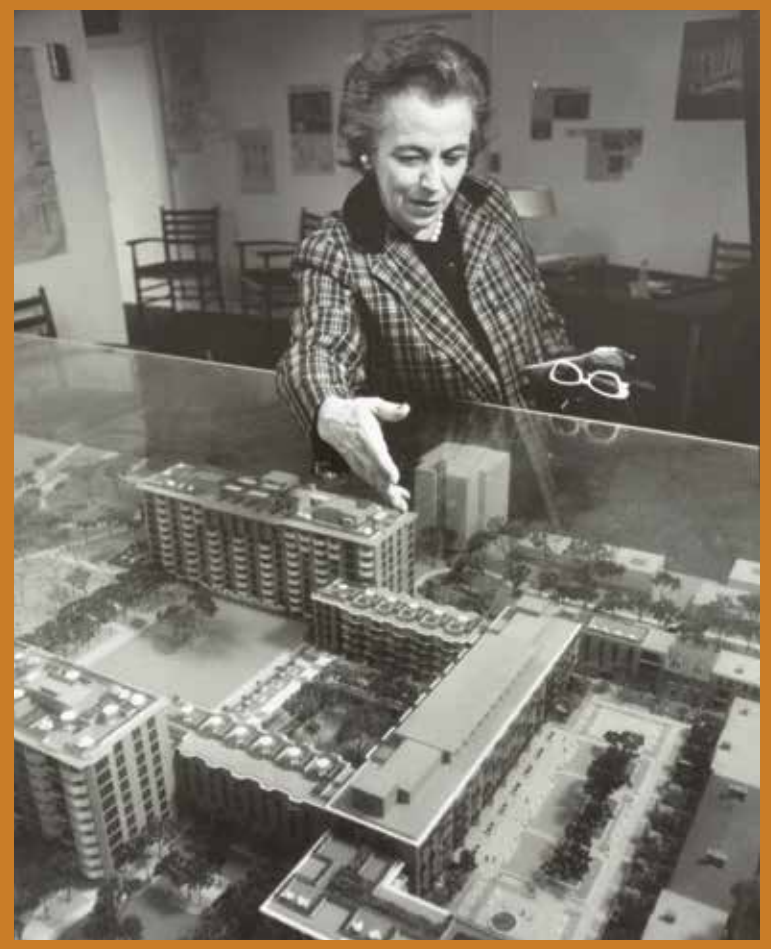
Harbour Square, built as middle-class housing to compete with the suburbs, with elaborate gardens and landscaping. Apartments boast unique floorplans and some offer spectacular views of the Potomac River. Among distinguished residents have been Chief Justice Thurgood Marshall and Vice President Hubert Humphrey.
QED Associates LLC

These complexes comprise a peaceful scene, a residential neighborhood well cared for and thriving, with a mix of townhouses and four-story and eight-story apartment buildings set among gardens. Their modernist aesthetic favors spaciousness and lobbies with soaring ceilings, unadorned and sparsely furnished with glass walls conjoining the interior and exterior spaces. Elegance flows from the simplicity of line and the beauty of the finishes in the public spaces. Apartments offer large rooms with big windows and attractive views.

Notably absent are commercial enterprises. Echoing the ethos of social reform in the early part of the 20th century and the residential separation from business common in the suburbs, the new Southwest placed homelife in its own world. The planners restricted retail business to Waterside Mall, a central market on 4th Street that stood near today's Waterfront Metro station.

> *Walk north on 4th Street to the intersection with M Street and face north, toward the SW Waterfront Metro station.*

The mall acknowledged the car's centrality to American culture, and like many suburban malls was built around and on top of a parking lot. The mall never lived up to its promise, though it was a creative effort at urban design. The end came early in the new millennium, when the original buildings gave way to new ones, and 4th Street, which had been covered over by the mall, was opened and allowed to reconnect as a major thoroughfare that ran from the river to Constitution Avenue.



Architect Chloethiel Woodard Smith showing a model of Capitol Park Towers, one of her modernist designs for the Southwest renewal area and one of the first racially integrated apartment houses in the city.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Waterside Mall shopping center, designed by Chloethiel Woodard Smith & Associates and built in 1972, near the present Waterfront Metro station. Capturing the spread out, boxy look of suburban shopping centers, complete with a parking lot, it replaced the convenient corner stores so familiar to Washingtonians before renewal. It failed as a commercial enterprise and was demolished.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Despite the failure of the mall, Southwest worked as a community. The new buildings were not conceived of as luxury residences but as middle-class housing. Rents were lower than in the more elite parts of the city for comparable accommodations and significantly lower than other apartments that included amenities like air conditioning and swimming pools.

Not only did the planners create good housing, they managed to preserve the racial diversity that had always marked the quadrant. When Southwest's first modernist buildings opened for rental in 1959, middle-class whites and blacks both had access to the new style of living.

The original proposals for Southwest renewal included low-rent housing as part of the mix, since it was such a critical need for the city. The cost of acquiring the land and of the associated legal costs exceeded expectations, and before the first shovel touched the ground, the developers informed the RLA that they could not afford to build low-cost housing, and most of the displaced poorer residents would never be able to return.

Greenleaf Gardens public housing, built ca. 1960. Like the privately owned modernist complexes, it combines high-rise and mid-rise multi-unit buildings with rows of duplex townhouses. Originally, the redevelopment area was supposed to offer low-income housing, but by 1959 the National Capital Planning Commission declared that rising land costs made that impossible. Therefore, the city's housing agency built Greenleaf Public Housing outside the renewal area, between M and I streets and east of 3rd Street SW. Syphax Gardens Public Housing, erected during the same period at 1st and R streets, was located just south and east of the urban renewal area. Unlike the updated modernist buildings in the redevelopment area, the Greenleaf residences have reached their designed lifespan and are slated for replacement.

QED Associates LLC

Newspaper stories of the 1950s suggest that the massive demolition in Southwest met wide public approval, even among local residents. However, compensation to residents for the loss of their residences and businesses went mainly to the property owners, many of whom contested the government's right to take their property or claimed that the compensation was inadequate. Renter and leaseholders usually got little or nothing. Worse, the RLA's efforts to find alternative housing for displaced residents was uncoordinated, at best, and complicated by the city's serious lack of housing, especially for low-income African Americans.

The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), which was the city's planning agency, and the RLA, which was its agent, scrambled to regroup as an angry public demanded that the government provide for low-income displaced residents. Interestingly, earlier renewal projects by the WSHC and the ADA had displaced poor residents, also primarily African Americans, but suffered no comparable outcry. Possibly, the vast scale of the 1950s clearance, demolishing neighborhoods having more than 20,000 residents, made a difference.

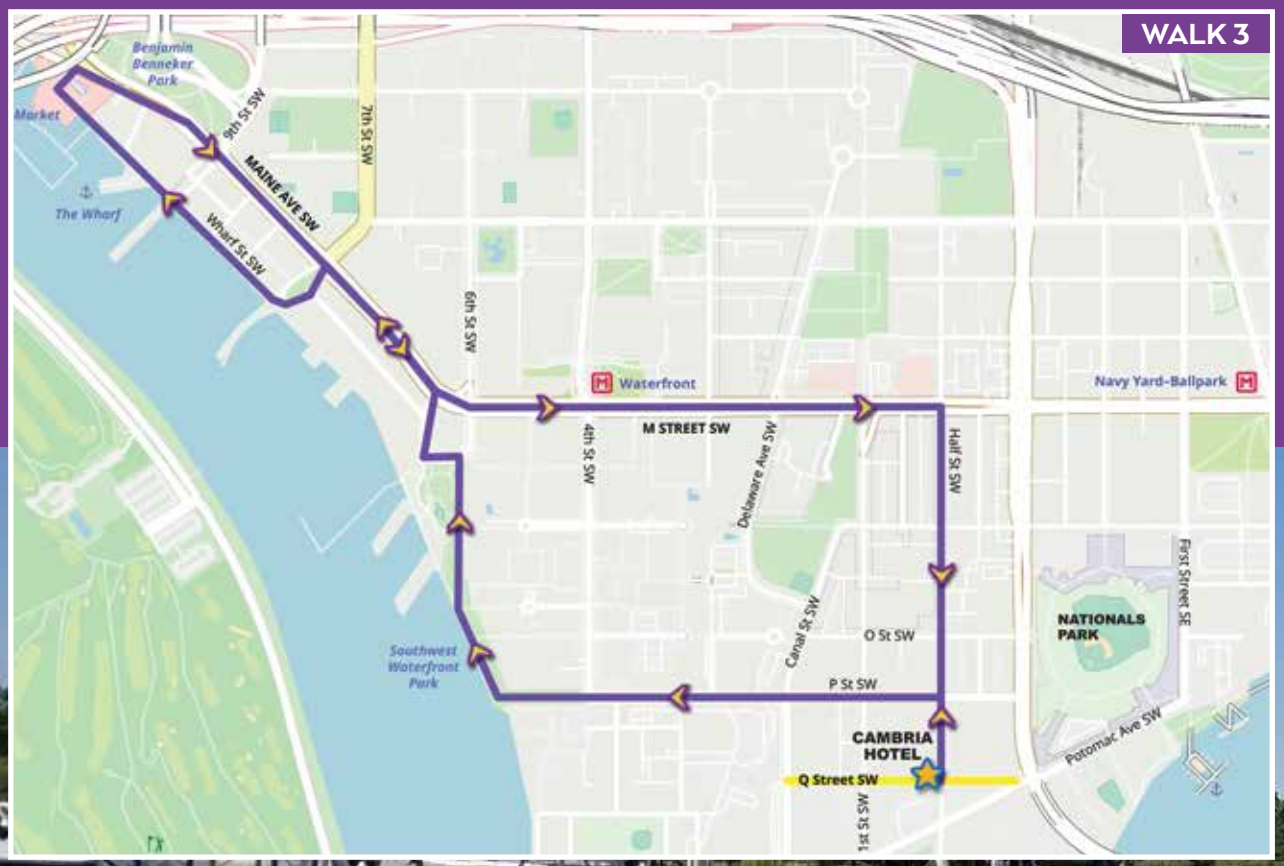
> *Turn right on M Street and walk east to 3rd Street and then Delaware Avenue, passing the low-rise Greenleaf Gardens public housing on the left and mid-rise Greenleaf Senior Center on the right.*

Following public hearings, the NCPC settled on three public housing sites, two of them in Southwest – Greenleaf Gardens, adjacent to the redevelopment area on M Street between 3rd Street and Delaware Avenue, and Syphax Gardens, farther east and south of M Street, extending along P Street. Like earlier urban renewal housing, the apartments had modern bathrooms with tubs and indoor toilets, fully equipped kitchens, and airy living rooms.

A comparison with the modernist housing built within the renewal area suggests the social attitudes incorporated into brick and mortar structures. The modernist complexes are about the same age as the public housing, some even a few years older. They remain profitable investments and enviable living environments, whether as condominiums, cooperatives, or rentals. Even those operating under the city's rent control law have received regular maintenance and updates. They have kept a diverse resident profile with differing proportions by income, ethnicity, and age.

The public housing has not been as successful as the private housing. It suffers from poorer quality materials and finishes, less upkeep, and less use of energy-efficient improvements. Cracked sidewalks lead past unkempt gardens and backyards filled with discarded odds and ends. The public housing is effectively not racially integrated and has a higher crime rate than the private housing. On the other hand, the private housing is not restricted to low and very low-income families and can draw on the residents' greater range of personal income.

> *Walk east on M Street to Half Street. Turn south and return to the Cambria Hotel.*



Waterfront at The Wharf. The harbor is filled with live-aboard boats that contribute to the sense of connection between land and water.
QED Associates LLC

WALK 3

The Commingling of Centuries

Fort McNair's red brick wall reaches the waterfront on 4th Street at a public park with one of Washington's most unexpected memorials – a Christ-like figure with outstretched arms soaring above the viewer. Dedicated to the sailors who gave their lives to save women and children when the big ocean liner sank in 1912, the Titanic Memorial, as it is locally known, stands on a curved stone bench that echoes the statue's pose, welcoming all who seek solace after a great disaster.

> *Walk from the Cambria Hotel up Half Street to P Street and turn left (west). Continue on P Street to the red brick wall of Fort McNair. Follow the wall west to 4th Street and turn left to the Titanic Memorial.*

The statue was designed by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, who later founded the Whitney Museum in New York, and paid for by the Women's Titanic Memorial Committee. Erected in Rock Creek Park, it was moved to the waterfront in the 1960s. Every year, on the anniversary of the catastrophe, the Men's Titanic Society gathers at the foot of the statue for a commemoration. Dressed in tux and tails and accompanied by women in gowns reminiscent of an older era, they offer champagne toasts to honor those who perished on that night to remember.

Titanic Memorial statue. Designed by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney and erected by the Women's Titanic Memorial Committee, the Christ-like statue celebrates the sailors who saved women and children from the sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912. The Men's Titanic Society remembers the sinking in an annual formal-attire event at the statue.
QED Associates LLC

The annual celebration in formal attire emphasizes the melding of the past and present, and invites reflection on the mutability of life. It encourages contemplation of the changes to the waterfront since Pierre L'Enfant's day, when the land under the memorial was river bottom and the beaches led to sandy bluffs. A walk along the water to Maine Avenue offers a tangible experience of the centuries that span Washington's history. It is a reminder that today's playground of marinas and docks, live-aboards, weekend sailors, and tourists was once a working port of warehouses and workshops.

> *Walk from the Titanic Memorial through the park, toward The Wharf complex. To the left is Washington Channel, bounded by East Potomac Park. Invisible beyond the park is the broad Potomac River. Directly ahead is the dock for the Police Harbor Patrol. Beyond the dock, about a mile, are the 14th Street bridges carrying vehicular traffic and the Long Bridge and Metro bridge for rail traffic.*

The waterfront's change came in spurts and provides a micro example of macro transformations in the national economy, the emergence of an ecological consciousness, and the birth of a new kind of urban lifestyle. Typically in Washington, change followed a pattern, beginning with years of public discussion in newspapers and other media, then Congressional hearings and official panels to examine choices among different and often conflicting plans. The massive renewal of the waterfront in the late 1950s, for example, started forty years earlier with public and official complaints about crumbling docks and ugly, worn-out buildings. Expert studies and civic agitation led to a rethinking of the waterfront as more a recreational zone than a port. The great financial crash of 1929 ended hope for implementing the plan, until the New Deal programs of President Franklin Roosevelt began pouring government money into infrastructure projects around the nation. Finally, the city got the funds for construction of a proper marina for pleasure boaters, but before much more could be done war came, and everything was again put on hold.

Wartime brought full employment and an infusion of cash that enabled everyone, African American and white business owners and employees alike, to regain some of the prosperity they had enjoyed before the Depression. The resurgence spilled into the community, reinforced by the approximately 1,500 housing units built by the WHSC and the ADA to replace alleys and tenements. The new housing, all of which was available by 1943, was concentrated

within the blocks between M Street to the north and P Street to the south, and west of South Capitol Street. It provided good residences to a stable, primarily African American population, in the neighborhood immediately adjacent to the waterfront.

> *About two-thirds' the distance between the Titanic Memorial and the Police Harbor Patrol dock, a broad path branches gently to the right. This treelined path, flanked with lawns and gardens, leads to Water Street and Maine Avenue.*

After the war, the city returned to its plan of making the waterfront a playground and civic adornment, but little happened until the urban renewal push of the 1950s. By then the working port had disappeared except for a few vessels that ran scheduled river cruises. Meanwhile, environmental activists claimed that widespread pollution and degradation of the Potomac and Anacostia waters were posing hazards for people and animals alike. Federal health advisories began urging residents not to eat fish caught in the rivers – rivers that had once been famous for vast populations of food fish.

Looking from the Titanic Memorial toward The Wharf complex. The river is on the left, the lawns of modernist residence complexes on the right. The designers of the modernist complexes juxtaposed gardens and pathways with the river in a manner that encouraged viewing the river but did not invite engagement with the water.

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Perceived as dirty and unwholesome, the nation's rivers seemed to be losing their greatest economic asset without gaining compensating urban value. Change was on the way, however, though as usual it would come after much discussion, indecision, and halting moves by government spurred by advocacy groups. The Clean Air Act of 1970 and the Clean Water Act, passed in 1972, reflected a new national environmental consensus. Federal standards for acceptable air, and funding to clean toxic waterways, provided leverage to undertake waterfront renewal during a decade when many cities were at the nadir of economic and environmental well-being. Within two decades, waterfronts would become attractive to a new generation of urban residents and developers.

Four centuries of living along the water. The shaded path from the river to Maine Avenue passes through four centuries of different relationships of life at the water's edge. The earliest is the Thomas Law House, built in 1794 as a private residence. The grounds of the federal-style townhouse extended to 4th Street, on one side, and to the low bluff that marked the water's edge on the other. A dock below the bluff probably offered access to the river, a source of food and the most efficient means of transport for people and goods.

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> *Following the tree-lined path, walk inland toward Maine Avenue/M Street. This is one of the few places along the waterfront where it is possible to simultaneously see the relationship between the river, the land, the architecture, and the times.*

It is difficult to grasp the magnitude of change along the waterfront over the centuries. Standing at a spot where buildings from multiple centuries are simultaneously visible provides a unique vantage point. Waterfront Park is such a point. Amid lawns and gardens that flank the modernist residential complexes of the 1960s is a single building from Washington's early days. The stately, white brick Thomas Law House was built in 1794 by the Greenleaf syndicate, one of the city's earliest real estate development groups, and briefly rented to General Washington's step-granddaughter, Eliza Parke Custis, during her honeymoon. It served as a hospital and clinic, during the Civil War, before becoming part of the Tiber Island residential complex and then being sold to a private owner for development.

The house originally had a dock on the edge of the property, which at the end of the 18th century still had low bluffs leading down to the river. Although a townhouse and not a farm, the large main building would have had outhouses for a kitchen, an ice house, stables, slave quarters, and a shed for dyeing yarn, which was usually spun and woven at home.

Tiber Island, on the left of the Law House, is part of the 1960s modernist renewal of the waterfront. The award-winning residential complex includes four nine-story apartment towers and 85 single-family townhouses. The gardens and pathways reach to the river's edge.
QED Associates LLC

On one side of the Law House is Harbour Square and on the other, Tiber Island, two award-winning modernist complexes of apartment buildings and townhouses built in the 1960s. The complexes were part of the redevelopment of Southwest after it had been flattened by the largest government financed urban renewal project of its time. The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC), which was the city's main planning body, established the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) to implement a plan for rebuilding Southwest and enhancing the waterfront.

Choosing a plan led by the New York developer William Zeckendorf and his firm, Webb & Knapp, the NCPC and RLA adopted a triumphalist vision of the American capital city. After Zeckendorf's firm went bankrupt following the 1957-58 recession, architects I.M. Pei and Chloethiel Woodard Smith assumed control over pieces of the redevelopment plan, which included designing and building the complexes surrounding the Law House and the adjacent waterfront.

Opposite the Law House and the modernist complexes of the 1960s is The Wharf, a shiny 21st century enclave of hotels, residences, theaters, restaurants, and venues aimed at attracting attention and business from throughout the Washington metro area. In keeping with its grand scale, along a half-mile of waterfront from the fish market to 6th Street,

A modernist lobby in Southwest. Inside and outside merge through use of large glass enclosed spaces.
QED Associates LLC

with a total cost of $2 billion, the Wharf needed more than 15 years and many public-private collaborations to plan and build. A quasi-governmental public body, the Anacostia Waterfront Commission (AWC), established in 2004, was tasked to lead the effort and secure ownership of the strip along the waterfront, from the fish market near 11th Street to 6th Street.

Following years of public engagement and debate, the commission considered many proposals. It selected plans by PN Hoffman in 2006, and Hoffman joined with Madison Marquette to begin construction shortly thereafter. From the beginning, there was engagement with the surrounding community to avoid creating scars of displacement like those left by the 1950s renewal. Fortunately, The Wharf project had to negotiate only with a relatively few commercial enterprises on the property. Early on, the live-a-aboard community of the Southwest waterfront was assured that it would be a part of the new development.

Harbour Square, designed by Chloethiel Woodard Smith with landscape by Dan Kiley. It has 430 apartments in high- and mid-rise buildings and 10 modern row houses. The green spaces around the buildings include a Japanese garden, an interior courtyard with a grassy lawn called the East Court, a sunken woodland garden, a Great Lawn facing a riverfront park, and an aquatic garden of over an acre in area.

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The juxtaposition of the Law House, the modernist complexes, and The Wharf offers an unusual vista of centuries of life along the river. The Law House is a product of a society and economy that needed proximity to water. It reflects a time of open spaces, few inhabitants, and a way of life analogous with that of the post-colonial manor houses of Tidewater Virginia.

The modernist complexes are products of an automobile-based, suburban ideal that separated work from personal life and family space. Rivers were scenic backdrops to the buildings and gardens. The open spaces around the modernist buildings convey a suburban feel, with glass walls and large windows encouraging a fluidity in the distinction between inside and outside. Walkways through extensive gardens and lawns lead to the shoreline and offer attractive river views but do not invite any additional interaction with the water. In contrast, The Wharf embraces the river as an asset to be enjoyed and tries to integrate it into daily living experience. Instead of using the river as a backdrop, it tries to merge land and water with long piers reaching into the Washington Channel.

Unlike the Law House, which sits open to the river with indeterminate boundaries, both the modernist complexes and The Wharf are bounded spaces. They intersect and interact with the surrounding city streets but are also separate entities. They are private property, while maintaining the tradition of a public setting. Each modernist complex forms an independent living community that self-consciously embraces the ideal of a peaceful home setting separate from the existential conflicts and hurly-burly of street and workplace.

> *On the tree-lined path, facing inland, the view to the left shows The Wharf complex.*

The Wharf contains all its variety within a single perimeter. The developers sought to create something unique to Washington and not a repeat of the suburban vision that marked the Southwest renewal of the 1950s. Various schools of urban planning and practice contributed to the final design. During the later 20th century, Jane Jacobs became the guru of the walkable and organic city. She opposed the rigidly zoned, suburban model espoused by the creators of the 1950s Southwest. Instead, she argued that city life gained safety and vitality from active street life that was fed by intermingled business and home life. Another perspective came from Europe, where the lanes and alleys of older cities were seen as unexpected and interesting byways of the urban experience. Urban planners

Fish market at 11th Street SW, soon after opening in 1918. Built and operated by the city, it replaced an assortment of wooden shacks that had served as Washington's wholesale fish market for nearly a century. This photo, taken from the landward side, shows delivery trucks lined up at the loading docks, preparing to take seafood to city markets and retailers. The market was demolished in 1960 to make way for highway bridge approaches.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

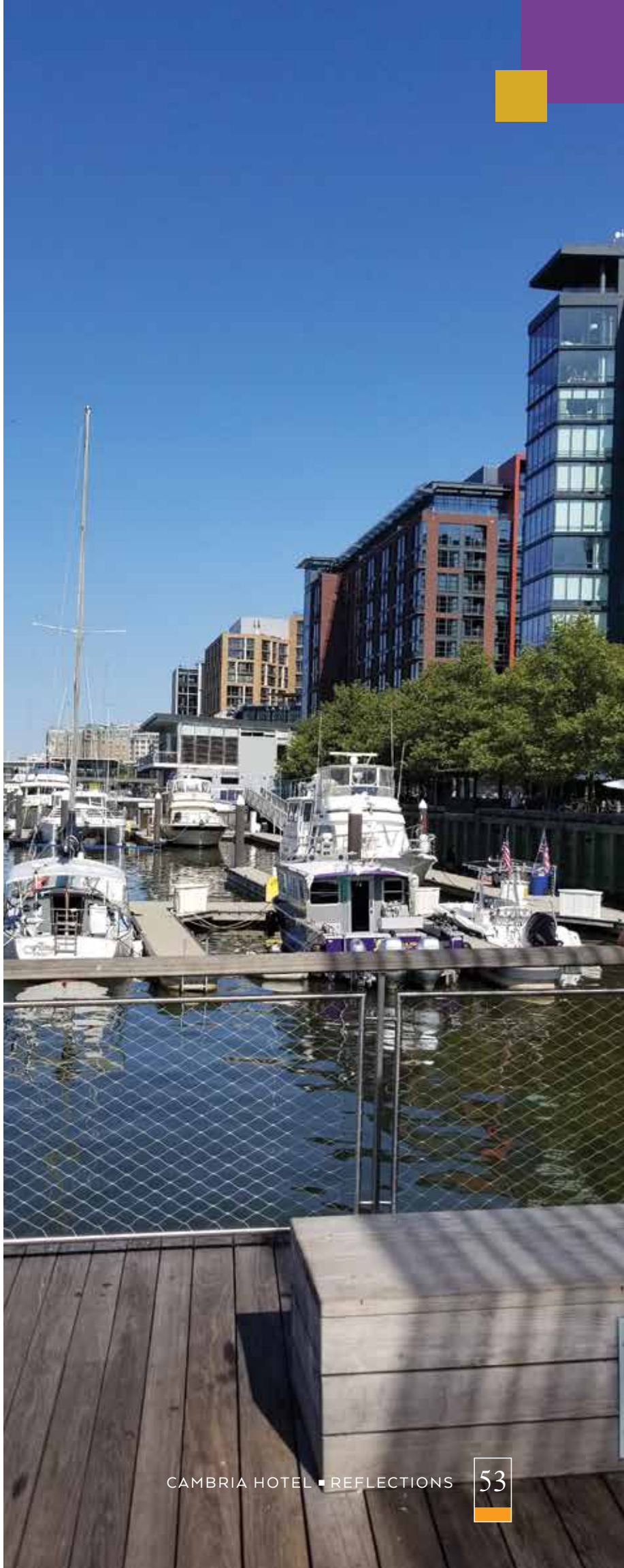
began to emphasize the importance of small spaces and of streets that allowed simultaneous vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

Yet a third influence reflected a unique combination of urban/suburban living. The Wharf's residences have the lavishly furnished kitchens of American homes and master suites that mimic the comforts of ample space and sprawling houses in the suburbs. They are apartments, however, not detached homes or even townhouses, and have been built vertically, instead of side-by-side.

The bars and restaurants lining The Wharf's streets create the movement and density that is the modern measure of Jane Jacobs' conviviality and sociability. Narrow streets with unexpected openings and cross-streets with adjacent alleys reinterpret the chance passageways characteristic of older cities, including Washington. Small shops along the passageways provide the walkability of the urban environment with enough people about to assure safety.

Unlike Jane Jacobs' organic city, The Wharf is orderly and clean. The complex may include some residents of modest means but there are no street people. Garbage does not pile up along the edge of the sidewalk waiting for pick-up, and no squealing truck brakes or wailing sirens disturb sleep. The sanitized quality captures the cleanliness sought by city dwellers escaping to the suburbs. It is a quality that the modernist complexes could never completely duplicate, although their car-friendly streets, lawns, and walking paths all sought this end.

Whatever the design, the river has been the "other" to the buildings and the land. For the Law House, the river was a living, functional other, the source of fresh fish, ease of travel, and a cool respite



The Wharf complex. Like the Thomas Law House, the 21st century Wharf engages with the water, inviting use of the river for travel and recreation. Water taxis connect the Southwest waterfront with Georgetown, Alexandria, and National Harbor, while kayaks and paddleboards are available for outings on Washington Channel and the broader river.
QED Associates LLC

St. Augustine's Episcopal Church. The church on Maine Avenue SW replaces a modernist structure built in the early 1960s. Like the adjacent Wharf, it juxtaposes spaces with different functions, in this case residences and a church. Its glass façade reflects the Arena Stage across Maine Avenue.
Wikimedia Commons / Farragutful

Arena Stage on Maine Avenue SW. Architect Bing Thom designed an eye-catching theater that encases original structures designed by Harry A. Weese in the 1960s. The show-stopping complex is formally the Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater.
QED Associates LLC

during Washington's hot season. For the modernist complexes the river was a largely visual experience of clouds, sunsets, and changing colors, useless for food, questionable for travel, and too polluted for summer swimming. The Wharf is different. It treats the river as a partner. People go out on the river and see and feel the water moving under them. Piers reaching out from cobblestoned squares provide pedestrian open spaces filled with public amenities, from swings and kayak launches to bandstands and eating spaces.

> *Continue walking along the tree-lined path to the first crossroad. Turn left (west) and walk along the curving street, passing 525 Water Street to the intersection with Maine Avenue. Turn left onto Maine Avenue.*

At the intersection of Maine Avenue with 6th Street, two large buildings engage in a cross-street conversation worth remarking. The residences at 525 Water Street share their space with St. Augustine's Episcopal Church, which faces Maine Avenue. The site is outside The Wharf proper and marks a transition into the older modernist complexes along 6th Street. The church's soaring glass face looks across the avenue and is reflected in the glass façade of the saucer-shaped Arena Stage, one of Southwest's best-known landmarks.

The visual conversation between St. Augustine's and the Arena Stage began decades ago, when both were smaller and quieter structures. The earlier version of St. Augustine's, completed 1964–66, was a low-roofed modernist building that might have escaped notice by the cars racing along Maine Avenue, and hardly competed for eyeballing with the elegant Tiber Island residential complex or the sleek

I.M. Pei buildings on 6th Street. St. Augustine's is a community-oriented church that went out of its way to be inclusive and diverse. It briefly hosted a small Jewish congregation that become Temple Mica and moved to Northwest.

St. Augustine's dedicated its building in an era when church membership in the United States was at a high-water mark. Over the decades, however, the congregation grew smaller, although St. Augustine's importance and service to the Southwest community continued unabated. After struggling to support the physical infrastructure, St. Augustine's followed the example of other Southwest congregations in a similar bind and engaged with developers to realize the potential of their generous real estate footprint. PN Hoffman, which led the team that built The Wharf, constructed 525 Water Street as a residential condominium with the church integral to the building. The altar of the new St. Augustine's looks out to the water, and the great windows along Maine Avenue boldly proclaim their Christian identity with tall, stark crosses.

Fish market and wharf in 1934. The wharves at the fish market served boats carrying fresh-caught finfish like shad and striped bass, and river and bay oysters and other shellfish.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

The gleaming glass behind the altar echoes the glass of the expanded Arena Stage, which like the church has grown in visibility. Founded in Washington's Foggy Bottom neighborhood in 1950, it soon became one of the nation's foremost repertory theaters. It moved to Southwest in the 1960s, into a quietly modernist main building designed by Harry Weese and a low support building done in a minimalist style. As a leader in the theater-in-the-round movement, Arena Stage made a reputation for staging new and often experimental productions and nurturing young American artists and playwrights. It committed to producing and staging plays that used multiracial and multiethnic casts without stereotyping or regard for traditional role castings. The theater's philosophy and practice fit with the renewed Southwest, which was the first part of the city to promote integrated housing and a diverse economic community.

The newest Arena Stage is far larger than the original buildings and more controversial. Called brilliant by many and a disappointment by others, the enlarged theater, designed by architect Bing Thom and renamed the Mead Center for the American Theater, places a saucer-shaped glass encasement over the original structures, adding two more performance spaces, new lobbies, dressing rooms, expanded electrical and sound facilities, and offices. It dominates its site and has become rooted in the community.

Walk west on Maine Avenue to the 7th Street entrance of The Wharf. Cross the cobblestoned driveways directly to the water, passing a hotel and restaurant on the right.

To the west of Arena Stage, Maine Avenue intersects with 7th Street, one of the many entry points to The Wharf. Passing through the broad portal is like entering a charmed circle. The stones underfoot, the shared space for pedestrians and cars, the sense of confined and defined space with the river straight ahead are palpably different from the less curated world of the larger city or the surrounding neighborhood.

Unloading fish in Washington, 1938. Small "runboats" brought fish from the nets in the river and Chesapeake Bay to the shorefront markets in the Washington area. The men seated on the wharf are probably dealers preparing to bid on the catch being unloaded before them.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

> *At the water turn right and walk west along The Wharf toward the fish market, passing a marina full of live-aboards.*

For mariners, the Southwest waterfront is perhaps best known for its live-aboard community, one of the largest in the nation. People have been living on boats for thousands of years, but in the United States the boat-home was most commonly found on canals. Many canal-boat captains made cozy little apartments at the stern that provided cheap quarters all year-round. Moored boat living made its appearance in Washington during the Depression, when a few residents found cheap living quarters on boats docked at Buzzard Point. By the 1940s, when a wartime population influx made housing nearly impossible to find, almost 50 permanently inhabited boats were moored at the marina near 7th Street SW.

After the war many of the floating residents chose to remain in their boats out of preference, not necessity. By the 1950s the live-aboards were a distinctive Southwest fixture, organized as a community. They succeeded in securing their occupancy within the new Wharf development, which has more than 90 slips with inhabited boats. The annual houseboat tour is one of The Wharf's most popular events and sparks the imagination of those who dream about living on the water.

Benjamin Banneker: Surveyor-Inventor-Astronomer, mural by Maxime Seelbinder, at the Recorder of Deeds building, in Washington, DC, built in 1943. Banneker was an inventive and skilled African American who was part of Pierre L'Enfant's survey team.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

> *At the western edge of The Wharf is the fish market.*

Visiting the boats docked at The Wharf reinforces the experience of the piers and of being on the river rather than simply near it. The experience becomes tangible in the fish market at the western edge of The Wharf, where retailers sell fresh seafood from barges for take-out and take-home meals. The original market, as distinguished from the fish wharves, was a mainly wholesale enterprise based in a large building located near 11th Street that was demolished in 1960 to make way for bridges over the Potomac. By the 1970s, the wholesale business had disappeared, and even at its busiest, today's market barely hints at its former size and economic importance.

The Potomac was long renowned as one of the finest fishing rivers on the nation, offering an annual bounty of fish that Washingtonians and others caught in prodigious numbers. In the decades before the Civil War, the operators of the river's largest fishing operations numbered among the city's wealthier residents. Spring runs of Potomac shad

were prized locally and in cities like New York and Philadelphia. Potomac salted herring fed Washingtonians as well as plantation slaves in Virginia and Maryland, and were sent in barrels throughout the states east of the Mississippi. Fish, oysters, and crabs were plentiful and cheap food for the masses. The city's innumerable bars offered free helpings of fried oysters and clams as well as crab and smoked herring for anyone who bought a beer.

Boats loaded with fish used to moor at the market's wharves, where men in the holds counted out the catch in baskets that were hauled up to the dock. Wholesalers bought the catch at auction and resold it to retailers or to restaurants, hotels, peddlers, and others, for sale to Washingtonians.

Fish in excess of local demand were salted or smoked. The first step was done by the cutters, most of whom were African American men. Paid per fish, they practiced legendary skill in removing the head and innards of a herring in a single, quick swipe of the knife, then tossing the carcass into a tub, where it was washed clean before going to the salters. The salters spread the fish on large tables coated with clean salt and let them sit for a day or so, before packing them in barrels.

The African American packers who put the salted herring into barrels – 900 per barrel – would sing a peculiar song that a Washington journalist in 1908 excerpted for his readers. "They actually sing the counting," he wrote, "and work themselves into a rhythmical and captivating swing. Another man stands by and sprinkles coarse salt on the fish as they are thrown into the barrel, keeping strict time to the odd and quaint music of the counters." As the packers tossed fish into the barrel they chanted, "Now there's one gone – there's two more – make it three. And fo' – Hyah's five – Six, ma baby." Meanwhile the man with the salt would hum "a subdued obligato, which is raised and lowered with weird accuracy and harmony, and his knees and shoulders swing with delight through it all."

Banneker Overlook, surmounting the last remaining bluff along the Washington waterfront. The staircase leads up to L'Enfant Plaza.
QED Associates LLC

With time the fish wharf began to show its age. Concrete docks replaced the wooden ones after World War I, and in 1918 the city opened a new market house, two stories tall and 300 feet long, that replaced the small wooden sheds of earlier days. Surrounding the new market was a covey of fish-related businesses and buildings, including sheds for storing fishing gear, restaurants, and cafes and bars. Of these, only the building for shucking fresh oysters remains, with a restored space for informal dining.

> *Exit the fish market onto Maine Avenue and look north up the bluff to Banneker Overlook and the high-rises of L'Enfant Plaza.*

A short walk from the fish market to Maine Avenue brings into view a low bluff, the sole survivor of the bluffs that once lined the river shore from 12th Street to South Capitol Street. Straight up the bluff climbs a staircase, completed in 2018-19, that culminates at Banneker Overlook. The overlook was named to honor Benjamin Banneker, an African American author and inventor who served on the team that surveyed the District of Columbia's boundaries in the early 1790s.

In the Zeckendorf redevelopment plan, the overlook was intended to connect the waterfront with a grand entertainment, tourist, and business complex called L'Enfant Plaza. The plaza would begin at 10th Street along Independence Avenue on the Mall and stretch in a continuous passage to the waterfront at Maine Avenue. Zeckendorf sought to create a boulevard that would evoke the avenues of great European cities. His plan called for eight mid-rise buildings standing like sentinels along a broad promenade lined with cafes – a grand and expansive vision. After the collapse of Zeckendorf's company in the 1957-58 recession, lack of funds permitted construction of four, not eight, buildings, and the residences, museums, and cultural center and auditorium went by the wayside.

From its opening days in 1960s, L'Enfant Plaza drew mixed reviews. A few critics praised the stark modernist architecture, while most found it cold and off-putting. Everyone could agree, however, that the promenade along 10th Street was lifeless and eerily quiet. It drew jokes by Washingtonians as a boulevard to nowhere, beginning near but not quite on the Mall and ending at an overlook that culminated in a view but not a destination. Until recently there was little more to say. Then a staircase up the face of the bluff gave easy access to the overlook, and the opening of the International Spy Museum on 10th Street revived the tantalizing possibilities of Zeckendorf's grand vision. ■

> *Walk east on Maine Avenue to 7th Street. Take the Circulator bus back to South Capitol Street and return to the Cambria Hotel.*

The Yards is a public/private partnership established to build apartment buildings, office buildings, and restaurant and retail spaces. The Anacostia Riverwalk Trail weaves through The Yards along the waterfront.
QED Associates LLC

WALK 4

East of South Capitol Street

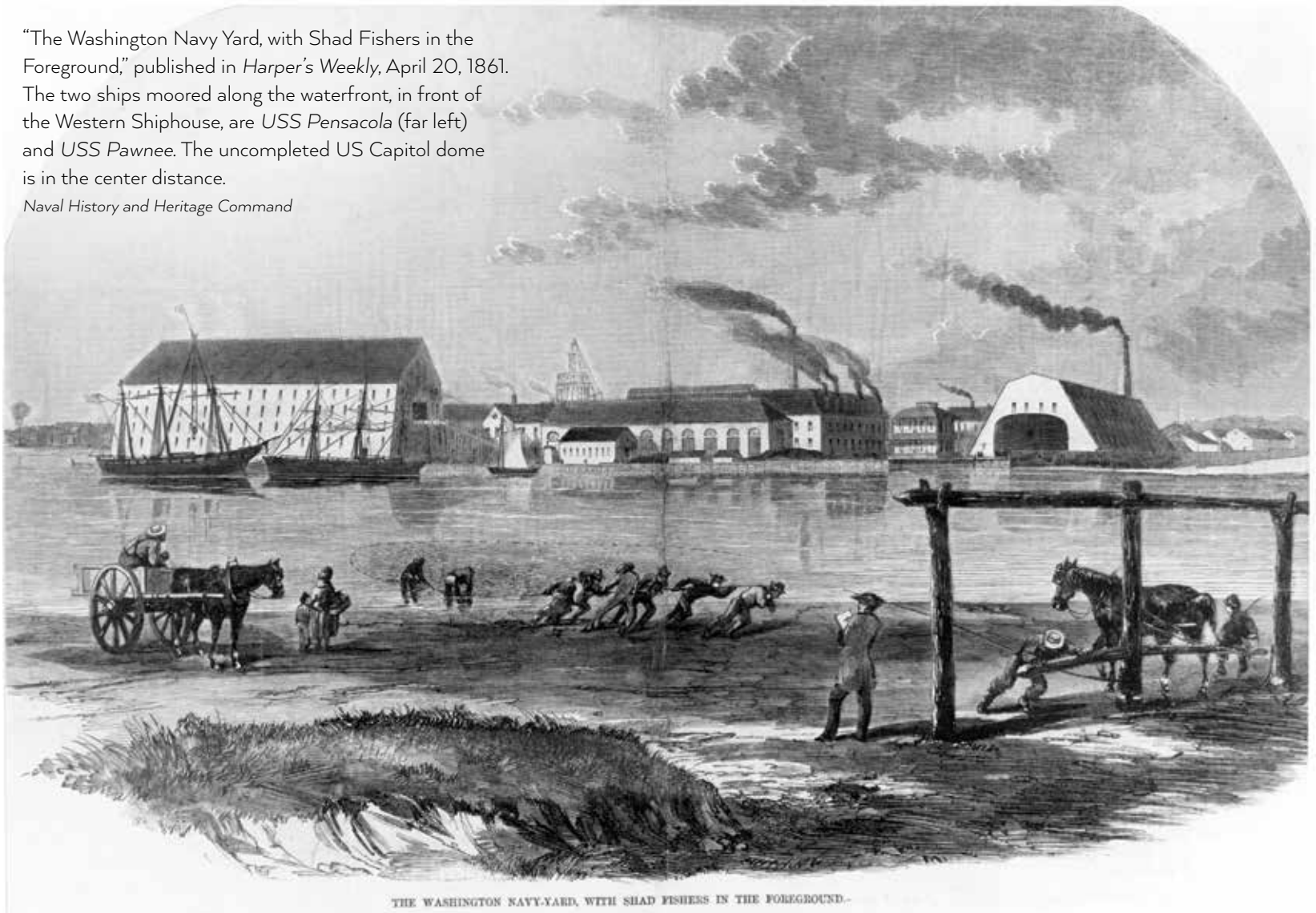
The Anacostia River and its shores have their own story, one tied to the Potomac River but distinct from it. In contrast with the Southwest waterfront, which had an active commercial port and a multifaceted economy, the Anacostia River waterfront depended mainly on the government, especially the Navy Yard, which controlled most of the river's northern shore to 11th Street SE. Three blocks west, at 8th Street, sits the yard's main gate, an impressive entrance to the city's largest industrial enterprise, which at its peak in World War II employed 26,000 civilian and military workers.

> *Walk up Half Street from the Cambria Hotel to M Street. Turn right and go to the Navy Yard main gate at 8th Street and east along the stone wall. Alternatively, take the Circulator bus on M Street and get off at the gate.*

The federal government established the Washington Navy Yard in 1799 to build, equip, and repair warships. The site was sufficiently far up-river to be safe from sea-based attack yet close enough to the Capitol for effective communication and oversight. For most of its history the yard has been the city's largest employer, but its focus has always been national rather than local and it has seldom engaged with the city. Despite its aloofness, it has profoundly shaped the Anacostia River's water and shore. In addition to filling

in the shoreline to create more land for its operations, the yard contributed large amounts of industrial pollutants to the air, soil, and water, and in 1998 was put on the EPA's list of Superfund sites.

Some of the Navy's most famous vessels, including the *Constitution*, received maintenance or modernization at the yard. The original site included two open-ended sheds to construct vessels, connected with auxiliary structures for all the tasks associated with fitting out a large wooden frigate or ship of the line, complete with sails, rigging, guns, and ammunition. Naval officers, for the most part, served as managers and senior administrators of a labor force that included civilian carpenters, shipwrights, joiners, mast makers, and blacksmiths as well as cooks and cleaners.



"The Washington Navy Yard, with Shad Fishers in the Foreground," published in *Harper's Weekly*, April 20, 1861. The two ships moored along the waterfront, in front of the Western Shiphouse, are *USS Pensacola* (far left) and *USS Pawnee*. The uncompleted US Capitol dome is in the center distance.
Naval History and Heritage Command

A hierarchy of status and pay placed apprentices and laborers at the bottom and master craftsmen and mechanics at the top. Another hierarchy ranked them by race and origin. At the top and commanding the best wages were local-born whites and European immigrants, who worked alongside African Americans, both free and slave. Among African Americans, slaves had the lowest status and pay. Pre-Civil War Washington had the largest free African American workforce among the southern states, along with several thousand slaves who were generally employed in household labor. Commonly in the city, slave owners who possessed slaves skilled in a craft might rent them out to work in the Navy Yard or in other commercial or large government enterprises, taking the major portion of the earnings.

Navy Yard map. The National Museum of the US Navy is located in buildings 76 (main building) and 70 (Cold War Gallery).
US Navy image

At the yard, wage disparities and status differences, compounded by ethnic and racial tensions, caused friction and occasional work stoppages. Government employment was nevertheless considered good work, steady and with regular pay. Nearby streets in Capitol Hill still have some small, wood-sided workers' cottages, now reworked and improved, that suggest that for white skilled workers a position at the Navy Yard could be the American dream.

The yard's naval commandants were adept at adjusting to technological and military changes. The first shift in focus was after the Civil War, when it became obvious that the Anacostia River was not deep enough for really large ships. The yard shifted to the production of guns, big ones, which were becoming increasingly powerful and necessary in warfare. By the time Teddy Roosevelt was president, the yard was the nation's leading producer of heavy ordnance. At that time the Navy's largest guns had a bore of 12 inches, but by 1920 that had increased to 16 inches and the shells weighed a ton each. The yard's experts designed each new type of gun and had it built and proofed by live firing at Indian Head, about twenty miles down the Potomac River.

Transformed into an industrial plant, equipped with large and expensive machinery, the yard attracted an increasingly knowledge-based workforce. When technologies like radio emerged, the yard added high-tech research to its development and manufacturing mission. After inventor Thomas Edison pointed out the benefits of having

Wireless School, Washington Navy Yard, 1904. Soon after Guglielmo Marconi demonstrated a working device for wireless telegraph transmission in 1895, the US Navy began exploring the new technology and training personnel in its use.
Naval History and Heritage Command

Lenah H. Sutcliffe Higbee, superintendent of the Navy Nurse Corps, at her office in the Washington Navy Yard, January 20, 1911. A Canadian by birth but educated as a nurse in the United States, she was the second woman to command the US Navy's nurse corps and the first to be awarded the Navy Cross. She died on January 10, 1941, and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery alongside her husband, a US Marine. A destroyer, the *USS Higbee* (DD-806), was named in her honor and served in the Pacific during World War II.
Naval History and Heritage Command

an electronics research center, the admirals established the Naval Research Laboratory in 1923, which pioneered many crucial fields including the development of radar. The lab, with its distinctive white communications domes, sits half a mile down the Potomac River, on an obscure bit of land known as Far Southwest.

With time, the yard's older hierarchy of apprentice, journeyman, and master gave way to a labor force distinguished less by title than by technical expertise and seniority. The workforce expanded and contracted in relation with the needs of defense policy and the definition of mission, which correlated with the country's engagement with war or warlike situations. During World War II, the Navy Yard expanded into 63 acres adjacent to its northern and western walls to accommodate a 24/7 workforce that produced a huge variety and number of armaments and high-tech military gear. When the war ended, the yard got a new name, the Naval Gun Factory, though guns were being phased out in favor of missiles.

As the need to make guns declined, the yard adjusted its mission again, in 1952, to become the Navy's main administrative and ceremonial center. The heavy machinery ground to a halt, replaced by typewriters and slide rules, and the civilian workforce thinned out and exchanged its blue collars for white ones.

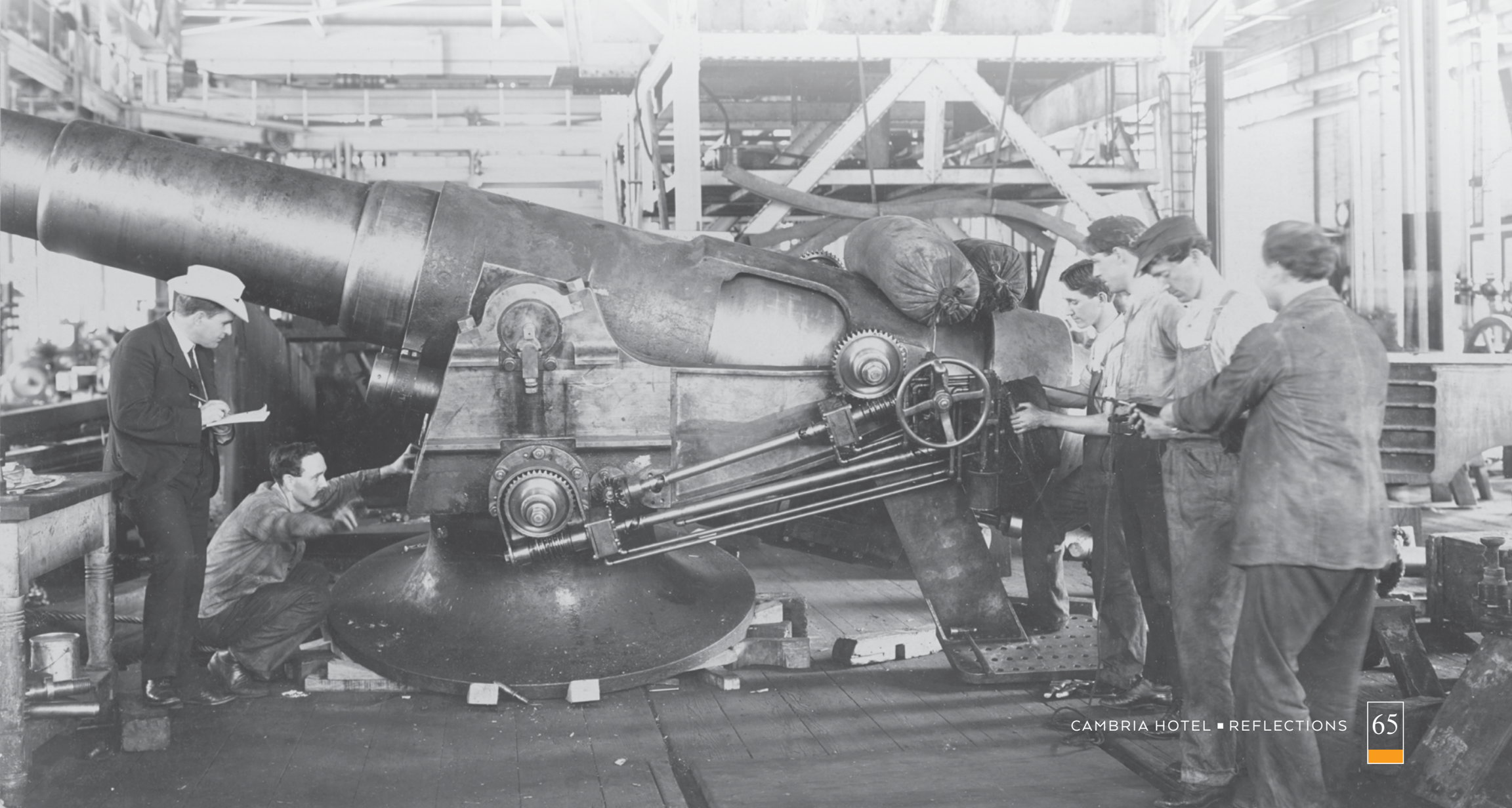
The downsizing also had an impact on the surrounding neighborhood. Restaurants and shops that had catered to generations of civilian and military personnel went out of business or relocated. M Street increasingly became a boulevard of seedy warehouses, liquor stores, and low-rent industrial operations. Empty and desolate, it was primed for

a succession of drug epidemics that only made things worse. By the 1970s, taxicabs avoided a once prosperous street that had become notorious for crime, drug-dealing, and murders.

> *Follow the wall to the eastern boundary of the Navy Yard on 11th Street and turn right to the river and there enter the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail. Follow the trail along the southern wall of the Navy Yard and the Anacostia River.*

The Navy decided it had more land than it needed and in 1963 ceded 63 acres of surplus land, stretching from shore of the Anacostia to M Street, to the federal government's General Services Administration (GSA). The GSA saw the potential of this empty acreage and proposed to develop the Southeast Federal Center (SWFC), a complex

Testing the mechanism of a gun carriage at the Washington Navy Yard, ca. 1920. The completed gun underwent extensive testing in the shop, before being sent to Indian Head, down the Potomac River, for proof firing.
National Archives and Records Administration



combining housing, stores, and office space. Even though the GSA spent considerable sums clearing the land of toxic wastes left from naval operations, it was unable to convince Congress to provide the funding to make the Southeast Federal Center a reality. The project languished over the next two decades, occasionally flaring into view when some newsworthy event brought the increasingly violent situation on M Street to the public's attention.

> *Take the trail to The Yards Marina. The arches of the new Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge frame the southernmost flow of the Anacostia River as a backdrop to the marina. Across the river are Poplar Point and Anacostia Park, and behind them is I-295, the Anacostia Freeway. Barry Farm lies just beyond the freeway.*

Navy Yard main gate in 1923. Designed by Benjamin Latrobe, whose architectural fingerprints are scattered around Washington, including the US Capitol, the gate has been an iconic waterfront feature since its completion in 1805. This view, taken from inside the yard, looks out onto 8th Street, where a streetcar is about to make the turn onto M Street.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Foundry in the Naval Gun Factory, Washington Navy Yard, during World War II. The yard cast a variety of parts for big guns and other armaments.
US Navy / National Archives and Records Administration

The Anacostia River's eastern shore remained sparsely settled and rural until the 20th century. Small farms on the lands East of the River, as the territory is often called, provided many of the carrots, tomatoes, and other vegetables for Washington's homes and boarding houses. The southern shore gained its first real town in 1854, when a developer built houses for Navy Yard workers and called the settlement Uniontown. In 1878 the area became a ward in the reorganized city, and in later years Uniontown was part of the village of Anacostia, now Historic Anacostia. By then the two shores were connected by the original 11th Street Bridge.

The development along the eastern shore of the Anacostia bears the scars of racism no less than in Southwest along the Potomac. Anacostia is a mélange of old and new, middle class and poor. Although majority white for most of its history, it had a free black community well before the Civil War, and some families today can trace their roots back to that early settlement. During the urban renewal of the mid-20th century, many African Americans evicted from Southwest relocated across the river.

Anacostia River bridge at 11th Street, connecting the Navy Yard and Uniontown, 1865. This was the first bridge across the Anacostia.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Barry Farm is an African American neighborhood in Anacostia that predates the Civil War. In 1940–41, when the Alley Dwelling Authority was building the James Creek Dwellings in Southwest, it requisitioned 34 acres around Barry Farm to erect emergency wartime housing. As with the James Creek Dwellings, the Navy claimed possession for African American workers. Notably, this was the first federal housing that gave preferential treatment to people who had been dispossessed, and it also instituted a rental program based on household income. These innovations became normative in the postwar decades and constitute two critical distinctions between the public and private housing markets.

Barry Farm's location on the periphery of the city made it easy for white city authorities to ignore. Indifference led to outright neglect, and Barry Farm and the surrounding area lacked basic services like streetlights. Isolation and neglect led residents to organize. They became leaders in the 20th-century fight for school desegregation, civil rights, and welfare and housing reform. Their championing of welfare mothers inspired Martin Luther King's Poor People's March in 1968.

During the same decade that the GSA was cleaning the toxic wastes left in the now surplus land adjacent to the Navy Yard, white families east of the river followed the national trend and began moving to the suburbs. The ballooning Maryland suburbs fueled demand for a new access road to downtown Washington, and after the original Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge opened in 1950, planning began for a connecting highway, I-295, across Anacostia and forming a barrier to shoreline access.

"The Fugitive's Song," 1845, a sheet music cover. It portrays prominent African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass as a runaway slave. After fleeing from Maryland in 1838, he gained national attention for his autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. He later settled in Anacostia.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

Fallow land near Barry Farm also attracted private development, especially after the largescale Southwest renewal displaced thousands of African Americans. The National Capital Planning Commission (NCPC) and the Redevelopment Land Agency (RLA) had seriously underestimated the problems of resettlement and came under intense political pressure to secure housing for displaced residents. Since housing in the city was scarce and still largely segregated, it was difficult to find suitable housing for poor and modest-income African Americans. Faced with private developers willing to build low-cost housing near Barry Farm, NCPC quickly approved increased zoning density and building applications.

New projects sprouted. Initially, the displaced families welcomed the buildings, but shoddy construction and poor upkeep led to rapid deterioration. By the end of the century most of the developments were demolished as unrepairable and substandard. Today, Anacostia remains primarily African American. It struggles with poverty and systemic racism. At the same time, city investments in affordable housing are limited, and efforts to stimulate private investment raise the specter of gentrification, even as healthcare and schools have not yet reached the level of the rest of the city.

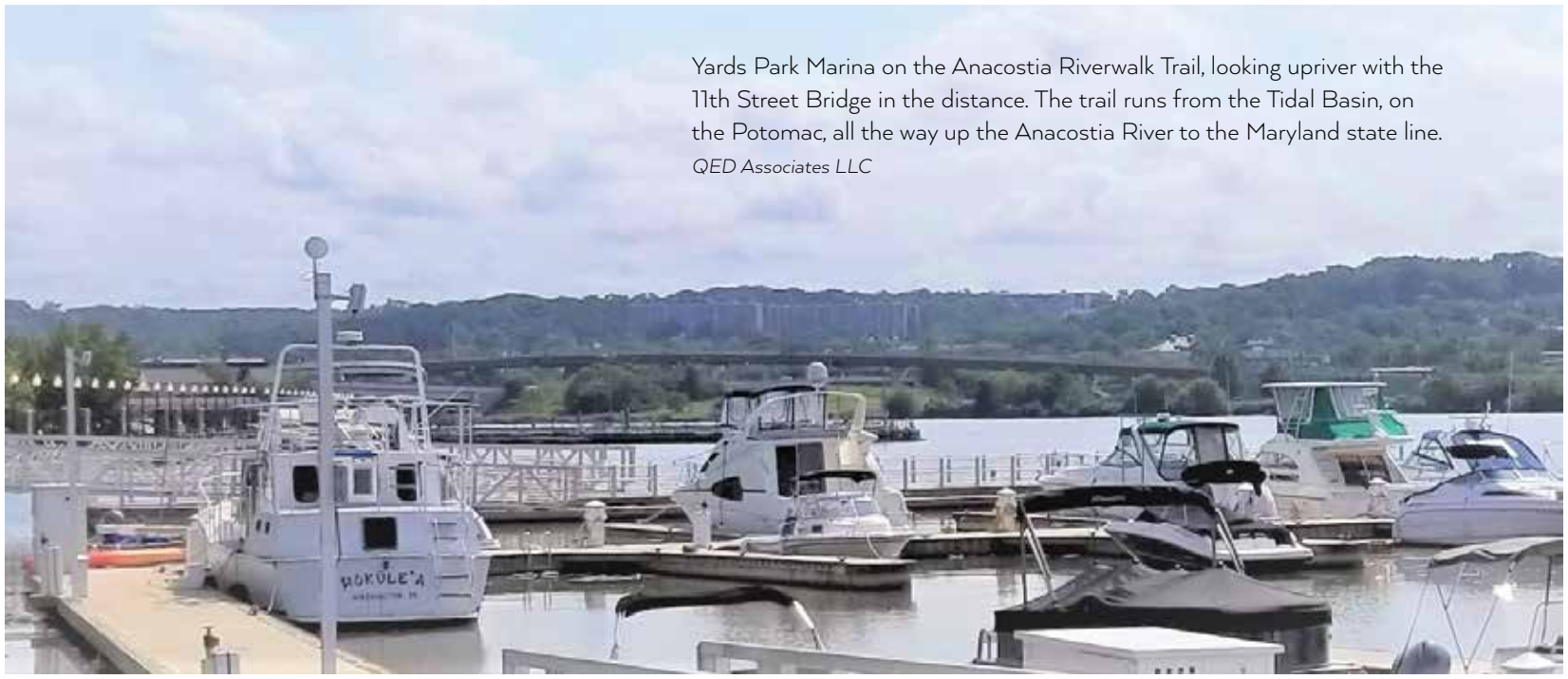
> *Walk from the marina into The Yards and toward M Street.*

Anacostia streetscape, 2010. Many of Anacostia's main streets feature renovated Victorian buildings.
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

On the other side of the Anacostia River, the GSA persisted in trying to develop the former Navy Yard property. Two decades passed before a realignment of military priorities reawakened interest in the surplus land. After the Vietnam War a period of soul-searching and cost-cutting by Congress led to the closing of selected military bases. Suddenly, military installations found themselves having to justify their existence or be legislated out of existence. As the civilian communities surrounding the bases faced the possibility of losing their economic foundation, members of Congress found themselves besieged by anxious constituents. In response, Congress established BRAC, the Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1990, revised several times thereafter. It established an independent, nonpartisan commission to make the politically difficult decisions to close or consolidate bases.

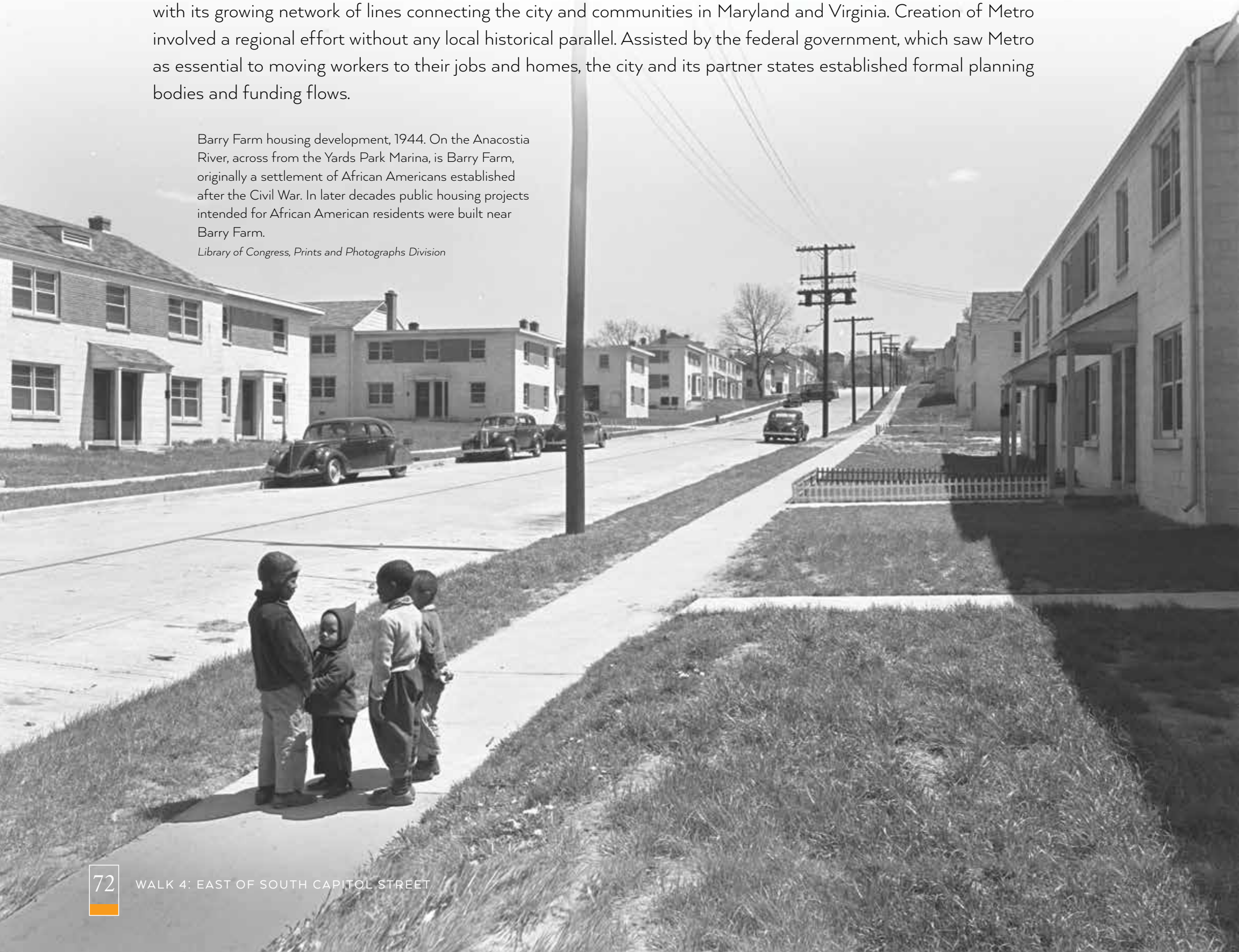
In all, more than 350 military bases in the United States closed. The Navy Yard, however, was expanded and revamped by the BRAC decisions in 1991 and 1995, when the commission closed facilities in neighboring northern Virginia and transferred responsibility for an array of functions and services to Washington. As a consequence, large numbers of defense contractors were required to move closer to the Navy Yard. For the first time since World War II, the real estate along the M Street corridor gained in value. Only a mile from the Capitol, M Street was a real estate boom waiting to happen.

At the intersection of 4th Street and M Street SE, the US Department of Transportation building is to the left (west). The Navy Yard Metro station is across M Street.



Yards Park Marina on the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail, looking upriver with the 11th Street Bridge in the distance. The trail runs from the Tidal Basin, on the Potomac, all the way up the Anacostia River to the Maryland state line.
QED Associates LLC

The Navy Yard's BRAC expansion heated up a quietly bubbling interest among a variety of federal agencies and private developers. The last large parcel of undeveloped land within sight of the Capitol stood waiting. Development moved closer to reality with the opening of Metro – the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority – with its growing network of lines connecting the city and communities in Maryland and Virginia. Creation of Metro involved a regional effort without any local historical parallel. Assisted by the federal government, which saw Metro as essential to moving workers to their jobs and homes, the city and its partner states established formal planning bodies and funding flows.



Barry Farm housing development, 1944. On the Anacostia River, across from the Yards Park Marina, is Barry Farm, originally a settlement of African Americans established after the Civil War. In later decades public housing projects intended for African American residents were built near Barry Farm.

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

In an era of civil rights activism, and at a time when the city had become a majority African American city, Metro's proponents listened to the opinions of all Washingtonians, not just the white establishment. As Washington moved toward home rule in the mid-1970s, the city's vocal and growing African American majority made it politically essential that routes, stations, and construction disruptions should accommodate the needs of the community.

The first Metro service, the Red Line, began in 1975, and early plans also called for a line intended to traverse the core of the central city and its poorest parts, passing through Historic Anacostia and terminating in Prince George's County, Maryland. Delays ensued, partly from the many community meetings held to gauge local sentiment about

Activists marching in the Poor People's Campaign, Washington, DC, 1968. Many of the activists were residents of Barry Farm and surrounding complexes who had become radicalized through their effort to improve public housing conditions in the face of official indifference. Barry Farm and the surrounding area became a center of civil rights protests, from school desegregation to welfare reform. The National Welfare Rights Organization was active between 1966 and 1975 and demanded adequate government support for mothers.

George Mason University Libraries / Jack Rottier Collection

service needs, partly from the planning changes that resulted from community input, and partly from resistance from some of the largely white parts of town that did not place a high priority on addressing the needs of less affluent residents. Not until 1992 did the Green Line begin service on the waterfront corridor, with stations at L'Enfant Plaza, Southwest Waterfront, and Navy Yard/Nationals Park.

Despite the advent of Metro and the enlargement of the Navy Yard's workforce following the BRAC decisions, the Southeast waterfront remained largely undeveloped. The GSA, however, persisted. Riverfront property throughout the nation was attracting growing attention from developers, as Americans began returning to the cities and showing especial interest in enjoying waterfront views and amenities. Environmental activists were deploying federal laws mandating clean air and water to curtail pollution and even restore the Anacostia and Potomac rivers. At the same time, the election of Anthony Williams as mayor brought a greater emphasis on economic development as the key to enlarging the tax base and increasing employment opportunities.

The GSA found an opportunity with the US Department of Transportation, which was finishing a lease on its headquarters at 7th Street SW and was interested in relocating. It asked the GSA for options. From the potential sites DOT chose one on M Street that was part of the GSA's former Navy Yard parcel. The issue was to find the money to build it.

SW Waterfront Metro station. The geometric beauty of Washington Metro's award-winning stations brought classical elegance to the underground waterfront.
QED Associates LLC

Congress declined to fund the headquarters, just as it had the Southeast Federal Center. Something new was needed that would allow the government to realize a return on its investment in land but limit the financial commitment. The GSA decided to create a public/private partnership, but that required Congressional legislation. Although the government had always worked with private contractors and had purchased and cleared land for the public good, it had never entered into a partnership with a private entity. Legislation in 2000 created the first public/private partnership. Like the old Alley Dwelling Authority, it was specific to Washington, and to the GSA. The Southeast Federal Center Public Private Development Act gave the GSA authority to "adopt innovative, flexible approaches" for development of the unneeded Navy Yard land, leaving five acres for a public park.

The act allowed GSA to sign an agreement with a private developer to build and own the DOT headquarters on land leased from the government. The government would rent the building for twenty years with an option to purchase at termination. The deal was done, the developer constructed the new headquarters, which became an anchor for the M Street corridor, and in 2018, near the end of the lease, the GSA purchased the building from the developers.

Metro map. During the 1990s the Green Line opened stations on Southwest and Southeast waterfronts. These were early efforts to reverse the decline of the waterfront, especially along the M Street corridor.
WMATA

The DOT headquarters was the first cabinet-level federal agency to move south of the Capitol. With 5,000 full-time workers and an entrance located across the street from the Navy Yard Metro stop, the new headquarters boldly declared the government's commitment to a revived waterfront. The 11-story building, huge yet surprisingly attractive, offered imaginative landscaping that seemed more like a suburban campus than a monolithic city office building. The U-shaped footprint, with two wings joined in a plaza, provided space for pop-up shopping and special events. Sightlines from the rear of the building showed views of the river, and walkways with seats invited a pause to relax.

However, the building on its own barely made a dent in M Street's desolation. Only with the development of the remaining acres of GSA land would the area gain vitality. In 2004 the GSA completed a contract with a Cleveland-

based developer, Forest City, for 3.2 million square feet of a mixed-use development adjacent to the Navy Yard. It would be known as The Yards, an allusion to the Navy Yard.

The Yards that Forest City developed was inspired neither by the 1950s Southwest's modernist renewal nor the 21st-century Wharf complex. It offers a third vision, more integrated with the surrounding area than The Wharf, but lacking the parklike settings of the modernist complexes. The Yards open onto M Street, at the intersection with the westernmost wall of the Navy Yard. A corner supermarket invites people in to shop, and through its attachment to the brick wall surrounding the Navy Yard simultaneously signifies a connection with the past. The supermarket anchors a commercial zone evoking a street scene reminiscent of a Hollywood movie-set. Colorful awnings, outdoor serving areas, and bricked sidewalks fill the street with restaurants and bars, most with abundant outdoor seating. Cars move and park freely and walkways are not shared with vehicular traffic as at The Wharf.

Apartment buildings, some mimicking the loft style of an industrial past, push the official height limits with penthouses, while keeping the classic, squat Washington mid-rise look. The buildings have the same pattern of street-level commercial use but are less closely packed and look more like organic urban growth rather than curated streets and alleys. This third style is its own thing, offering a more suburban feel than the European references of The Wharf.

US Department of Transportation headquarters on M Street. The decision to build a major federal office building next to the Navy Yard, following soon after the opening of the Navy Yard Metro station, marked the beginning of M Street's renewal.
QED Associates LLC

> *Walk west down M Street toward Nationals Park.*

Initially, in the first new buildings, the GSA seeded redevelopment with government leases. At the same time, the city courted developers by allowing the maximum use of land to gain more income per square foot. As defense contractors relocated to be near the Navy Yard and developers took note, warehoused land soon sprouted construction scaffolding. The first cohort of M Street buildings, built right up to the sidewalk, set the style for those that followed.

When M Street began to come alive, everyone noticed. Articles in local business journals and media exclaimed over the flocks of cranes rising high above M Street. Press releases from developers touted the street's destiny as the waterfront's primary route, a welcoming, tree-lined boulevard full of cafes and landscaped entryways. What transpired, however, resembled the prosaic office corridor of downtown K Street more than a chic boulevard of the future. The street gained a wall of mid-rise office buildings that stand like sentinels guarding the law firms, professional associations, and consulting firms of all variety that followed the Navy Yard contractors. The restaurants, bars, and stylish take-outs in the street-level shops were mostly renditions of mid-level chains available across America. Even after the city's finances improved and developers were jumping on every piece of vacant waterfront land, the city kept

Yards Park, near the marina. The parklike setting encourages exploration of the riverfront and the Anacostia Riverwalk Trail.
QED Associates LLC

to its policy of maximizing financial return above all. Only in recent years did some of the new construction paint from a more varied and interesting architectural palette, but none offered a parklike setting or a European-style boulevard.

> *Continue west on M Street to South Capitol Street, passing the entrance to Nationals Park across from the Navy Yard/Ballpark Metro stop.*

M Street and The Yards had everything necessary to claim economic success, even though the street would never win architectural awards. However, the Southeast still lacked "buzz." Canyons of residential and office buildings and clusters of affordable restaurants could not make the waterfront a destination. The area was still shackled to its history.

The missing element appeared unexpectedly at the end of the millennium, when Major League Baseball found itself owning a struggling team in need of a new home. The Montreal Expos had never really clicked in their Canadian

Redeveloped M Street corridor. Mid-rise buildings reaching to the sidewalk express the street's regained vitality. The assertive line of buildings gives M Street greater resemblance to downtown's K Street NW than to the wide avenue of greenery and sidewalk cafes some had envisioned for it.
QED Associates LLC

venue, though they had a few good years. When the owners effectively walked away from the team, Major League Baseball assumed ownership and tried to find a new owner and venue. Many cities offered sites, but the challenge of assembling a package of financing and providing a suitable stadium reduced the list down to just a few, including Washington.

The prospect of having a baseball team aroused immediate interest in the Washington press and sporting community. Decades before, the city had lost its major league team, the Senators, when they moved to Texas. The Senators had played in a stadium north of the Mall, but departed in 1972, after almost a century of largely indifferent seasons. Sports writers back in the day liked to repeat the remark of a San Francisco journalist that the Senators were "first in war, first in peace, and last in the American League."

"Home Run Polka," composed by Mrs. W.J. Bodell in 1867 and respectfully dedicated to the National Baseball Club of Washington, DC. Stamped on lower right: "W. G. Metzerott, Music & Pianos, Washington, D.C."
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

But that kind of remark ignored the city's long tradition of baseball, reaching back to the 1850s, when amateur teams of gentlemen would gather for friendly games on the White Lot, south of the White House. In April 1860, for instance, the Potomacs challenged a Baltimore club to a match, and in 1866 the National Club hosted a match on the White Lot with the Excelsior club of Brooklyn, New York. In keeping with the era, teams were usually racially segregated, but that did not prevent them from playing games. The press had a high opinion of local African American baseball players and reported regularly on the "colored" teams. In September 1869, the Olympics, a white team, received a challenge from the Alerts, an African American team, for a series of games, "which challenge it is stated will undoubtedly be accepted, and the first game played at an early day," according to the newspaper account.

In the 21st century, baseball officials and many city leaders saw the return of a professional team, with construction of a stadium on South Capitol Street, as way of setting a final jewel in the waterfront's necklace. Mayor Anthony Williams led the city's successful drive to bring the team to Washington and engaged in the politics of convincing the city council and the voters that a baseball stadium was a worthwhile investment. Building a stadium was controversial. Critics said it would make more sense to spend the city's money to upgrade the schools, improve services, or build affordable housing. Several times the project was nearly derailed. Accusations that the city was offering too much of a subsidy, that it could ill afford a baseball stadium, or that the team would attract little local patronage were regularly voiced. In the end, when the Lerner organization, a metro-area real estate developer, won the bid for the franchise, a deal was struck, and in 2008 a baseball stadium came to Southeast.

The city-champion Oriental Tigers semi-professional baseball team from Buzzard Point, 1926. The team's home field was near South Capitol and R streets SW. Some of its players later joined the Washington-based Homestead Grays professional team of the Negro League.
DC Public Library / Joseph Owen Curtis Photograph Collection

The Nationals proved a success, though at first the team seemed to be retracing the history of the Senators, with a succession of frustrating seasons and no championship. Critics and doubters had to keep silent in 2019, when the Nationals won the World Series and sparked a marathon victory celebration. Baseball was back where it belonged – on the Washington waterfront. However, the city was providing more than a stadium to assure the success of the team and its home in Southeast. The city had established an entertainment zone around the stadium offering food, dancing, and music far into the night. Southeast had buzz. It was a destination!

Today, construction continues across the Southeast/Southwest waterfront. Residences, hotels, restaurants, and businesses fill the burgeoning spaces. Visitors abound, from the metro area and from far afield. The waterfront is Washington's special place, where people live, work, and play. It is L'Enfant's gateway to the city, Zeckendorf's waterfront worthy of a capital city, and the Nationals' home field. ■

Nationals Park, on South Capitol Street, with the US Capitol in the background.
QED Associates LLC

Selected Sources

This book drew on original sources and expert studies too numerous to list comprehensively. Newspapers from the 19th and 20th centuries provided an especially large amount of information, supplemented with contemporary autobiographies and shorter accounts. Various websites offered important information on specific aspects of the waterfront's history. The photographic collections of the Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Museum of American History, and National Library of Medicine were particularly helpful.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marjorie Lightman and **William Zeisel** hold doctorates in history from Rutgers University and have published on a variety of historical topics. For the past two decades, they have been writing about the history of Washington, DC. They have published a history of the University of the District of Columbia and curated an exhibition on the city at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum. *Reflections* is based in part on an earlier study they published on the historical context of buildings in Southwest.

The authors live in Southwest and are active in the community. They are founding board members of the Southwest Community Foundation and also support projects done under the umbrella of the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly. Dr. Lightman served for two years as an elected ANC commissioner in the Southwest Waterfront neighborhood.


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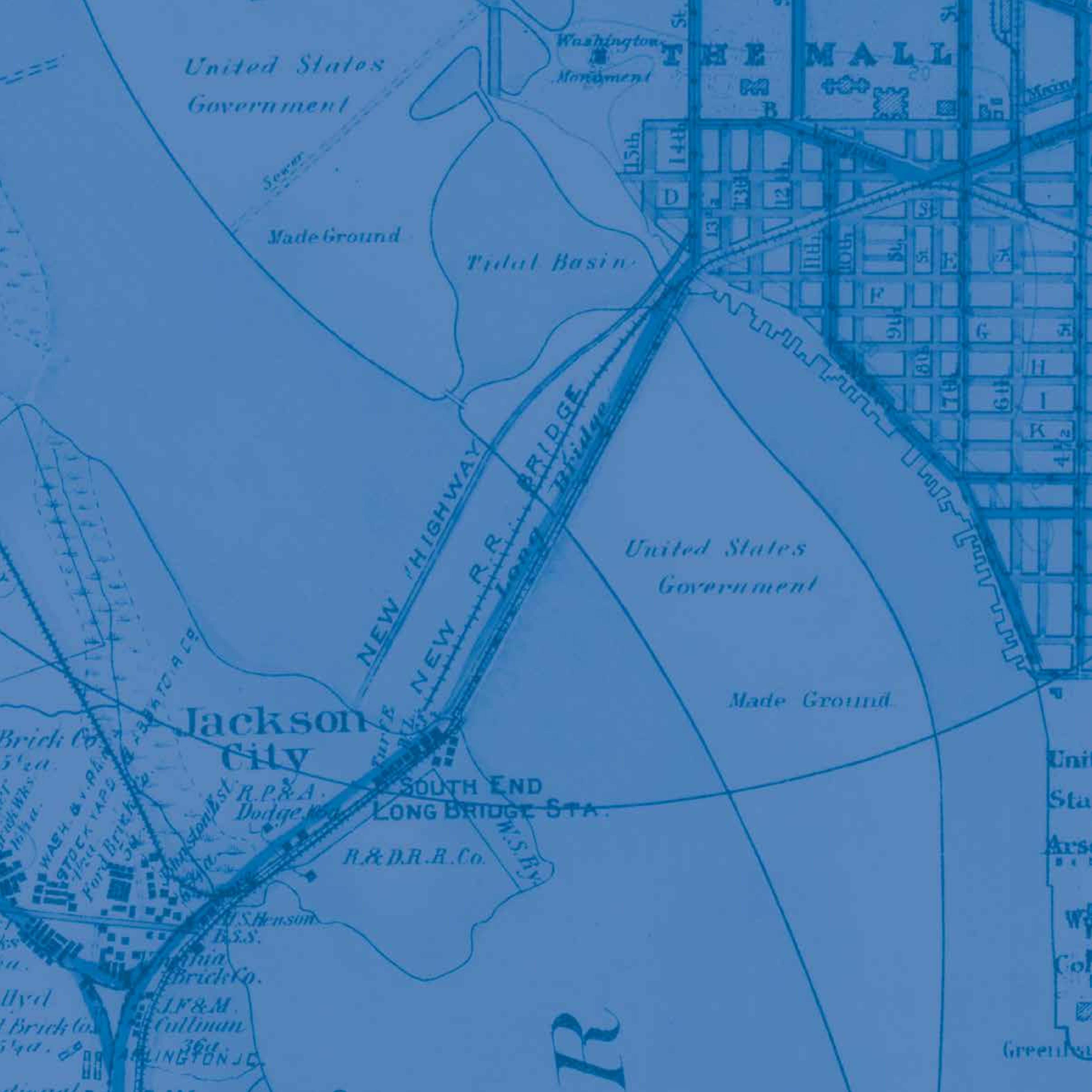
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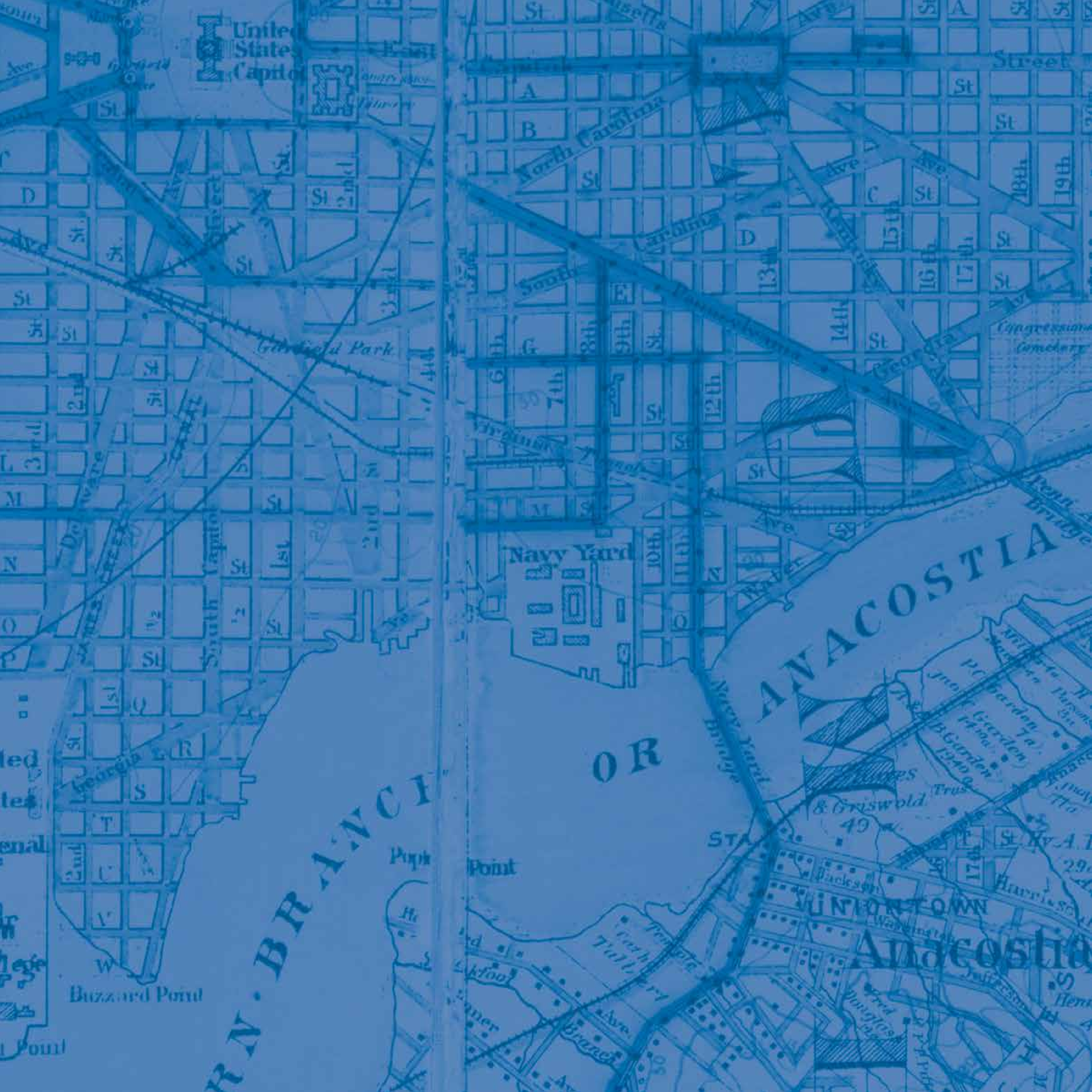

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