



DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND GENTRIFICATION: A TALE OF DOGS AND MEN AT THE SHAW DOG PARK

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"And any fool knows a dog needs a home, and shelter from pigs on the wing."—Pink
Floyd

Abstract: Engaging with the work of Derek Hyra and Setha Low, this paper examines the intersection between gentrification and the control (and erasure) of public space by focusing on cultural displacement--a process that is the result of gentrification as much as physical displacement is. It is intended as an exploration of a process, rather than offering a binary displacers vs. displaced view. The Shaw Dog Park, located in Washington, DC's Shaw neighborhood, was built on the former site of "La Canchita," a pick-up soccer court much beloved by immigrants and the previous residents of that area. The paper features extensive discourse analysis of all of the documents related to the erasure of the site's past, the rhetoric of "clean up," and also offers interviews with all of the actors affected and involved in the process. The goal is to present cultural displacement as just as disruptive a process as gentrification. The results point to the way that local governments participate in the process of displacement by creating an atmosphere of regulation of public space that excludes (tacitly or overtly) "undesirable" elements. The paper also finds that rather than thinking of gentrification as a function of class, it might be helpful to also consider it from the perspective of "older" vs. "newer" residents. Finally, the findings indicate that the inexorably quick pace of erasure is not accidental but a planned feature of displacement and one that, regardless of its intention, precludes voices of dissent from changing its course.

“Yeah, it's like Robin Hood, but strike that, and reverse it... rob from the poor and give to the rich.”—blog comment by “Drew.”

I first conceived this project as a study of cultural displacement, a process, I suggest, that is no less disruptive than the physical displacement that is often the outcome of gentrification. I examined the building of the Shaw Dog Park on 11th and Rhode Island Streets NW, in Washington, DC, on the former site of La Canchita, a pick-up soccer court. What I discovered was that sometimes, the best laid plans of dogs and men are just that; the heroes and the villains are the most unlikely ones; community is elusive but can be found on asphalt, gravel, or concrete...and that a discourse of us vs. them is not a good lens for studying gentrification. So, here's a tale of two packs laying claim to the same turf.

Theoretical Background

A place is a meaningful site that combines location (the geographical situation of a place), locale (its physical and material characteristics), and a sense of place (the feelings and emotions that are introduced by a place, especially through representation) (Anguelovski 47). Local social relations and their links to a broader system produce a place over time. People shape places through their interactions with each other and with their locale, and places shape residents through the political and physical processes that intervene in their lives.

Place attachment is an essential characteristic of people's feeling toward a place, and it is defined as an affective bond between people and places. It provides a sense of security and well-being, defines boundaries between groups, and anchors memories, especially against the passage of time. The ties that exist among residents are based on

connections between people who live there and also on the setting, building layout, and characteristics of public or semipublic places. For example--“narrow streets and alleys allow people to develop social and cultural outdoor activities so that residents recreate a piece of village life and build connections to each other” (Anguelovski 47).

Place attachment is indelibly tied to questions of identity. The relationship of people to a place and the feelings they develop toward it contribute to the formation and protection of their identity. Place identity is shaped through interactions that create values and beliefs. The identity of a place is often the object of controversies, conflicts, and traumas. “The loss of place has devastating consequences for protecting individual and collective memory and identity as well as restoring mental wellness. When planners displace people and demolish houses, they leave residents homeless physically and mentally as their memories are destroyed” (Anguelovski 48).

Parks hold an especially important place in public consciousness. I would argue that to romanticize parks as some sort of idyllic haven of inclusivity would belie a much more complicated reality. To some residents, the newly “cleaned-up” parks are a poignant reminder that the parks used to be a dangerous place they could never allow their children to go to. To some, they may actually serve to foster a greater feeling of safety: “In the environmental arena, neighborhood green space plays multiple roles for low-income populations and residents of color. Residents use public spaces with plants and trees to develop social contacts with each other and feel less vulnerable in their neighborhood” (Anguelovski 49). As playgrounds and parks encourage children and youth to play outside

freely, they also increase the sense of safety for families and create a dynamic outdoor and street life (Newman 103).

Parks are seen as stages for urban behavior, where residents from all walks of life and forced to interact and socialize. The underlying assumption of being “forced” to interact will be revisited later. They are where the social is drawn into a dialogue with nature. “Parks can function as an unpredictable commons of a city and as such are a threat to any political order that invokes the idealized notion of the ‘public’ as a claim to legitimacy. Therefore parks, public squares, and open spaces in general are a source of continual anxiety for those seeking to safeguard normative definitions of the public. Parks and public spaces are continually subject to efforts to “fix’ what can be viewed as unruly vibrant commons” (Newman 74). Therefore, control of the public space is important on both an ideological and literal level. As areas of protest and dissent, parks are monitored and regulated by power impositions framed as preserving of law, order, and public safety.

Gentrification brings to the forefront clashing ideologies on public space. The more romantic view of public space as where people can come together organically and in an unrestrained sense is in direct contrast to the view of public space as a place of ordered, controlled “recreation.” Recreation is re-created and created by rules—what constitutes “recreation” is very much a contested process. Setha M. Low, an anthropologist who studies public spaces in New York City, believes such spaces are becoming increasingly off limits. As parks get beautified, she argues, poor people feel uncomfortable in what increasingly feels like an elite landscape.

Affluent residents and tourists appreciate heavily-policed public spaces, while minority residents, fearful of harassment, avoid those places. Teenagers avoid spaces with long lists of rules and regulations; the homeless are deterred by police harassment and perverse contraptions meant to prevent them from even so much as laying down on a park bench. Street vendors, part of the fabric of street life, feel increasingly beleaguered. Low says, "We're becoming more homogeneous in our neighborhoods -- not less -- while the city is becoming more heterogeneous over all."

In his research, "Social Exclusion and Space," Ali Madanipour explains the ways in which our world is divided by physical, economic, and social barriers. One's ability to move freely through spaces gives one a sense of pride, while "some members of society are excluded in the 'mainstream' and where this exclusion is painful for the excluded and harmful for society as a whole" (Madanipour 159). Urbanist Mike Davis explains that with privatization of space comes the marginalization and exclusion of "unsavory" populations. "The universal and ineluctable consequence of this crusade to secure the city is the destruction of accessible public space. The contemporary opprobrium attached to the term 'street person' is in itself a harrowing index of the devaluation of public spaces" (Davis 180). Socio-spatial exclusionary forces characterize all built landscapes: "A combination of formalized rules and regulations, informal codes and signs, and fears and desires control our spatial behavior and alert us to the limitations on our access. Through these, we have come to know whether we can enter a place, are welcomed in another and excluded from others. More restrictions on our access to our surroundings would bring about the feeling of being trapped, alienated and excluded from our social space" (Madanipour 162). These types of exclusionary forces are especially palpable in gentrifying neighborhoods.

In her article “Of Dogs and Men: The Making of Spatial Boundaries in a Gentrifying Neighborhood,” Sylvie Tissot argues that animals play an interesting role in the processes of social inclusion and exclusion in a gentrifying neighborhood. She writes that residents who move into mixed-income, “inner-city” neighborhoods generally express a taste for diversity, while simultaneously attempting to distance themselves from “undesirables.” Dogs and the resultant dog parks are a symbol of newcomers’ attempts to control their environment and they allow for a discourse of a “diverse community” to be deployed (i.e. all dog owners are welcome to these parks). In reality, this mythical “diverse community” simply never materializes.

Pets constitute social markers, and relationships to them are also based on contrasting socioeconomic norms—for example, “doggie spas” and other such markers of affluence are not available or socially accepted for people of different socio-economic statuses. The market has been very responsive in catering to the new class of “yuppies,” as I have come to jokingly call them. Case in point: there are now “Yappy Hours” with taglines such as “Looking for a way to spend quality time with your friends and Fido at a local bar or restaurant? Try a Yappy Hour, where pets attendance isn't just allowed, it's encouraged.” By extension, dog parks perpetuate this marking of social territory, if you will.

Dog parks are loci of processes of both inclusion and exclusion, especially from a dialectic perspective. Gentrifiers actively use public spaces to create social boundaries; to define insiders and outsiders. The spatial boundaries allow them to distinguish themselves from the poor, long-term minority residents of the neighborhood, but this relationship is ambivalent and fraught. On one hand, gentrifiers staunchly defend dog parks as spaces for

“everyone” and as communal gathering spots that encourage friendship building of a genuinely inclusive nature.

They also deploy a rhetoric of difference from “those people living in the suburbs.” The kind of commitment to community discussed so frequently is intended to be in sharp contrast to the “anonymity, isolation, and homogeneity of the suburbs.” Discourses about the dog park are of a liberal bent, connoting openness to ethnic and sexual minorities. In the Charles Park Association document that Tissot studied, dog parks are described as “where people from different racial, religious, social, and economic backgrounds meet and recreate together with their pets” (Tissot 265)

On the other hand, a concurrent narrative thread about the particularistic rights of dog owners is also in place. The dog park is supposed to be good for the community and not only for dog owners because it builds relationships in an urban space. But dog owners are quick to stress another—perhaps paradoxical—point at length in their letters: “that dog owners pay taxes, and as such, are entitled to have a space adapted to their specific use. Like parents for whose children the neighborhood maintains playgrounds, ‘dog parents,’ as one letter says, are also entitled to specific, dedicated space” (Tissot 270).

Conspicuously absent from the conversation is any mention of the potential conflicts among park users and among dog owners of different socioeconomic status or race, and when they do, it is only through euphemism or feigned unawareness. In his article “The Back-to-the-City Movement: Neighbourhood Redevelopment and Processes of Political and Cultural Displacement” Director of American University’s Metropolitan Policy Center Dr. Derek Hyra, discusses the resultant political and culture displacement and feelings of

community loss. Some long-term DC residents are not as enthusiastic about dog parks.

“Marshall Brown, a political strategist and father of former DC City Council Chair, Kwame Brown, stated, ‘They [the new white residents] want doggie parks and bike lanes. The result is a lot of tension. The new people believe more in their dogs than they do in people...This is not the District I knew. There’s no relationship with the black community. They don’t connect at the church, they don’t go to the same cafes, they don’t volunteer in the neighborhood school, and a lot of longtime black residents feel threatened’” (Hyra 1766).

The way in which this cultural displacement takes place is quite clear—new residents are better able to lobby and navigate the channels of power to effect the changes they want to see. Long-term residents or immigrant residents, distrustful of byzantine bureaucracy and police authority, lack the political will power to advocate for their needs. They also often do not receive much of a warning about changes afoot. “As new upper- and middle-income residents have come into the community, some have joined civic associations, seized political power and have advocated for policies, including limited parking, the removal of go-go clubs, bikes lanes and dog parks, which cater to their tastes and preferences. The combination of the political takeover and development of new amenities is associated with fear, resentment and civic withdrawal among some long-term, African-American residents” (Hyra 1767).

According to NeighborhoodInfoDC (http://www.neighborhoodinfodc.org/wards/nbr_prof_wrd2.html), the total population in Ward 2, where the Shaw Dog Park is located, was 56,986 in 1980. It rose to 76,883 by 2010. The percentage of African-American residents halved—in 1990, it was

19%; by 2010, it was 9.8%. The Latino population has stayed fairly consistent at around 10%, with a 2% increase in the “foreign-born” residents.

Shaw Dog Park



In November 2008, the first DC area official off-leash dog park was built. The dog park is a 15,000 square foot fenced enclosure with pea gravel and small stone surface floor where dogs can roam off their leashes. It likely cost the city at least several hundred thousand dollars to construct. The dog park was the product of an extensive advocacy effort. With political pressures from ANCs and civic associations, the city agreed to build the dog park. The Shaw Middle School (not in use since 2006) playground, where the dog park is located, also contains basketball courts and a soccer field (on top of an old baseball diamond, which has never been used for baseball). At the time of the dog park’s construction, no resources were dedicated to other playground amenities, which were in need of desperate upgrading. The soccer goals were askew and the field was mainly dirt. The basketball courts had not been renovated since at least 1995. While soccer fields and

basketball courts, which are often used by Hispanics and African Americans, are neglected, newcomer amenities are developed and upgraded (Hyra 1765).

According to the Shaw Dog Park website ("Park History"), in 2005, the Dog Owners of Greater Shaw Yahoo Group formed to advocate for a permanent, legal dog park in the Shaw and Logan Circle neighborhood. In November of the same year, the D.C. Council passed a law allowing for the creation of dog parks. In May 2008, under the auspices of the MidCity Residents Association (MCRA), a neighborhood non-profit organization, the Shaw Dog Park application was filed, with 400 petitioners supporting the application. In November 2008, the Shaw Dog Park opened with then-Mayor Adrian Fenty "cutting the leash." In 2011, the Shaw Dog Park Association (SDPA) incorporated in D.C. as a non-profit organization, separating from MCRA. The IRS granted 501(c) 3 tax-exempt status to SDPA, allowing all contributions to the organization to be treated as charitable donations.

The mission statement of the Shaw Dog Park states that it is a "public dog park that was developed and built by the city of Washington, DC." The Shaw Dog Park Association is made up of "Shaw citizen volunteers that have a committed and vested interest in ensuring that Shaw Dog Park meets its main mission of providing a clean, safe and open environment for *responsible* dog owners and their dogs to visit." I am placing the emphasis on responsible so we can unpack this a little bit.

Meet George Kassouf, the park's Godfather, or as I called him, The Dogfather. He is the one-man show that built a field of doggie dreams (he built it and they came). George kindly agreed to be interviewed by me. If you are expecting me to characterize him as some sort of Machiavellian Yappie Overlord, I'll just say George is a far cry from that. I met a man

who had lived in the neighborhood for the last 13 years, who simply loves his dogs. A “tail/tale of two cities” was my immediate feeling about this. George told me he was unaware of La Canchita or even less, of people being displaced. In truth, later on, in examining his dog park proposal, I see that he was aware and did try to find space for La Canchita...so, perhaps, a better statement would be that he was unaware what impact his work would have. He recounted to me seeing games played, yet seemed absolutely baffled that this might have been a space that held such a prominence in the hearts and minds of people. If he did, he masked it really well by repeatedly reassuring me that all the neighborhood ANC and civic organizations supported the dog park. He insisted that the area had been nothing but a crime magnet, a space riddled with drug users and drunks (he even produced a picture of a needle on the ground as “proof”), using three trees as cover for their nefarious activities. George pointed me to a letter by a Police Lieutenant attesting to the fact that this area was in dire need of a clean-up (I will address this letter later). I saw the trees, which were the “original trees,” and was a bit hard-pressed to understand how anyone could hide under the lush canopies of these...shrubs, but as I said before, George appeared genuine enough for me to accept this as fact.

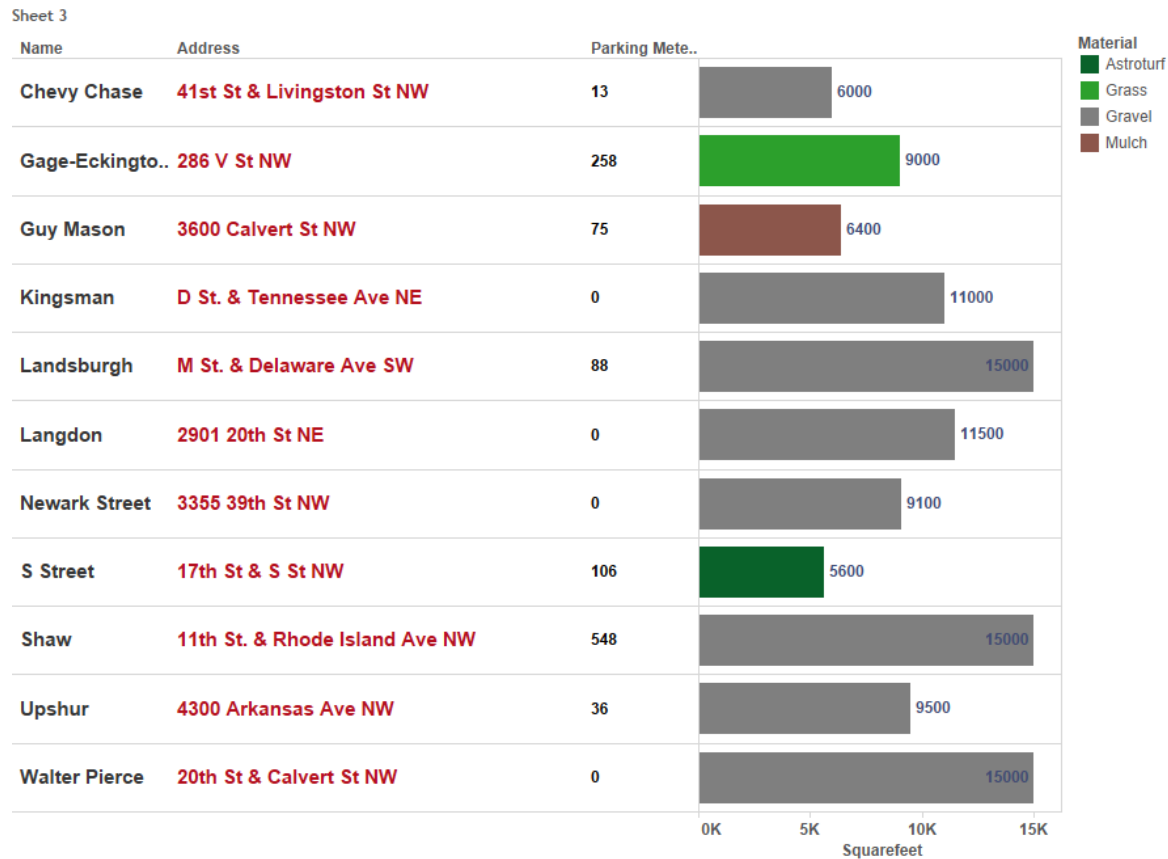
One major take away from the conversation was how business-as-usual politics is done in DC, sadly—apparently, alike in the lower and upper echelons of power. George’s application for the park had been languishing in the dusty bins of the Department of Parks and Recreation. One day, Councilmember Jack Evans gave George notice that Evans would be going on a walk-through with Mayor Fenty—a fairly routine occurrence. George immediately asked to join this walk-through. Surely enough, upon George’s inquiring about the status of the dog park, the Mayor responded with sheer alacrity and a “well, why don’t

we do it here” (referring to the current site). The Mayor had not even seen George’s application--talk about this being a true case of “face time,” “who you know,” and all the other clichés of DC politics. Had George not been fortuitously along for the Mayor’s walk-through, the Shaw Dog Park might have never been built.



Let’s talk about the park. Prior to meeting George, I had visited the park quite a few times at different times in the day, doing some participant observation. The park always struck me as an incredibly sad place—imposing fencing and wire surrounded everything; on the ground, gray gravel; the “trees” sitting in forbidding wooden boxes, with stones piled on top of their soil. As a tree lover, I admired their tenacity in spite of these Spartan conditions. I saw nothing but gray and confinement. I felt pent-in—I suppose an experience dogs are, sadly, all too familiar with. It felt restricted, constricting, and just plain desolate--gritty urban cum yappie chicue? By the way, as the diagram below illustrates, gravel is the

base of choice in dog parks around the city:



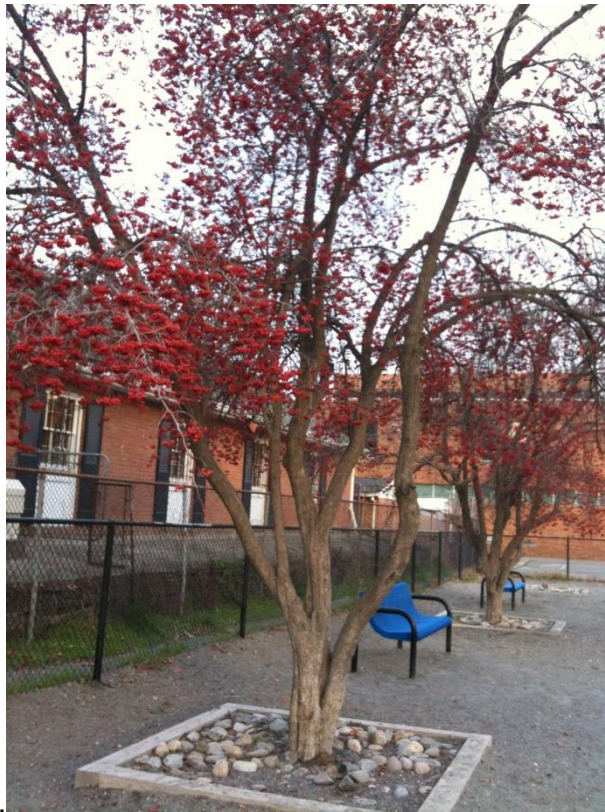
For the life of me, I could not fathom why anyone would go there (and I am not saying this sarcastically, I want to underline). I was simply baffled. Almost every time I went there, I saw people sitting by themselves on the austere metal benches, staring at their phones listlessly while their dogs made equally listless circles. Talk about a microcosm of DC! I did not see the camaraderie, the community, or the fun that this was supposed to be. Below is a picture of the Easter egg hunt the park held for its denizens. I couldn't help but feel that this was a true example of the commodification of dogs as status symbols—does what you see below seem more fun for the dogs or the owners? It just spoke to me of the “regulation of recreation” concept I brought up in the theory section—

that recreation and fun has to be scheduled in a capitalist society and commodified wherever possible.



It wasn't until I talked to George that I grasped something really important—that the users of this park thought of it as a “socialization” for their dogs. It was more about letting your dog go off-leash and play with other dogs, which would be something unacceptable on a city sidewalk, than walking your dog. My first question to him was why would anyone choose to go to this drab place (doggy jail, as I called it), when one could walk freely on the streets!? This is when it dawned on me that this gentrification we are talking about here is **not** humans vs. dogs. It's more human insistence on keeping a pet no matter the living arrangement. Most of the new residents in the neighborhood have dogs.

Yet, urban living, not created with a dog in mind, necessitates the creation of these artificial



“doggie playdate” scenarios.

Ultimately, dog parks are a microcosm of gentrification in the sense that just as dogs act as identity markers for their owners, so are dog parks markers of the regulation of public space. The Shaw Dog Park is maintained by volunteers. Even though every owner is responsible for cleaning up after his/her dog, volunteers still have to spray the gravel with disinfectant every week. No unregistered dogs are permitted inside the park; no non-immunized dogs are either. If you just found a stray on the street and are too poor to take him to the vet or license him with the city, neither he nor you are welcome there. The dog park has set hours. If your dog is aggressive with other dogs and harms any, you are responsible. These might sound like “minor” regulations meant to ensure “responsible”

owner use, but, I would argue, they are manifestations of a climate of regulation where even the simple act of letting your dog play with another dog is surveilled and managed.

And the socialization of the dogs? Good question. George pointed to that as one of the greatest benefits of coming to the park. But would this be something of value if the dog were not an identity marker? In other words, does it have any value beyond showing off the obedience of your pet? George extolled the virtues of getting to meet people he would have never met otherwise—and he is right, but he also said, “I might not know their names, but I know their dogs’ names.” To harken back to my earlier discussion of theory, this “community,” in a sense, is far less inclusive than we might imagine, though not purposely so. Just picture this—an inner-city youth walks into the park with an unregistered pit bull...would he be as welcomed there as anybody else? I want to believe so, but I can’t speak to that as throughout my entire time doing participant observation in the park, I did not see any Latino or African-American residents using it. When I asked George about that, he pointedly answered, “Well, there is no ‘Whites Only’ sign.” He is, in fact, right.



But I do wonder whether poorer residents avoid the park for fear that if their dog is to “rough up” any other dog, they would not be able to address the costs of this sort of an encounter. One of the reviews of the park on Yelp spoke to this very idea: “People in this park are generally not that friendly. Not mean, but not friendly. My attitude changed, however, when my dog was savagely attacked in this park, and no one there offered to do a thing to help. The owner of the attacking dog did not come forward to claim responsibility either. My friend had a similar experience there. I will not be returning to this park in the future. I’ve been to a number of dog parks across the country and have never experienced such complete apathy.”

The Shaw Dog Park is the largest off-leash dog park in Washington, DC with its 15,000 square foot area. In an interview with Borderstan (“George Kassouf”), George

Kassouf explained the impetus behind the park's creation: "Frankly, I just got tired of getting kicked off of fields for letting my dog off-leash. I learned that there were other dog owners around the District organizing for legal dog parks, and I joined forces with them. As far as Shaw Dog Park goes, it really was a team effort of dog owners and non-dog-owners alike, the police, community groups, ANCs [Advisory Neighborhood Commissions], and at least one PTA, believe it or not. Perhaps, I was just the most dogged — I wouldn't accept no as an answer. But it definitely wouldn't have happened without the intervention of ANC 2C Commissioner Alex Padro, Councilmember Jack Evans [D-Ward 2] and then-Mayor Adrian Fenty."

Kassouf characterizes the park as a communal space, while deploying the "doggie parents" argument brought up in theory section of this paper. "The dog park is our own front porch, where we can gather after work to relax and spend time with our best friends and perhaps some new friends. And for those who might criticize spending money on dog parks, I'd argue, we spend gobs of money building soccer fields not for soccer balls but for soccer players; we construct tennis courts for tennis players, not tennis balls. The same applies to dog parks; it's for the dog owners."

Below is a post by Jack Evans on the Renew Shaw blog. The comments below it exemplify the concerns over gentrification and dogs vs. people. I have purposely left all posts in their original, unedited format. "I am pleased to announce construction has began on the new dog park near Shaw Jr. High School site – and at my request the project has been expanded to 15,000 square feet. On a walk-thru the community in September, Mayor Adrian Fenty promised the Shaw/Logan neighborhoods this much needed urban amenity,

which was originally slated to be 10,000 square feet. Working with the Department of Parks and Recreation, after numerous requests from constituents in these Ward 2 neighborhoods, I asked for and secured the larger area. The dog park which will be located on the soccer fields near 11th and R is eagerly awaited. The park will open in the near future—stay tuned for the ribbon-cutting date and time! – Jack Evans” (Rez).

Becca said...

what about all the people who used to play soccer there?

October 17, 2008

Drew said...

 Yeah, it's like Robin Hood, but strike that, and reverse it... rob from the poor and give to the rich.

October 18, 2008

In response to questions about why the Latino community was displaced by the park's construction, ANC Commissioner Alex Padro, at least admits to the presence of a soccer field there, yet promptly dispatches any concerns by positing the new site as an improvement on the crime. Noteworthy is his assertion that the users of the soccer field were not local residents—a fact clearly non-verifiable, but one that affirms that the dog park, unlike the soccer field, is clearly intended for local residents only. So much for inclusivity.

“As a Latino myself, I take offense to the suggestion that the motivation for the location of the Shaw Dog Park was to displace a resource for the Hispanic community. The truth is that

the siting of the park was made easier by the fact that the soccer enclosure had been the source of innumerable complaints about public drunkenness and unruly and anti-social behavior, uncontrolled trash, public urination and defecation, etc. MPD has had been routinely sending bicycle officers to the site at night, even deep into the AM hours, to address the complaints and illegal activity, and making arrests when the offenders have not scattered as soon as an officer appeared, as was generally the case. Further, the vast majority of the individuals who were using the soccer enclosure and generating the complaints drove vehicles with Maryland tags. MPD Lt. Michael Smith concurred with the recommendation that a dog park should replace the soccer enclosure, which is not to be reestablished at the Shaw Recreation Center site. I suggested to DPR that they move it to a rec center that was able to properly secure the site after hours in order to prevent the illegal activities that made the Shaw location such a blight.”

Alexander M. Padro

Commissioner, ANC 2C01

October 18, 2008

Anonymous said...

Alex makes some good points but I think this is a pretty clear example of gentrification. I tend to think of Shaw as being a little better about sensitivity to older residents than some other neighborhoods, but not really in this case.

EdTheRed said...

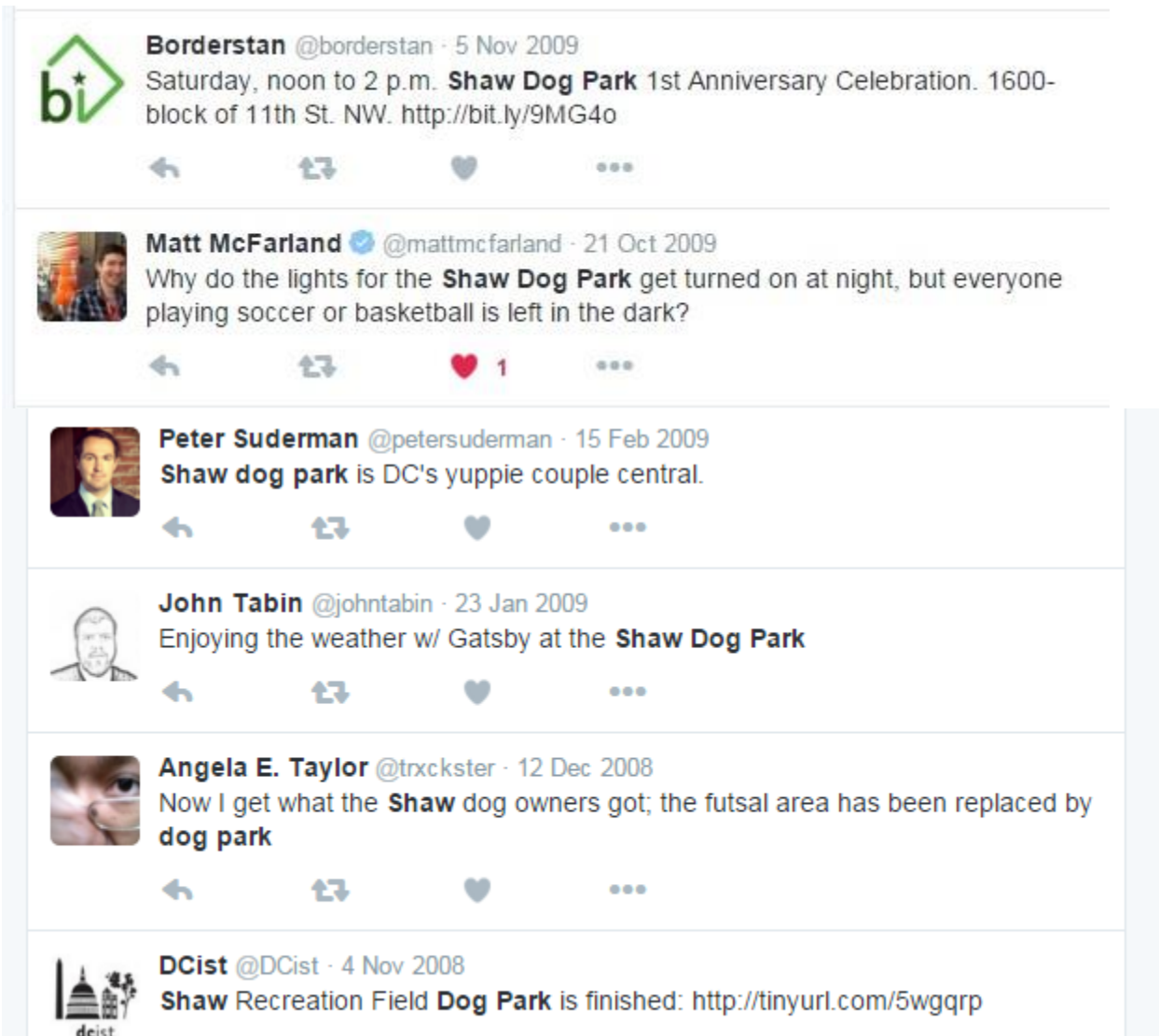
What's next? Converting the Shaw basketball courts to squash courts? How about a Caribou Coffee where the skate park is now?

October 28, 2008

Canchita said...

Yeah, wonderful addition, plenty of room for everyone, so why the f**k did they tear down the soccer court? Why not put it right on top the useless baseball diamond?! Or the skate park, which sucks for skating anyway.

Users on Twitter expressed similar sentiments:



The Shaw Dog Park was constructed in less than three weeks and “replaced a concrete *fútbol rápido* field” (Mathis). The fast pace of construction is telling when

considered in the context of how long it takes to build other, arguably, much more needed city amenities. This also explains why the previous occupants of this area had no time to respond to their displacement. It is hard not to view this as something planned and used as a tactic to quell dissenting voices.



George was extremely forthcoming and helpfully shared with me the original application with the Department of Parks and Recreation, as well as all supporting documents. The application shows an awareness of the use of the field for pick-up soccer games (he refers to canchita as mini arena, to clarify) and proposes the moving of the canchita to the baseball diamond area next to the dog park: “Beyond the northern boundaries of the baseball outfield is an enclosed, paved soccer/hockey mini-arena, which measures approximately 4,000 square feet. To the north of this paved area is a row of shade trees which, because of the cover and concealment they provide, is a magnet for

daytime and nighttime drunkenness, drug distribution, gambling and fights. Officers patrolling the area have commented about this persistent problem.

DOGS proposes that the mini-arena be moved to one of the un-designated parcels east or southeast of the athletic field and that a dog park be established in its place. The proposed dog park would sit beyond the boundaries of the athletic field, and full use of the athletic field and relocated mini-arena would thus continue. Finally, placing the mini-arena in a more observable area will deter criminal activity. PSA 307 Commander Lt. Michael Smith endorses this plan.”

In justifying the need for a dog park, George cites over 500 signatures of supporters and dog owners on the petition. He also rightly points to the heavy regulation of space that is the hallmark of city living: “because of the dense nature of the neighborhoods, very little undesignated green space exists for dog owners to play with their unleashed pets. School playgrounds, athletic fields and federal parkland remain off-limits. Logan Circle itself, a recognized haven and meeting place for many dog-owners, is under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service, which has a policy of prohibiting dog parks on federal land.” George characterizes the relocation of the “mini arena” as a “response to specific, changing user needs.”

Below is a statement from a local Police Lieutenant, PSA 307 Commander Michael Smith, dated May 5, 2008:

“As a resident of Shaw and a dog owner combined with the responsibility of enforcement, I see all sides. A dog parks is enjoyed by more than just dog owners. The last time I visited

one with my dog in Arlington (where the city's existing dog park is located), I saw families, couples and bicyclist enjoy visiting with and watching dogs frolic.

Where else can you find free entertainment in this city, fresh air and creatures that provide unlimited, unprejudiced friendliness?

Dogs cannot be expected to live their lives never leaving their yard, or in most cases here, their condo - it is against their nature. You would go crazy, too, if you were kept in solitary confinement.

A dog park gives a place to exercise your dogs without offending the neighbors. It is likely that there are fewer dogs turned in to shelters because people who frequent dog parks share information and helpful behavioral advice, not to mention that a tired dog is a good dog.

As for the financial aspect, unused land serves no interest for the taxpayers. That is really a small amount in the grand scheme of things in this city, the Nation's Capitol.

In Shaw, that are several location publicly own that I never see anyone use. Yes they are nearby by playgrounds, but these are the same playgrounds that I see homeless drinking, drugs sales and usage. It would be only a good to have an adult dog owners playing with their dogs in sight of these locations. That in itself is a crime deterrent and an extension of my law enforcement capabilities.

I just hope that people use the dog park responsibly and follow the rules so that everyone can enjoy it for a long time to come."

The ambiguous language used in this letter is tremendous fodder for discourse analysis, so I examine it from that perspective. He first characterizes the land as “public and unused.” Confusingly, he then admits that, yes, it is next to playgrounds, immediately relying on a “protect the children” narrative, which is absolutely irrelevant in this instance as this area had not been a “playground” since 2006, when Shaw Middle School stopped operating, and was certainly never frequented by children. The term “homeless drinking” is also incredibly alarming—are we to assume that is one and the same thing!? That homeless people should be banned from all parks and that they, inevitably, always drink!? In other words, via their presence alone, they pose a threat!?

Lt. Smith’s suggestion that dog parks are “not just for dog owners” is also plainly ludicrous—“free entertainment” for non-dog-owners!? Sure, as long as you don’t have Maryland license plates and take up local parking spots! That would definitely be unacceptable. Noteworthy is also his assertion that a dog would go crazy if he/she is kept in solitary confinement, i.e. a condo. Clearly, the onus and responsibility of a dog’s lifestyle lies with its owner—to suggest that dog owners are oblivious to the issues of keeping a dog in a tiny space, without proper exercise, is patronizing to those owners. Finally, keeping a dog in a condo is “against their nature.” Tissot wrote about the rhetoric of differentiation from their suburban counterparts that urban dog owners use, explaining that they live in the city for the “vibrant, diverse community.” I am sure she would note this all to be a prime example of wanting to have the social advantages of city living, yet refusing to recognize the constraints of space that also come along with them.



Canchita

The “canchita”—as it was referred to by those who played there—originates from the Spanish word *cancha* or “court/field” Shaw’s canchita is a small soccer enclosure with steel walls that are used in the play. The pitch measures approximately 80 ft in length and 40 ft in width, and is optimal for four-on-four player games.

The canchita game is fast-paced. Similar in speed and strategy to futsal, players engage in quick passing and calculated touches on the ball. The rules of play are simple. Teams consist of four players—three field players and a goalie. Once a full side is assembled, a member of the team yells: “*Equipo Nuevo!*” or “*New Team!*” This enters the team into the queue to play. A team remains on the canchita until it loses.

The players at the canchita were an eclectic bunch. Most were first or second-generation immigrants, of Honduran, Venezuelan, El Salvadorian, Mexican, and Guatemalan descent, but there were players from many other ethnicities as well, including plenty of Americans. Canchita had many regulars. During the warmer months (March to October),

there were on average 40-45 players during the late afternoon and early evening daily. Because the players rotated into play so frequently (games are, on average, 6 minutes long), everyone got a chance to play.

I conducted interviews with five canchita players from very diverse backgrounds (see Interview Addendum). They all described a very communal and meaningful experience that far eclipsed what one would imagine for an athletic meet. Tim Djawotho recounts: “Met up with friends and strangers and played Monday through Friday 5:30pm until sun down. Sometimes longer. Met players I still play with today. People brought families and children there. Very unfortunate it was turned into a dog park.” Joe Schoenbauer: “There was a great expectation to show up to canchita every day after work as soon as possible to try to get as many games in as possible. There was a good group of players that would show up most every day that would play and have fun for hours. Mostly young adults in their 20-30s, but some teenagers and kids and older guys as well. The field itself was special as well. It reminded me of what you see in other countries where soccer is such a major part of the culture – free pickup soccer in a small court with goals that encourages quick, skillful type games.” Another respondent recounts what was unique about the set-up of canchita and the game itself: “I moved to the neighborhood, and one day I saw a bunch of people playing at Canchita. The court was a unique set-up, because there were seats built into the frame, so people who weren’t playing at the time, could sit and watch the action. One day I sat down and started watching, and then I joined a team and started playing. For a time, during the summer I used to play about 3-4 times a week after work. I liked that anyone could play, and I liked the atmosphere and style of play. It was

quick and team work was needed. There wasn't anything that I didn't like. I came to be friends with a lot of people who played there. It was a fun atmosphere."



Every one of the interviewees expressed having no awareness whatsoever that a dog park was being planned on the site of the pick-up soccer field. "Not until one day when I biked by and it had been mostly torn down already and bulldozers were present." "My reaction was surprise and disappointment. It happened all of a sudden, without warning. There was no announcement, no warning, no meeting. The canchita was a semi-permanent structure that was used every day. I thought that there could've been room for both, if they wanted to add a dog park. But with canchita, it was typical of what people who may be against gentrification are saying. Rich residents with dogs, are more important than prior residents."

The view all of the interviewees had of gentrification was of priorities shifting towards the interests of newcomers, instead of the long-time residents of the

neighborhood. They didn't always speak in term of poor vs. rich but rather in terms of old vs. new residents. "The thing about the dog park was that it seemed as if they were prioritizing dogs, over people. The canchita court was being used every day. And it brought together people from the neighborhood. I still see people from Canchita in the city every so often and we know each other. People that I probably wouldn't have interacted with otherwise."



"Everyone in the whole community was coming to play," said Salvador Martínez Arias, 47. Once in a while, he said, people would call the police if someone was suspected of drinking alcohol. "It didn't bother us if people made calls, though, because we didn't want them there, either" (Ricard). "No one even stayed to say, 'Hey, do you guys like playing here?' "said Eli Sipos. "We just showed up one day, and it was gone" (Ricard).



It is cogent that the same argument used by the dog park creators (“this park allows me to interact with people I would not otherwise be able to meet”) is used by the canchita players as well—that the park was a drawing point for people even outside the neighborhood, from various walks of life, to interact in a truly communal sense. Perhaps relevant here is that, unlike the canchita players, the Shaw Dog Park users felt some apprehension about “outsiders” (meaning people from other neighborhoods) encroaching on their hard-kept turf, both literally in using up parking spaces and facilities but also metaphorically in relying on the political work of the creators of the park instead of creating dog parks in their own neighborhoods.



Canchita is significant in that it also represents a model of sports participation that is threatened by the regulation-centric ethos of D.C. Parks and Recreation. Players and activists argue that gentrification and permit requirements for field usage create an environment of field shortage. The players, many of whom are undocumented Latino immigrants, are fearful of authorities, as a result, and less able to advocate for their rights due to language and access barriers. Unable to afford the fees required to join organized soccer leagues (\$70 and upwards), they are reliant on pickup soccer games (Ricard). Tom, one of the former canchita players said, “the sports leagues are cool too, unless they are displacing people that have been using these ‘public’ spaces for years...I would think that at least several pick-up spots have been taken over by leagues that pay to use fields. I have seen a kickball league take over a field that Latinos have been playing on for years. Guess they got a permit or something.”

In conclusion, we would be remiss to characterize the dog park residents as the villainous gentrifiers who uprooted a community that was less vocal and politically active than them. The structural forces of neighborhood change are inexorable and the euphemistic misnomer of “development” can’t whitewash the razing of culture and the spaces that are so linked to it. Government control of public space is more than physical. Under the auspices of “safety,” regulation, regimentation, confinement, and boundary-making become the tactics of choice for controlling the memories and experiences of the city’s residents. Those unable to navigate the byzantine channels of bureaucracy or gain access to the ear of those that would listen are left out. Their voices are never heard in the din of bulldozers that quickly erase any trace of what might have been. I tried to give these voices a forum.

Yet, the biggest takeaway from this project is that hope, like grass, does spring eternal—George Kassouf kindly extended an invitation to join forces and lobby the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation to rebuild Canchita, as he had initially requested that they not destroy it but rather move it. I remain hopeful that this will happen. *“Nuevo Equipo!”*

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