



PLANS TO PROSPER YOU:
REFLECTIONS OF BLACK RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE
IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY'S POTOMAC RIVER VALLEY

PROJECT • SPACE

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Dedication

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

Jeremiah 29:11-15
(New International Version)

For the ancestors of yesterday and their labors of love—
They paved a way out of darkness.

For the communities of today and their continued faith—
They persist towards the light in spite of the world.

For the generations of tomorrow and their unbridled hope—
They carry the torch of a brighter future.

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Acknowledgements

2 First and foremost, neither the planning nor production of this exhibition would have been possible without the commitment and counsel of our community collaborators: Macedonia-Moses, Scotland, and Tobytown. These revered communities of Montgomery County welcomed us into their sacred spaces: their churches, their homes, their hearts. They took a leap of faith, believed in our intentions and ambitions, and transformed a mere idea into the multi modal, interdisciplinary project to which we now bear witness. Mr. Harvey Matthews, Dr. Marsha Coleman-Adebayo, Rev. Segun Adebayo, the congregation of Macedonia Baptist Church, The Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition, Dr. Amy Rispin, Rev. Quintin Borders, Mr. Chuck Williams, Ms. Eileen Barnett, Ms. Cheryl Harris, Ms. Bernice Dove, Ms. Barbara Thompson, Ms. Janet Ross, Ms. Francine Scott, the congregation of Scotland AME Zion Church, Rev. Melvin Martin, and members of the Tobytown community—thank you.

We would be remiss not to mention the historical society of Montgomery County, Montgomery History, and our deep gratitude for their treasure trove of resources and their attentive staff. In particular, if not for librarian and archivist Sarah Hedlund's overwhelming support and sincere commitment to the success of this exhibition, its execution would have been in no way possible.

Plans To Prosper You is largely indebted to partnerships across the American University campus that have all worked to bring the project to its best form. We were incredibly fortunate to have Mr. Ronald Cunningham's vast recollections of interconnected Black histories within Montgomery County—the depths of his memory knows no bounds. After learning of the significance of the project and the aspirations for a visual component, AU Museum Director & Curator Dr. Jack Rasmussen moved mountains to offer *Plans To Prosper You* a quality display in the American University Museum's summer exhibition. Moreover, his class, "Curating the AU Museum," contributed the curatorial and registerial expertise necessary to bring this exhibition to professional standards. Working together with the University Archives

and Special Collections provided methodological training in multimedia collections management and processing essential to the maintenance of exhibition materials. Leslie Nellis, whose archival and repertorial mastery was foundational to these tasks and more, deserves a special acknowledgment for consistently going above and beyond the call of duty.

Last but certainly not least, the unwavering support from the faculty, staff, and students in the Department of Anthropology provided the encouragement necessary to push through every impediment and impossibility this project faced. Sometimes the invisible labor of care and compassion carries more weight than all else.



Foreword

Abby Swaringam
MA Student, Art History

This project is a collaboration between graduate students in several different fields of study at American University in the spring of 2019. Art history, arts management, and studio art graduate students have worked in collaboration with anthropology and public history graduate students to create *Plans to Prosper You: Reflections of Black Resistance and Resilience in Montgomery County's Potomac River Valley*. The project arose out of the American University Museum's desire to offer itself as a highly trafficked space to support local Black communities' history in light of gentrification and racism in its own neighborhood. Collaboration between multiple departments arose out of an interest in bringing more interdisciplinary and risky work into the museum setting. Dr. Jack Rasmussen's class, "Curating the AU Museum," has been learning and thinking about museum practices and testing the limits of presentation. This exhibition and our upcoming fall 2019 exhibition, *Moves Like Walter: New Curators Find Signs of Life in the Corcoran Legacy Collection*, are both results of our recent studies. They combine the participants' varied approaches to museum function, art culture, and art historical research.

Plans to Prosper You has proved to be particularly productive, as well as challenging for us as students of art. An exhibition displaying a community's history rather than their art is atypical of usual art museum exhibitions. However, this exhibition has caused us to reconsider the potential of the museum. Rather than a site of display and critique, *Plans to Prosper You* thinks about the museum as a site of history and celebration. This collaboration between graduate departments, the American University Museum, and the Scotland, Tobytown, and Macedonia-Moses communities stands as testament to fostering new relationships between institutions and the communities that surround them. Our class has seen the communities' generosity and excitement towards this exhibition and hopes that you gain a sense of that as well.

Baist 1904 DC Vicinity Map. Housed at: Library of Congress.



Introduction

By Adrienne Pine
*PhD, Associate Professor,
Department of Anthropology, American University*
and Delande Justinvil
*PhD Student,
Anthropology, American University*

As descendants and community members continue today to fight against gentrification and the erasure of their histories, we are excited to be collaborating with them on this exhibit at the American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, which we view as a first step in a broader project of public curation in support of Potomac River Valley communities under threat by property developers operating within structurally racist logics. In fall 2018, the Anthropology department's first-year graduate seminar ("Craft of Anthropology") embarked on a partnership to support a local community's struggle to protect its cemetery from desecration. What began as course-based methodological training has grown into this exhibition, *Plans to Prosper You*, at the American University Museum. The exhibition was curated in collaboration with community members and AU graduate students in the art history, arts management, public history, and studio art programs.

The primary reason behind this project's success thus far lies in the powerful stories of the River Road, Scotland and Tobytown communities—well-known to their members, nearly all descendants of the communities' Reconstruction-era founders, but largely ignored outside. The willful erasure of the proud stories of these and other historic Black communities of the Potomac River Valley has gone hand in hand with the systematic expulsion of community members from their lands and the desecration of the cemeteries where their grandparents and great-grandparents are buried. The members of our course have approached the work of challenging this erasure and amplifying the voices of community members using the tools of ethnography, guided by the Best Practices for Engaging Descendant

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Opposite: Henson Davis (L) and Maggie Davis (R), November 28th, 1971. Courtesy of Cudney Collection, Montgomery History.

Communities laid out by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund.¹ Participant-observation fieldwork at church services, in public community meetings, and in collaboration with the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition has enabled us to build strong relationships with our partners and better understand community priorities. We have conducted numerous archival-quality oral histories, which have helped us to strengthen the archival and historical record, as well as to identify new lines of inquiry. This project has also pushed us to expand our archival work to identify (with the collaboration of community members) and catalog items in other relevant local collections, including collections focused on Scotland located in Montgomery History and at the Rockville, MD Public Library. We have also compiled an extensive bibliography combining historic and contemporary newspaper articles and other media, local histories, legal and land documents, and the few peer-reviewed articles focused on the Black communities of the Potomac River Valley.

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We have learned from our community partners and archival sources (less so from the secondary literature) about the thriving interconnected network of communities that existed well into the 1960s in the Montgomery County. Older community members remember well the active regional Negro baseball league (which included the River Road Lions and Scotland Eagles); the competitive traveling church choirs; the dances and other social activities that resulted in business partnerships, inter-generational friendships and countless intermarriages creating a strong kinship network throughout the region. We have found that even among descendants of the River Road community—forced off their lands through the same logic by the early 1960s and living in diaspora today—narratives of happy childhoods, thriving communities and resistance against racist structural violence prevail.

It is our hope that the exhibit will meet the expectations of our community partners and beyond that, lay the foundation for possible future collaborative projects centered on celebrating the culture and history of Black Montgomery County communities with an explicit anti-racist mission. To continue developing this work, we are dedicated to deepening our knowledge of the history and uses of public museums and their relationship to the humanities more broadly, with a particular focus on current ethical debates about sustainability and cultural heritage.

¹ Michael Blakey, *Engaging Descendant Communities in the Interpretation of Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, Montpelier, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2018. <https://montpelier-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/Interpreting%20Slavery%2010-30-18.pdf>.



Scotland groundbreaking in 1972. Photo by Alan Siegel. Courtesy of Montgomery History.

Tenleytown and The American University

The opportunity for this exhibition is serendipitous, as we are in a moment where universities nationwide are deeply reflecting on their institutional implications and positions around issues of race and racism. Some are embroiled in cases of racist admissions practices, while others are confronting the support of Black studies and culture. Another issue with deep geographical and historical roots is that of universities' ties to slavery, a necessary connection that our very own American University recently confronted. Though the university was founded by a staunch abolitionist and maintained a progressive front from its establishment through its dedication and beyond, it was not free of race-related tensions. The establishment of American University Park, coupled with a dying agricultural economy and improved transportation, attracted developers and wealthier white families to nearby areas (Kathan et al. 2017a). While the growth and development of various educational institutions in Northwest DC had similar impacts, this specific attraction forced the push of families of formerly enslaved peoples from local Tenleytown and Montgomery County neighborhoods, such as Fort Reno and Somerset, respectively (Helms 1981; Kathan et al. 2017b).

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Geneva Mason (L) and Joyce Siegel (R).
Photo by Alan Siegel.
Courtesy of Montgomery History.



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Gail Rebhan, *5202 River Road, Bethesda, Maryland*, 2019. UV ink on adhesive-backed wallcovering, 60 x 51 in. Courtesy of the artist.

PART I:

Faith, Family, and Fellowship

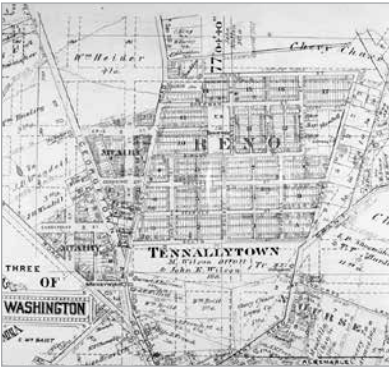
Reno City

Reno City (what is now Fort Reno Park), another main neighborhood of Tenleytown, serves as the southern origin point of the historical River Road. This farm-turned-fort-turned-neighborhood became a postbellum haven for lower-class families. Though some low income white families resided there as well, Reno City was comprised of predominantly formerly enslaved Black Americans and their families. Despite their socio-economic statuses, residents of Reno City created a thriving community complete with markets, dairies, Black churches and a Black school. One of the most notable of these churches, Rock Creek Baptist Church, was connected to Moses Cemetery—the only known cemetery in Reno City—through its affiliation with the White’s Tabernacle 39, an African American benevolent society dedicated to ensuring decent burials for its local Black community. However, with the increasing pressures of development to appease the wealthy white families flocking to Tenleytown, government agencies intentionally targeted Reno City as the ideal area for new local infrastructure such as “a new junior high school (Alice Deal) and a high school (Woodrow Wilson), a water tower, and a scenic public park” (Cultural Tourism DC).

This ultimately resulted in the razing of Reno City, approved by Congress in the 1920s, although the purchasing of homes and condemnations by the DC Board of Commissioners had already begun. By falsely claiming that the neighborhood was falling apart, local and federal departments took this opportunity to rid this “blight upon this part of



Rock Creek Baptist Church, circa 1900s.
Courtesy of Tenleytown Historical Society.



Clockwise, from top: Aerial view of Fort Reno, 1957. Courtesy of Historic Aerials; Aerial view of Fort Reno, 1982. Courtesy of Historic Aerials; 1903 Map of Fort Reno.

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Baist's Real Estate Atlas, 1919. Survey of Reno Road Area courtesy of the Library of Congress.

DC,” an opinion long held of the poorer parts of Tenleytown (Helms 1981; Tenleytown Cultural Guide; Tenleytown Historical Society). Because of this, White’s Tabernacle 39 purchased land on River Road in Bethesda in 1911 for the relocation of the Moses Cemetery, which made its physical move in 1926.

River Road (Bethesda)

While the new location of the Moses Cemetery was fortuitous in that it was directly adjacent to the home of then-pastor of Rock Creek Baptist Church, Rev. William Armstead Jones, as well as surrounded by a number of trustees and close friends of White’s Tabernacle 39, the plot of land itself was already in use. The burials from the old Moses Cemetery were reinterred in land already used as a local burial ground and maintained by the local Black families who collectively made up this “River Road” community. Between 1869 and 1873, newly freed individuals like Frank Gray, John Hall, Jane Rivers and their families bought acres of land at the juncture of the Counselman, Posey, and Loughborough plantations (which, combined, make up what is now the Westbard neighborhood). These families, likely formerly enslaved by the surrounding plantations, skillfully tended to the



Boschke Map of Reno City, 1861. Courtesy of Tenleytown Historical Society.



William Armstead Jones, ca. 1920s. Courtesy of *The History of the American Negro*, Washington, D.C. edition.



land once deemed unfit for living (Clarke 1983; Kathan et al 2017b) and cultivated it so that they could produce enough food for their families, thus beginning the Black River Road community in modern-day Bethesda.

Though they continued to face various forms of racist oppression and discrimination in spite of their recent freedom, the early 20th century saw the families of River Road diligently invest in their community, especially for future generations. “After more than 20 years of lobbying by residents for a school in their community, county officials in 1912 established the River Road Colored School” (Rotenstein 2017). While the original 1912 school was originally held in the home of Frank Wood, the son of formerly enslaved community members, the county finally built



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From top: Loughborough family's “Milton” estate, October 4, 1935. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

1879 Hopkins Atlas that depicts settlements of founding River Road families, including Frank Gray (upper left). Courtesy of Montgomery History.

the two-room River Road School in 1926 in a plot adjacent to the cemetery through land and monetary donations from adjacent Black families, and financial support through the Rosenwald fund (Kathan et al 2017).

Another institution that made its way to the community was the Macedonia Baptist Church, which moved from its original Bethesda location on Elm St. to the plot of land abutting the River Road Moses Cemetery in 1937, establishing the official affiliation between the two. Macedonia Baptist Church quickly became central to the River Road community, offering the community members who had once fellowshiped at Rock Creek Baptist Church a local place of worship after it relocated to Georgetown. However, not long after Macedonia's final relocation across the street in 1945, where it currently stands, the River Road community begin to dissipate. The 1950s saw



Clockwise, from top: River Road School, circa late 1920s. Courtesy of Montgomery History.; Macedonia Baptist Church at its Elm St. location with an insert of Rev. Mason in lower left hand corner.; Macedonia church organizers Louise Hill and Tillie Ruffin, 1920. Both courtesy of Macedonia Baptist Church.

compounding pressures mounting against the River Road community, such as the decline of agricultural and light industrial labor, expanding commercial developments, the suburban real estate prospects. The pressures manifested through dubious quasi-governmental policies, racist threats of violence, and unethical plots by developers who wanted the land (Rottenstein 2017). In addition to the homes, the River Road Moses cemetery was also lost to these machinations, and immediately sustained repeated desecration, from being partially plowed through on its western side, to being completely paved over during the construction of Westwood shopping center. In spite of the desecration of its cemetery and exponential rates of gentrification, Macedonia



Macedonia Baptist Church in its first years at its current address. Courtesy of Macedonia Baptist Church.

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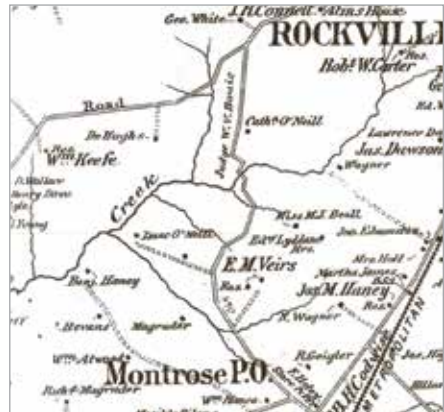
Scotland A.M.E. Zion Church circa 1968. (man on left is likely Reverend Randall). Photo by Alan Siegel; Courtesy of Montgomery History.

Baptist Church remained a stronghold for family and fellowship for the Black community. Memories of childhood play, choral praise, community support, and uplift line the walls of the church and memories of its congregation. It still fosters the fights against local racial injustices, championing the current fights to honor and memorialize Moses construction. Still standing in the place of its 1945 move, Macedonia Baptist Church serves and continues to spearhead efforts to ensure its cemetery isn't forgotten.

Scotland

Before Macedonia Baptist Church moved to Bethesda, Reverend Will Mason steered its humble beginnings in the second floor of a residential home in his home community of Scotland. Scotland, Maryland is another Montgomery County community founded by newly freed Black Americans, such as the Mason family (the Reverend's predecessors) and the Dove family. Despite the predominant occupations being farmhands and day laborers, Scotland families still managed to maintain a keen focus on doing what they could do to uplift their community. An investment in community preservation and dedication to its improvement was core to Scotland, and its church was the centerpiece for maintaining that vitality. In 1915, the Simms family donated the land for the church (then called Scotland Warner Church) and after a few phases of construction, the Scotland AME Zion Church in its current form was completed in 1967 during the pastorate of Reverend Frank Randall.

One of the more well-known aspects of the history and culture of Scotland was its Save Our Scotland (S.O.S.) campaign. After being designated an urban renewal area, community members collaborated with activists and leaders from within and outside of Scotland to protect and renovate their neighborhood. "The S.O.S. campaign was a grassroots endeavor that vastly improved the quality of life for the families of the historic Black community of Scotland,



1879 Hopkins Atlas that depicts some of Scotland's founding Black families, including Henry Dove (far left). Courtesy of Montgomery History.



Joyce Siegel (left) at Scotland Development Planning Meeting. Photo by Alan Siegel. Courtesy of Montgomery History.



Melvin Crawford axes wooden structure during Scotland renovations. Sept 18, 1968. Photo by Alan Siegel. Courtesy of Montgomery History.



Janet (Thompson) Ross (left) and Melvin Crawford (right). Groundbreaking for what is now the Bette C Thompson Recreation Center in Scotland. Courtesy of Janet Ross.

Maryland. The Scotland community was being threatened by real estate developers and the expansion of the Cabin John Regional Park. The S.O.S. committee petitioned Montgomery County government to have water and service to the Scotland community... [and] resulted in the construction of new homes for the residents of the Scotland community” (Scotland AME Zion Church, n.d.). In spite of the tireless work and countless hours worked by members of the community and committee, no one was starved of the the love and joy that flowed through the community, children and adults alike. The Scotland of today remains a stronghold of faith; a community whose commitment to its preservation and uplift continues to withstand the test of time.



1879 Hopkins Atlas depicting the settlements of Tobytown's founding Black families, like William Davis and the Martins (lower middle). Courtesy of Montgomery History.

Tobytown

Further north in Potomac, another community also underwent a major renovation after being designated an urban renewal area: Tobytown. William Davis, Ailsie Martin, and Emory Genus established the post-emancipation Black community of Tobytown in 1875. It was Ailsie's son, Tobias, whom Tobytown was named after. Not long after settling in, the 1884 building of the local Travilah Baptist Church inspired Ailsie Martin to dedicate a parcel of her land "for the purpose of erecting a meeting house or place of worship for the colored Baptist congregation worshipping in the neighborhood of Travillah" and an accompanying cemetery (Cavicci 1994). Having been denied their own school, the church doubled as a schoolhouse in both iterations; the original one had to be rebuilt after being burned down in 1917. The church came to be known as the Refugee Church of Lord Jesus Christ.

Who remembers.....?



Tobeytown? When they had their own neat little church and church bus?

What happened to this happy community which once had a church, a community vegetable garden, plow horse, cow and a flock of chickens?



Lillian Martin, the Matriarch of Tobeytown, had lived in her same little house at the top of the hill for over 100 years.



at her usual observation post, sitting in the rocker in her doorway.

When Ray Norton had his whitewashing truck?

He personally toured the countryside spraying friends' fences. Every spring he sprayed all fencing at the Hunt Club and Horse Show grounds.



THE SAGA OF DRY GULP GULCHY.

Written and produced by Newbold and Betty Noyes to make money for a cafeteria in the Potomac Elementary School. During the musical western, Mike McGonighe flirts with barnmaid, Godfrey Kauffmann (below) in the saloon where Doc Mannar was bar tending.



POTOMAC'S FIRST SWIMMING POOL circa 1940

Remember when Alice Hostettler's cold, spring-fed swimming pool at Gatton's Adventure (in the Glen) was the only place to swim in this area? And so appreciated was this pool that every Decoration Day the countryside (about ten to fifteen neighbours) would turn out en masse to help clean the mud and silt from the pool.

"Who remembers?: Tobeytown" (left half of page). Courtesy of Margo Mconige's *History of Potomac*. Potomac Almanac, 1970.



Aerial Shot, Tobytown. circa 1967. Henson Davis' house on far right. Courtesy of Montgomery County Office of Community Development, Plan for the Redevelopment of Tobytown 1991. (HOC File)

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Henson Davis, 77, at his home in Tobytown, 1970. Courtesy of Jim McNamara and the *Washington Post*.



The Travilah Baptist Church on Travilah Road, established in 1884. Courtesy of Margo Mconige's *History of Potomac*. Potomac Almanac, 1970.



Maggie Davis, niece of Tobias Davis (the eponym of Tobytown), 1965. Courtesy of Melvin Martin.

The original Tobytown houses were smaller than most other post-bellum Black settlements, where two-story houses with two or more rooms per level was the norm. Out of the 15 total houses in Tobytown, there was one two-story house with five rooms. The remaining 14 homes were either one-, two-, or three-bedroom single story houses (McDaniel 1979; Kelly 2011; Cavicci 1994).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the demand for rural labor dropped significantly and agricultural areas began succumbing to real estate development. Communities like Tobytown received the worst end of these changes, as it gave county officials new reason to scrutinize their homes and neighborhoods. The order that the Montgomery County health department issued to Tobytown in 1965 led to the County Council to designate Tobytown as an urban renewal area in 1967. However, the narratives that accompanied this devastation do not afford residents of Tobytown a proper reputation. During community renovation, Tobytown residents were greatly involved in the community renovation,

going as far as to assist with implementation of new infrastructures, including residents Henson and Maggie Davis.

With an approved development plan at the beginning of 1972, Tobytown residents were able to settle into their new townhouses and renovated community space by that December. "Today, Tobytown has approximately 125 residents in 26 townhouses on 16 acres of land. These residents have a



Henson Davis and Maggie Davis, November 28th, 1971. Courtesy of Cudney Collection, Montgomery History.

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marked sense of pride and community” (Potomac Subregion Master Plan 2002). Though the renovations revitalized Tobytown in many ways, it also meant losing some elements of their founding. As the last vestige of the original community, Tobytown’s cemetery still stands today. When it fell into disrepair due to county negligence, it was the community who banded together and cleaned it up. To this day, Tobytown residents continue to maintain this historic landmark, calling on the county to fulfill their duties and reassuring that this sacred symbol of their legacy of resistance and resilience doesn’t fall out of sight.



Tobytown Cemetery circa 1993. Photos by L. Snyderman. Courtesy of Montgomery County Planning Department.

PART II:

Research and Reflections

IT WAS MORE THAN A GAME

E. Nickole Sharp

PhD Student, Anthropology, American University

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In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, overturning the segregation of public schools in the United States. This of course was monumental, as it went against the ruling of “separate but equal” brought forth by the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. Rather, it ruled that states’ segregated school systems must begin to integrate, or face legal consequences. While desegregation is normatively posited as a “success” story in a linear narrative of progress towards racial equality in the United States, many current and former residents of Montgomery County’s Black communities remember the darker side that came with the dismantling of Black schools. Prior to desegregation, there were seventeen “Rosenwald Schools” in the county specifically designated for the education of Black students. These schools, funded in part by part owner of the Sears & Roebuck Company Julius Rosenwald, were constructed for and within specific communities, such as Scotland or Bethesda’s River Road. Alongside their respective churches, these schools became crucial spaces around which Black youth could participate in organized forms of recreation. One of the most notable was baseball, which became central to cultural unity, joy, and fun. Teams like the Scotland Eagles and the River Road Lions would compete in seasonal tournaments and regardless of wins or losses, each game was a marker of pride for the players and their respective communities.

Through ethnographic data, oral histories, and archival documents, along with memorabilia shared by community members, it became quite evident that baseball was more than a game to Scotland and many more communities throughout Montgomery County. Baseball was a way to take a pause



Above: River Road School, circa 1930s. Reprinted with permission of the DC Public Library, Star Collection © *Washington Post*.

From left: Baseball Uniform of Dennis Young, 1954.; Mr. Dennis Young and Mr. Eddie Dove, 1954.; Scotland Eagles Baseball Team Players, 1954. All courtesy of Deborah Young.

from the ills of societal racism and classism, and a time to come together with community and family. As much as it was recreational, baseball was also a celebration of unity. In conversations with members of the Scotland Community, in particular Ms. Deborah Young, baseball was always at the center of the conversation, and the joy that it brought was evident in the tone of her voice, the sparkle in her eyes... The following photographs offer an opportunity to journey through these memories from Ms. Young's perspective and reflect on the institution of baseball. As much as it was recreational, baseball was also a celebration of unity.



Clockwise from top: Four times Olympic Gold Medalist Jesse Owens, 1936.; Eddie Dove and Hoover Baker.; Scotland Little Rascals at the Ballgame, 1954.; Hoover Baker at bat during a game. All courtesy of Deborah Young.



Clockwise from top: [1] Left to Right: Virginia Ferrell, unknown man, Virginia Lefeged.; [2] Left to Right: Roger Curtis, Unknown, Lester Ferrell.; [3] Scotland Baseball Players: Back row, left to right: Unknown, Monroe R. Lefeged Sr., Alphonso Lefeged, Roy Dove, Ralph Dove, Uncle Buz, Bus Thompson, Unknown. Front row, left to right: Jim Booze, Abraham Cooper, Billy "Red" Dove, Promise "Duck" Walker.; [4] Back row, left to right: Audrey Henderson, Joan Dove, Unknown, Betty Lefeged Thompson. Front row, left to right: Phyllis Dove, Louise Dove, Virginia Henderson, Gary Smith (baby), Carol Henderson.; [5] Woman in rear: Delores Henderson. Back row, left to right: Audrey Henderson, Unknown, Rose Walker, Vernie Dove, Virginia Henderson, Mary Barnett, Tina Walker. Front row, left to right: Phyllis Dove, Joan Dove, Francine Smith (baby), Louise Dove, Earlene Barnett, Gary Smith (baby), held by Carol "Tugie" Henderson. All courtesy of Deborah Young.

Earlene, Barbara-jean and Me

The days were always too short to get in all we wanted to do;
There were red apples on the tree that had
to come off, but who would climb the tree
Earlene, Barbara-jean and me

The pear tree was full with pears but hardly ever fell;
guess who would bump against the tree,
Earlene, Barbara-jean and me

There were strawberries, and blackberries, and walnuts
to pick, so tasty for our tea parties under the
pine tree playhouse carpeted with fallen pine needles.
There was always Earlene, Barbara-jean and me.

We had church some days, Earlene preached and
prayed the way you were supposed to;
we also had weddings, and one day we had a funeral,
we buried our dolls and after a short while
dug them up and started over again.
Earlene was the preacher Barbara-jean and me would sit,
watch and listen while Earlene held service,
we said amen at the appropriate time,
sang our songs, had prayer and even shouted.

Some days we just rode our bikes, jumped rope,
or simply played with our dolls.

It was rare Earlene did not come to play. I am so glad I have
these wonderful memories of Earlene, Barbara-jean and me.

— Beverly

REFLECTIONS ON CHILDHOOD IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY

Paige Magrogan

PhD Student, Anthropology, American University

This essay examines childhood recollections of two members of historic Black communities in Montgomery County—River Road and Scotland. Their memories, recorded in oral history interviews carried out in late 2018 by American University Anthropology graduate students, provide insight into the roles that childhood leisure activities including sports and games, time spent with family and friends, and unstructured playtime played in community and family life. Their stories make clear both the harmful impacts of structural racism and the creativity and resilience that communities and families harnessed in order to ensure children’s health, happiness, and well-being despite the obstacles they faced.

The oral history interviews analyzed here are from Mrs. Barbara Smith, Scotland AME Zion Church member who was born in Scotland in 1933, and Mr. Harvey Matthews, a longtime member of the Bethesda (River Road) Macedonia Baptist Church who was born in the area in 1944. Scotland and River Road were both established by formerly enslaved people who purchased land in the area after the Civil War. Both have been threatened by gentrification and dispossession, particularly after World War II, as Montgomery County became more suburban and more desirable to white and Jewish middle and upper-class families. Both communities have struggled against the forces of development. In the late 1960s, Mrs. Smith was active in the “Save Our Scotland” movement that succeeded in keeping much of Scotland’s land in community hands and compelling the county to build new houses with modern amenities for community members. Members of the Bethesda Macedonia Baptist Church are currently engaged in a struggle with the county to prevent further desecration of and to properly memorialize the Macedonia Moses cemetery (affiliated with Macedonia Baptist Church), which was paved over in the late 1950s and is located on county-held and privately owned land parcels. Mr. Matthews is a central participant in this struggle and is in part motivated by the theft of his family’s land in the late 1950s (a parcel currently occupied by Whole Foods). The communities are intertwined, but they have distinct histories and identities.

I conducted an oral history interview with Mrs. Smith in late November 2018, in which she talked about her memories of the Great Depression and World War II eras. Born as Barbara Lefeged, she spent her childhood living with her grandparents and her parents. She was an athlete in both elementary and high school, and recalled field days with other elementary schools and playing tennis on the dirt because there was no tennis court. During her time at Lincoln High School, a segregated school in Rockville, Ms. Lefeged was on the basketball team, which was her main sport, but she also played dodgeball, baseball, and “kickball, now they call it soccer.” She also said that she tried to play football, but “the guys [chuckles]... they wouldn’t let us.” Like many children, she thought about what she wanted to be when she grew up; she dreamed of being a nurse because—as she told me—she was charmed by the white cap and white dress that nurses wore in magazines. Later in life, Mrs. Smith would become a nurse, which she loved. She has been a member of the Scotland choir since she was nine years old and recalled taking some piano lessons, though the only song she was able to play parts of was “My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean.” While practicing the same parts of the song over and over, her sister would tease, “I’ll be glad when you get off that piano!”

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Like many young people, she experimented briefly with rebellion. Mrs. Smith told me that many of her fellow high school students would sneak away from school to go to a local store during lunchtime. Her cousin and their friends were even more rebellious; they would get off the school bus in the morning and walk to Rockville, never even attending class. But the first time Mrs. Smith tried leaving during lunchtime to go to the store, the school principal caught her, and her punishment was to clean all the desks in her classroom. She told me that she never got in trouble again, which earned her the nickname Honest John from her sister.

Mrs. Smith’s memories, including her involvement in sports and music and her admittedly rare act of rebellion, echo common narratives of childhood in the United States. However, she also shared memories that were particular to her community and era. She recalled that Seven Locks Road, one of the main thoroughfares adjacent to the Scotland Community, was only partially paved, so the community was relatively isolated. She and her friends and siblings would sit in their yard up the hill from Seven Locks Road, and when a car drove by, they could always recognize who it was by the sound of the engine. In winter, no cars could drive on the unpaved roads,



Ms. Barbara Smith, October 28, 1967. Clothing Drive held at the Scotland School. Courtesy of Montgomery History.

so she and her uncle and cousin would sleigh-ride down the hill from Scotland Drive to Seven Locks Road in the evenings. Since it is steep, they could go fast and sleigh all the way past the church. Because she enjoyed spending time with her uncle and cousin so much, she would stay out until her hands were nearly frostbitten, and her aunt and uncle would rub her hands with half of a potato covered in salt to prevent frostbite. Such stories suggest how important quality time with Mrs. Smith's extended family and friends was in her childhood. They also reveal that some preferred leisure activities were mediated by the lack

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of modern infrastructure, like paved roads, in the neighborhood. This, in turn, stemmed from structural racism that manifested itself in the county's reluctance to provide the same benefits that it extended to nearby white neighborhoods, which in this period had paved roads, indoor plumbing, and central heating. Indeed, in the postwar years the county would cite the same lack of infrastructure for which it was responsible to justify its attempts to condemn Scotland's land and sell it at much higher prices to white families or developers.

Mrs. Smith also recalled attending Scotland Elementary, a segregated one-room schoolhouse with 30-40 students from first through sixth grade. As she got older, she and the other girls had to cook meals for the rest of the students, which she described as "fun" and "very nice"; she said, "cooking for the other children, it made us feel like we were...older." She mentioned that because the houses in Scotland did not have indoor plumbing or central heating until the late 1960s, she had to go to the spring to collect drinking water, and it was always her job to clean her family's outhouse and help chop firewood. In addition, her grandfather butchered pigs, and she and her



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Alan Twyman with Ms. Francis Palmer's house in the background, Scotland, MD. March 23, 1968. Photo by Alan Siegel. Courtesy of Montgomery History.



Everett Thompson (left) and Carroll Smith (right). Scotland. March 22, 1969. Photo by Alan Siegel. Courtesy of Montgomery History.



Photograph of Gilbert Lefeged in front of Barbara Smith's house. August 2, 1967. Photo by Alan Siegel. Courtesy of Montgomery History.

siblings had to chase the ones that escaped from the pen. She recalled: “we had to go get that little pig and chase him all around all over this, that, and everywhere... and then he could get his little run out and come on back to the pen... that was our exercise I guess.” These memories suggest that she made important contributions to her family’s livelihood. Her help was likely necessary because of the challenges that adults in her family faced in making a living with few opportunities.

Mr. Matthews’s oral history interview with my colleague John Power illuminates some of the effects of segregation on Black children, and many of the stories he told John dovetail with the stories Mrs. Smith told me. Mr. Matthews’s parents owned a parcel of land where they kept dogs, horses, and chickens. He had a big dog that followed him everywhere. He recalled playing along the railroad tracks, playing hide-and-seek with his friends among the gravestones at his church cemetery, and playing around the church in summer. He and his friends also used to camp out in the woods near American University, as the area was less developed than it is now. He said he regularly swam at the American University pool and in a creek near Georgetown. These improvised play spaces were necessary because Black children were not permitted entry to the local playground or to the public pool. Like Mrs. Smith, Mr. Matthews’s childhood involved playtime that was in part mediated

by racist policies—a fact he discusses at length in his interview. It is worth remembering that Mr. Matthews’s community was being destroyed; only a couple of years after these memories took place would the county confiscate his family’s land, which was eventually sold to a developer.

Also like Mrs. Smith, sports were a big part of Mr. Matthews’s childhood. His main sport was baseball, though he played softball and kickball as well. In fact, Mr. Matthews was a talented baseball player. When he joined the Chevy Chase Recreation Center baseball team as the only Black team member, he said the coach allowed him to join because the other boys in his newly-de-segregated school vouched for his talents; they knew he could play. Also like Mrs. Smith, some of his activities outside of school involved contributing to his family’s livelihood; he and his brothers would help their father to hunt rabbits and slaughter hogs on Thanksgiving. Unlike Mrs. Smith, Mr. Matthews had paid employment during his childhood. Mr. Matthews worked as a golf caddy in the mid-1950s at the Kenwood Country Club, which only allowed white members long after segregation in public accommodation was no longer legal, and he also set pins at a local bowling alley, which was reserved for white patrons.

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Both Mrs. Smith’s and Mr. Matthews’s oral histories suggest that childhood in River Road and Scotland in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s was a time of play and forging and maintaining familial and community-wide bonds. Mrs. Smith’s account shows the importance of relationships with extended family and community—not just parents and siblings. Forms of play were mediated in part by structural racism, manifested as segregation and the county’s reluctance to provide the level of infrastructure to Black neighborhoods that they did to white neighborhoods. Childhood was also a time of responsibility and contribution to one’s family’s livelihood, through assisting with food procurement and preparation, acquiring drinking water and firewood, and even paid employment. Mr. Matthews and Mrs. Smith may have had to help their families in this way in part because of the opportunities denied them, yet through their youthful (and often playful) labor they each also formed a sense of responsibility toward their fellow community members and a profound love for their communities.

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DISLOCATIONS

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The various ways that Black people and their bodies have been forcibly uprooted and moved are, quite frankly, innumerable. Globally, Black diasporans have undergone various forms of social and geographical ruptures brought on by the evil genius that is colonialism and its legacies. From the forced migration of enslaved Africans, to the Red Summer and Great Migration, to gentrification and mass incarceration, the United States continues to strategically and intentionally enforce practices that result in the devastation of Black people, culture, and history. As scholars, we have many ways to categorize and discuss these coercions: as dispossessions, as disenfranchisements, as displacements, as disembodiments, and more. These concepts share core tenets and a certain essence that are perhaps better encapsulated in meaning and feeling by the term “dislocations.” In its strictly biological usage, the term refers to the traumatic expulsion of parts of the body from their set positions, caused by the application of forceful impact upon them. In a broader metaphorical usage, the term can extend to reference the result of sustained structural violence against spaces and people that constitute the backbone and vital organs of any community. Moreover, because of the way we understand the physicality and accompanying pains of dislocations, the term also emphasizes the embodied trauma resulting from state-sanctioned violence that forcibly fractures and fragments Black communities. Such intergenerational trauma continues in death—as seen in the public erasure and desecration of the River Road Moses Cemetery in Bethesda, MD and nearby historic Black burial grounds—with serious, embodied repercussions for living descendants. It is here that anthropological approaches can intervene to analyze the types of injuries that these diasporic descendant communities sustain, comprehend attempts at social recovery, and witness activist resistance against current and future traumas.

Though the Black communities of Maryland’s Montgomery County are no stranger to the mistreatment and neglect of their burial grounds, the breadth of disrespect and desecration that routinely befell the River Road Moses Cemetery for more than a century is in a league of its own. From the very year that Moses Cemetery became part of Montgomery County in 1910,

the grounds have been subject to racist dislocations under the guise of urban development and maintenance. In *Land of Open Graves*, anthropologist Jason De León develops the concept of “necroviolence” to explain how violence performed in the mistreatment of the dead works to harm their living relatives (broadly defined), while still affording the perpetrators the capacity to avoid blame (De Leon 2015). This form of violence is what has repeatedly dislocated the Moses Cemetery and—by extension—the descendants of those buried there. During each stage of the cemetery’s presence, both its dead and living descendants suffered forced removals and loss at the hands of local government. Moses cemetery only became part of Montgomery County through the Congressionally-forced displacement of the graves from the former Moses Cemetery, located in predominantly-Black Reno City, where families had lived for two or three generations (Tenleytown Historical Society, n.d.). Despite the fact that a portion of the River Road plot was already used as a local community burial ground, the 1911 deeding of the River Road land to Moses Cemetery was immediately met with protest. The neighboring, formerly slave-owning Loughborough family led a community-wide petition to prevent Moses’ eventual 1926 physical relocation (Kathan, Rispin, and Whitley 2017; Loughborough and Johnston 2010). In 1957, the county granted a right of way easement to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) that resulted in the destruction of a western portion of Moses Cemetery. While the WSSC claimed that there was a need to reshape and concrete Willet Branch, a local water source, it is important to note that this is the same commission that repeatedly condemned local Black homes citing inadequate infrastructure, despite the fact that the county had actively refused to provide such infrastructure to resident Black folks who had only been freed from bondage less than 100 years prior (Sigworth 2018). After further waves of community-destroying racial disenfranchisement through the 1960s, including racist threats from local white families, gentrification pressures and ever-encroaching real estate and commercial development (Offutt 1996; Levine 2000; Cavicchi 1994), the plot(s) of land that included Moses Cemetery were eventually sold. However, the way the developers came into possession of the land was an act of deceit. White’s Tabernacle No. 39 of the Ancient United Order of the Brothers and Sisters, Sons and Daughters of Moses, an African American benevolent society whose mission was “to mutually benefit the members, care for the sick, bury the dead, and otherwise aid members of the society who may be in need or distress” sold



View from Dorsey Lane, Bethesda, MD. Juxtaposing the modest single story home and its wooded surrounding against the backdrop of an industrial building, this photo captures the shift away from rural living and towards urban development that claimed Montgomery County neighborhoods in the 60s and 70s. Courtesy of “Rural to Urban” file, Cudney Collection, Montgomery History.

the land to neither developers nor investors, but instead to a local doctor. It turned out that the doctor almost immediately turned the land over to his uncle, an investor who was “purchasing and bundling small parcels” like the neighboring River Road school. The investor then sold it to the “Westwood” developers (Kathan, Rispin, and Whitley 2017). During the construction of Westwood Towers, the already dislocated remains of those buried there sustained repeated additional desecration, including instances of remains being discarded into storm sewers, rumors of sacks of bones being driven away, and convoluted claims of a group reburial despite no confirmation from state, county, funeral home, nor cemetery records (Kathan et al. 2017).

Though state-sanctioned violence often refers to direct political violence carried out by a government against the people within its territory, it can also include governmental inaction in the face of demands for accountability and justice. Whether this takes the form of disproportionate rates of incarceration or lethal police brutality, governmental silence in the face of such condemnable actions can be equally or even more damaging than direct state terror itself. Legislation calling for the razing of Reno City, (Tenleytown Historical Society, n.d.) and the state of Maryland approving the Moses

Cemetery's partial destruction through the WSSC's easement (Kathan et al. 2017) instantiate forms of governmental agency causing the expulsion or demolition of the dead. When present-day officials turn a blind eye to previous and ongoing white supremacist terror campaigns against the mere existence of a Black cemetery and its community, they sanction and continue these attacks by way of their inaction. Whether direct or indirect, we witness necroviolence in action at every turn. As with any dislocation that goes untreated, permanent damage to the community's integral connective tissue is at risk. The spiritual ligaments formed through the practices of burying ancestors and traditions of communally consecrating land were torn and damaged upon the desecration of these burial sites. To rupture the bonds formed through this diasporic custom clots the cultural flow and disarticulates the social body of the Black community, which in turn sustains long-term—if not permanent—injury. Moses Cemetery has sat at the nexus of displaced families, dispossessed properties, disenfranchised statuses, and disembodied ancestors; a legacy that has borne witness to collective and compounding dislocations.

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Anthropological approaches do not only expose the violence that causes and is caused by these dislocations; they also hold the potential to unveil certain patterns within these violations that provide the necessary context to confront and combat them. According to medical literature, the occurrence of bodily dislocations increases their likelihood of recurrence. Similarly, the injuries of forced movement and loss that have been sustained by the ancestors and descendant community of the Moses Cemetery continue to compound. In her analysis of state-sanctioned violence perpetrated on Black communities, anthropologist Deborah Thomas reminds us that these situations do not happen in a vacuum, nor are they out of the ordinary (Thomas 2011; Trouillot 1990). When Montgomery County's Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) announced new development plans in 2015 on Moses Cemetery land adjacent to the Westwood Towers, it brought the burial ground's legacy of desecration to the fore, igniting activist retaliation. The Macedonia Baptist Church and affiliated Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition's (BACC) ability to contextualize this impending destructive construction within a broader legacy of excising Black people, history, and culture has been key to activist success thus far in opposing further desecration of the Moses Cemetery, historically connected to Macedonia Church. BACC has led protests that have restaged the geography of the auction block, highlighting how this

instance of desecration echoes a time when enslaved peoples were actively kept from burying and consecrating their dead in order to destroy their traditions, break their spirits, and tame them for the commodification of their bodies (Fuentes 2016; Thomas 2011). Oral histories with descendants reaffirm the burial ground's place on River Road and its importance to the local Black community (Offutt 1996; Powers 2018), despite the HOC's initial claims that there had been no cemetery at the site (Rotenstein 2017). Asset tracing outlined a chain of financial shuffles connecting the HOC's mortgage of the land occupied by the cemetery to institutions directly funded by slavery and later internationally implicated in white-collar crime (Coleman-Adebayo 2019). Scholarship produced through archival reconnaissance and genealogical research meticulously traced the history of these grounds to the families who founded the community (Kathan, Rispin, and Whitley 2017). Each of these investigations has historicized the injustices to which the Moses Cemetery has been subject, in ways that (re)position it beyond "singular" and "exceptional" forms of violence (Thomas 2011; Bonilla 2013) and reveal "the conditions of marginality which makes violence against these populations not only plausible, but banal" (Hanchard 2015). Each one remarks the displacements directly brought on by quasi-public corporations and the dispossessions indirectly sanctioned through purposeful government inaction. Each reveals the "continuing systematic disenfranchisement and the long history of violence enacted on black bodies" (Navarro 2013) past and present. Each reproaches the damages imparted by these dislocations.

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These critical methodologies come together as part of an anthropological and historiographical toolkit that allows activist-scholars and scholar-activists to resurrect the truths of those who have been dislocated by state-sanctioned violence in both life and death. While preventing further impending desecration of the Moses burial ground and reclaiming the space constitute one measure of rearticulating the ancestors buried there and their communities, the realization that justice for these ancestral remains and justice for those alive are one in the same constitutes another. A refusal to forget, a reproof of neglect; confronting these issues as the same fight against forced removal at the hands of racial terror offers a first step towards recovering from these dislocations. Fighting for justice in Moses Cemetery means forcing those working against it to both remember and *re*-remember the ancestors buried there; to populate both our memories as well as narratives and public discourse with their names, their lives, and their existence.



Protestors carry a banner from Macedonia Baptist Church to the Moses Cemetery site. Pictured, from left to right: Rev. Segun Adebayo (Macedonia Baptist Church), Frank Lancaster (former River Road resident), Rev. Walter Fauntroy, and Robin Ficker. Source: "The Moses Cemetery: Where Serial Displacement Meets History," *The Activist History Review*. Dec. 2017.



Plat illustrating the original Moses Cemetery location in Washington. Note that the planned 37th Street overlays the rectangular cemetery. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration.

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Members of the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition protesting with knitted tombstones embroidered with names of individuals buried at Moses Cemetery. Left to right: Chris Rigaux, Tim Willard, Segun Adebayo, Shira Elrich, Jeffrey Slavin, Mary Tyrle Rooke, Marsha Coleman-Adebayo. Courtesy of the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition.

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Front cover: Melvin Crawford axes wooden structure during
Scotland renovations. Sept. 18, 1968. Photo by Alan Siegel;
Courtesy of Montgomery History.

Back cover: Washington, DC, U.S., Dept. of the Interior,
Geological Survey, [1947]. Courtesy of Library of Congress,
Geography and Map Division.

The logo features the word "the" in a small, lowercase, serif font, followed by a large, stylized, outlined letter "K". To the right of the "K" is the word "ATZEN" in a bold, uppercase, serif font. Below this, there is a small square icon containing the letters "AU" in a stylized font, followed by the text "AMERICAN UNIVERSITY MUSEUM" and "COLLEGE of ARTS & SCIENCES" in a smaller, uppercase, serif font.

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