

DC Mutual Aid Network Community Archive

Gentrification as Public Policy: BIDs, Development, and Displacement in Washington D.C.

[Current Movements](#), [Empower DC](#), [SW Action](#) and advocates present "Gentrification as Public Policy: BIDS, Development, and Displacement in Washington D.C."

Publicly-available at:

<https://www.facebook.com/CurrentMovements/videos/427922161939794/>

Summary

Organized by neighborhood, this event series aims to lift the veil on Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), and their critical role in facilitating development at the expense of working Black and immigrant communities in DC.

Join community advocates and researchers for the inaugural event of this series centered around Downtown Washington and Downtown DC BID. As BIDs continue to present as progressive entities, through projects like the Murals That Matter exhibit, we will explore the untold story of how BIDs and why BIDs came to be, how BID-centered policy drives systemic racism and displacement, and offer some possible paths forward.

Speakers include:

[Maurice Cook](#), Serve Your City

[Aristotle Theresa](#), Stoop Law

[Shani Shih](#), Chinatown Art Studio

Jay Forth, housing rights organizer in DC

[Susanna Schaller](#), CUNY, Author of "Business Improvement Districts and the Contradictions of Placemaking: BID Urbanism in Washington

Peer-Index 1

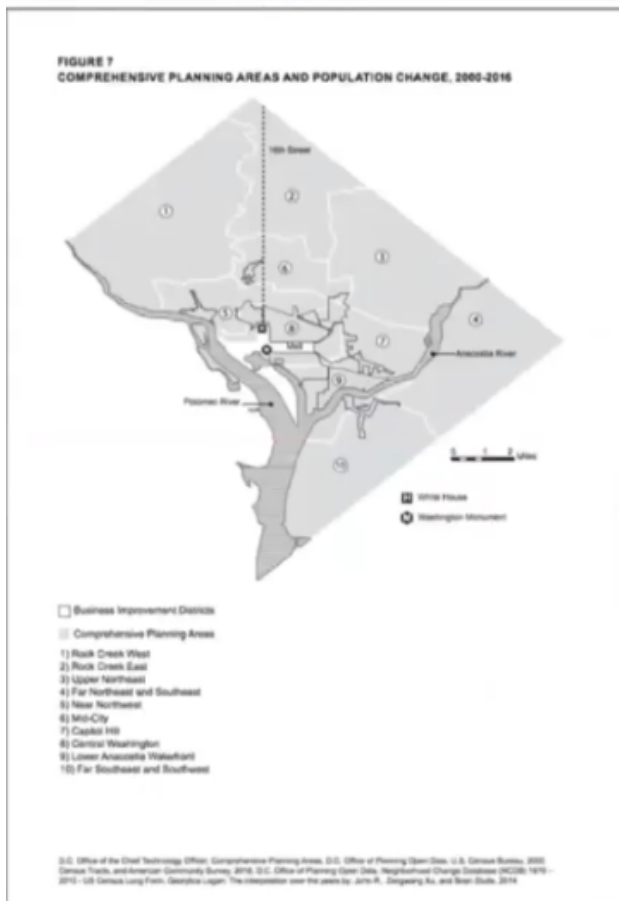
Indexer Bio: the following peer index was provided by Tara V., a volunteer moderator with the DC Mutual Aid Network Facebook group since May 2020. The chosen excerpts and highlighted portions are informed and limited by her life experiences - while she is a first generation immigrant, she has not personally experienced traumatic housing insecurity.

Tara's personal top highlights include: Maurice Cook describing the theft of this beautiful Chocolate City from Black people from his lived experience over decades at 33:25 - 35:21 and 1:15:30 - 1:49:00; and the historical data and context provided by Susanna Schaller at 8:40-24:15.

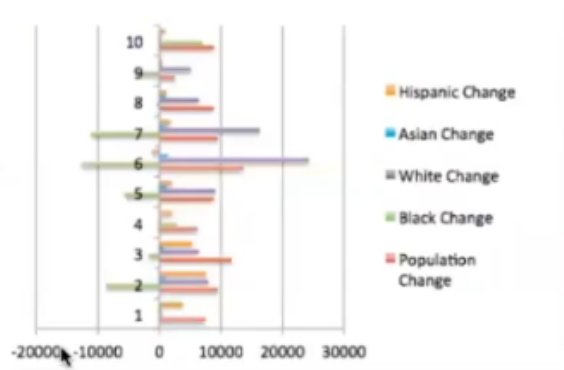
00:00 - 8:40 - Introductions by [Katie Petitt](#) and [Coy McKinney](#)

8:40 - 24:15 - Video by **Susanna Schaller** providing her main thesis (found at 15:15:) that **“It is the collective placemaking work of BIDS, as a part of a regime of private-public partnerships, that oils the gentrification machine.”**

- ~16:50 - 17:12 - explaining DC's unique tax limitations and representation issues in creating the context for BIDs
- 17:30 - DC's Strategic Plan - making the assumption that these places were not yet real or vibrant places
- 18:47 - **check out [DC Grassroots Planning Coalition - Stop the Comprehensive Scam!](#)**
- 19:30 - how this context reinforced oppressive relationships between the real estate markets, property values, and the racist housing landscape
- ~19:58 - 22:00: *Diversity* as a lifestyle product, an asset to increase property values



Comprehensive Planning Areas Population Change 2000-2016



Schaller, Susanna F. .2019. *Business Improvement Districts and the Contradictions of Placemaking BID Urbanism in Washington, D.C.* (University of Georgia Press)

Research Supported through PSC-CUNY

- 22:00-23:45 - This pattern of displacement was foreseeable and was foreseen - see [Neighborhood Revitalization and Racial Change: The Case of Washington, DC](#)
- ~ 23:45 - 26:00 - explaining why this discussion is focusing specifically on the [DowntownDC](#) and [Mount Vernon Triangle DC](#) BIDs

DOWNTOWN DC & MT VERNON BID AREAS in DOWNTOWN DC

[W2, W6]
Residential Neighborhoods affected:
**Mt Vernon, Chinatown, "Northwest One"/Sursum
 Corda areas, and more**

Shani Shih

- 26:30 - **Saluting Ari Theresa**, a lawyer who filed a gentrification lawsuit in 2018 - read all about it [here](#) and [here](#) and he discusses it in further detail at minutes **37:13 - 49:52** of this video (see excerpts below)
- 28:20 - **Saluting Shani Shih**, an artist and organizer with a long list of affiliations localized to creative expression and gentrification in the Chinatown neighborhood including: independent artist, illustrator, painter, muralist, Asian American Youth Leadership Empowerment And Development ([AALEAD](#) - the only local org that supports low income and working class Asian-Americans), [Museum Square Tenants Association](#) (legal battle for justice in maddening displacement issues), [Housing Counseling Services](#), [Chinatown Art Studio](#) (youth art space), [411Collective](#) (collective of artists and muralists concerned with how their creative expression is implicated by gentrification and racially-unjust “placemaking”)
- 31:30 - **Saluting Jay Forth**, who has worked as job placement counselor, tenant organizer helping tenants avoid displacement, volunteer board member with [Potter’s House](#) (non-profit bookstore and cafe rooted in the neighborhood since 1960 - offers a free option menu everyday), for a time was a director with [The Festival Center](#) in Adams Morgan (a hub of faith and justice orgs), Director of Street Outreach for a local unhoused/unsheltered organization and that is how he came into contact with BIDs where some outreach teams were funded by the BIDs
- 33:25 - **Saluting Maurice Cook**, Executive Director and Founder of [Serve Your City](#) (youth, family-based non-profit founded in 2011), storytelling about the significance of being a little kid in this city and the impact of the theft of this city from Black people
- 37:30 - Ari Theresa on his lawsuit against the city regarding gentrification - **so-called “creative class” vs. essential employees**
- 43:00 - 44:30 - Ari Theresa on “light industrial” neighborhoods = historically more polluted + Black neighborhoods; *Official Policy*: to protest a development project, groups could ask for a protest status that would allow them to argue collectively during a zoning commission hearing
 - **key argument = the unofficial policy that people who were not in the “creative class” were denied human rights**: empirical data (mathematical proof/evidence) that Black groups organizing for protest status in zoning commission hearings were denied this status disproportionately and often for reasons the same exact reasons that non-Black groups were afforded this status - if the group cannot even get this status then they have no legal right to question or influence the make-up of a development project.
- 43:30 - Ari Theresa on the special status of so-called “historic neighborhoods” - targeting light industrial neighborhoods disproportionately impact Black people
- 48:00 - 50:00 - Ari Theresa summarizing the lawsuit
- 50:20 - 53:16 - Shani Shi on the sense of voicelessness for communities of color that live, work, and have built Home in DC: **“A lot of what I’m going to share just reinforces the general idea that Ari explained just now and it’s that contradiction in the hyper-development that we are seeing in the city rests upon a diversity narrative, a branding based on culture, identity, rooted in grassroots communities but the end result and the vision of development does not include our community.**

And it's just this thing that is felt everyday in Chinatown... Displacement is Pervasive."

- 54:20 - Shani Shi on "*creative placemaking* (for example, Chinese characters on the corporate big businesses and trash cans in the neighborhood) provides the context to make gentrification possible
- 58:00 - 59:30 - Shani Shi describing the "challenge of the fight" - compounding struggle most heavily shouldered by the people with the least time, resources, and bandwidth to address the problem
- 1:00:00 - 1:06:00 - Shani Shi offering **suggestions and helpful tips for artists, creatives, muralists, and makers navigating *creative placemaking* in the midst of rapid gentrification, displacement of humans, and immense suffering**
- 1:07:00 - 1:09:00 - Jay Forth describing the details of the effort to "clean-up" the K Street encampments in the middle of winter 2020
- 1:10:30 - 1:13:18 - Jay Forth explaining the concerned role of MPD, Reimbursable Detail, and other police presence in the Street Outreach Team security council meetings
 - "That already struck me as odd that homelessness would be considered a security issue. I thought of that as criminalization of people who are experiencing homelessness within these downtown areas... **These services that are meant for finding people housing were being used for soft policing people who are homeless in their neighborhoods.**"
- 1:13:20 - Jay Forth offers that bracketed under the fact that BIDs are gentrifying, displacement machines (that is what they are designed for), different BIDs have different people/approaches and so the possibilities for improvement or learning for these entities likewise vary
- 1:15:30 - 1:49:00 - Maurice Cook, observations and guidance from unmatched perspective:
 - 1:17:00 - Black people were designed to be placed in SW and now we're having that place of relegation taken from us
 - 1:18:00 - 1:20:00 - Background of why Serve Your City was started (as an angry response): those of us who were born and raised in this city pre-gentrification were always struggling with a lack of resources, a lack of tax revenue, organizing mutual aid because of a lack of access so to watch the wealth of resources that were being bridged into the city, especially with schools in white neighborhoods, was ...
 - 1:20:30 - **"This is open warfare on our space: I had to watch losing U Street...my heart is broken I can't even walk up Georgia Avenue... we're going through the pain of losing Martin Luther King Ave... M Street SE and SW - lost, taken, stolen... This is warfare."**

Peer-Index - Top Highlight

1:21:34 - **“I always take it back to the beginning: How can a people who built this city for free have no access to the resources readily available when people from all around the world take our resources and are able to maximize those resources for any type of goal that they might have.”**

“There are invisible walls in this city.” - Maurice Cook

Rest in Power [Ellen Wilson Dwellings](#)

Rest in Power [Arthur Capper](#)

Rest in Power [Ellen Wilson](#)

How do we protect what we have now so we don't lose anymore?

- 1:24:00 - Maurice Cook explains “the reason you see me working so hard all the time is because this city gifted me the blessing of not being othered, of being black + anonymous... That is the most powerful thing that someone can have to be anonymous and just be like everyone else. That's what we had here in Washington DC, being black. I didn't know growing up that there were places in other parts of the country that weren't like that... When people talk about other places, I say ‘yeah I get it but this was a Black majority city and it still is a majority black city.”
- 1:28:00 - Maurice Cook explaining the details of the NOMA (btw not a real neighborhood) [lights](#) in the underpass encampment

Housing is a human right. There should be no one living on the street. No one should have the security of housing while people have the potential of dying outside... that is an indictment on all of us. - Maurice Cook

- 1:31:30 - Maurice Cook explaining how nonsensical it is that people have a hard time finding community in DC: “I have personal feelings and nostalgic memories about all these locations and the beautiful community that everyone is looking for... No we had a wonderful Community in these locations.”
 - 1:33:18 - **“If people have the basics then we will have the capacity to fight. If we don't have to worry about working to death just to have the basics, then we will get there!” - Maurice Cook**
 - 1:34:20 - Maurice Cook pinpoints the great **THE IRONY** - the city is always sending emails to see if we can support them; they have never supported us financially.
 - **“You've been hired to do this.**
- “We're doing this because we have no choice, because this is our spirit. Anytime you see someone unhoused that is an indictment on all of us.” - Maurice Cook**