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Theorizing the Public Sphere: Notions of Public Space in Washington DC

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A common misconception of academic research is that it takes place in a vacuum; to the average person, academic research would seem to have little or no reflection, much less effect, on reality. One of the dynamics of research that contributes to this misconception is the seeming inapplicability of research methods and results to the 'everyday' aspect of life. While this may on occasion be a valid criticism, in many ways research does have very tangible pertinence to non-academic reality.

Interpretive analysis is often a matter of trying to put a plausible explanation to an existing phenomenon. Interpretive analysis seeks to answer questions that are different than those posed in quantitative research. Even when the question is one of definition, the answer will be interpretive rather than denotative. This is because 'reality' is negotiable; what seems like clear reality to one person is either unclear or untrue to another. So interpretive analysis is a matter of placing an explanation, a framework of reality, over a set of data in an attempt to create a binding reason for the occurrence or existence of the data. Thus, interpretive analysis seeks to answer not only what something is but also why it is. Interpretive analysis is also connotative; it is a negotiated meaning, but the analyst hopes to establish a sound, persuasive basis for that explanation.

Washington, DC is the capitol of the United States of America. It is a city of great wealth and great poverty, of reserved refinement and drug-fueled violence. The reality that Washington presents is an immensely complex one. A convincing definition of what Washington is, as a city, as a capitol, or as a metaphor for the nation it represents would be nearly impossible. To be more accurate, a definition that is widely acceptable would be nearly impossible. There is a great diversity of human beings in Washington, and their understandings of 'their' city are wildly divergent. What is

true to one group may be false to another. What one group might see as important, if not crucial is seen by others as marginal. What exists, therefore, is a multiplicity of truths, of realities; importance becomes negotiated, and that negotiation is accomplished through communication. The groups will communicate their needs within the group according to a set of accepted methods and styles. They will articulate their needs and desires to those outside the group through a number of outlets, and will vary the substance of their message as well as the methods by which they transmit them. This difference will become pivotal in the following analysis.

The task for an interpretive analyst (or analysts) is to attempt to place some structured reasoning on this overwhelmingly complex phenomenon. In order to do this, a systematic theoretical framework must be employed to ensure academic rigor. In this manner, the analyst(s) seek to avoid having their work sink to the level of opinion. If the theoretical framework can be applied to the situation, it can illuminate patterns within the behavior or situation that may not have been immediately apparent. Conversely, if the situation evades the theory, or is not adequately explained by it, flaws or shortcomings of the theory may be brought to light.

This is indeed the case when a theory of public discourse is used to explain the use of public space in Washington DC. Habermas' theory of the public sphere does not adequately explain the reality of Washington DC's use of public space nor its public discourse, of which public space is a part. By examining Habermas' proposed method for conducting public discourse, we will see that it simply does not provide an adequate model for public discourse in a diverse community. It is inadequate because of the assumptions it makes about culture, ethnicity and objectivity. Habermas' model is a product of his Eurocentric background.

Habermas and the Public Sphere

Jurgen Habermas is a German philosopher whose ideological roots are embedded in the German school of such thinkers as Kant and Marx. He is most often associated with the Frankfurt School, whose pioneering work helped synthesize the philosophies of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. The Frankfurt School is also one of the foundations of what has become known as critical theory and scholarship, in which scholars seek to generate research and knowledge with the overt inten-

tion of having a positive impact on the living conditions of those persons about whom they write. This openly subjective approach is directly traceable to the Frankfurt Schools adoption of Marxian thought, although they later reduced their endorsement of Marx first introduced his concept of the public sphere in 1962, when his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit)* was published. He traced the development of the bourgeois public sphere as a social phenomenon in Europe. The movement towards modern day capitalism forced commodity exchange, as Habermas (1989) notes, beyond the control of the household economy and consequently forced the private man into the public sphere, to become both property owner and "human being" (p. 28). Habermas defines the public sphere as "a body of 'private persons' assembled to discuss matters of 'public concern' or 'common interest.'" (Fraser, 1992, p.58)

It first arose, he contended, as an alternative to simple monarchic rule. Before the rise of the bourgeois public sphere, there was no forum for the citizenry to address issues of common interest, at least not without fear of governmental reprisal. The rise in wealth among the private citizens of Europe allowed for accumulation of money and power outside of the government and/or ruling families, bringing a rudimentary redistribution of power if not influence. This redistribution of power contributed or led directly to the formation of the bourgeois public sphere. In Habermas' view, the public sphere

designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. The public sphere in Habermas' sense is also conceptually distinct from the official-economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling." (Fraser, 1992, p.57)

It was Habermas' belief that public discourse could be used as a method for working through matters affecting the public. Habermas' civil society relies on the private man's public use of his reason as it signifies the

private sphere synthesizing with the public sphere in society "to engage in a debate over the general rules of governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange in social labor" (1989, p. 27). With the head of the household "now in the context of a practice of running a business in accord with principles of profitability" (Habermas, 1989, p. 20) the private sphere of civil society "was no longer confined to the authorities but was considered by the subjects as one that was properly theirs" (p. 23). The ambivalent relationship[i] between the state and its people, one that emancipated the public's "power of control over [their] own capitalistically functioning property" made private matters "apolitical" and out of state control (p. 28). This would be an ideal speech situation in which participants would set aside political, theological and personal differences to 'objectively' discuss issues and concerns of the public interest:

Thus, at one level, the idea of the public sphere designated an institutional mechanism for 'rationalizing' political domination by rendering states accountable to (some of) the citizenry. At another level, it designated a specific kind of discursive interaction. Here the public sphere connoted an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters. The discussion was to be open and accessible to all; merely private interests were to be inadmissible; inequalities of status were to be bracketed; and discussants were to deliberate as peers. The result of such discussion would be 'public opinion' in the strong sense of consensus about a common good. (Fraser, 1992, p.59)

In this sphere, all people would be equal and all viewpoints would be welcome. The total emphasis of the public discourse would be consensus building to promote solutions and ideas that would further the 'common good'. Habermas believed that this model would be an effective means of political discussion that would lead to consequent action. He believed it was possible for people to set aside or bracket their differences and to put 'private' interest aside in the name of the 'common good'.

In order for this conception to work, a number of assumptions must be entertained. These have been elucidated by Fraser as follows:

1. the assumption that it is possible for interlocutors in a public sphere to bracket status differentials and to deliberate 'as if' they were social equals; the assump-

tion, therefore, that societal equality is not a necessary condition for political democracy;

2. the assumption that the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy, and that a single, comprehensive public sphere is always preferable to a nexus of multiple publics;

3. the assumption that discourse in public spheres should be restricted to deliberation about the common good, and that the appearance of 'private interests' and 'private issues' is always undesirable;

4. the assumption that a functioning democratic public sphere requires a sharp separation between civil society and the state. (pp. 62-3)

Several criticisms of Habermas' theory immediately come to light. As Fraser points out, it is unrealistic to believe that people can or will put aside their differences, conscious or otherwise: another problem with the public sphere is that it may indeed maintain rather than transcend the existing social order. If the public sphere treats everyone equally, and no one is allowed any specificity or extra consideration, then whatever social situation exists at the implementation of the sphere will remain.

There is a Eurocentric cast to his work, which, given his background, is understandable if not inevitable. His belief in the egalitarian nature of the public sphere seems to ask much of its participants. There can be no specialized or specified communication within the sphere; if women are allowed no more or less time than men, then they cannot self-organize or intracommunicate except outside the sphere, thus negating the benefits. The public sphere, it would seem, is better suited to continuing egalitarian communication than implementing it.

African Americans traditionally did not participate in private or public spheres because they were not considered citizens during the mercantilist era, the height of the development of the Western public sphere. Thus, the emergence of Jürgen Habermas's (1996/1989) notion of the "people's public" was truly exclusive to whites^[ii] primarily because this "liberal public sphere took shape in the specific historical circum-

stances of a developing market economy" (p. xi). The movement towards modern day capitalism forced commodity exchange, as Habermas notes in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, beyond the control of the household economy and consequently forced the private man into the public sphere, to become both property owner and "human being" (p. 28). Black people were not only denied the right to property, they were also included in the category of property.

The public sphere and the private sphere simply did not exist for blacks because they did not have the ability to create an autonomous household and with that household, gain the opportunity to move beyond this sphere into the public. Without the integrity of a private sphere, black people could never enter the coffee houses, salons and table societies that, according to Habermas, became the early sites for cultural and political discussion. With neither a public nor a private sphere, this racial exclusivity delayed blacks in having the possibilities of entering "the sphere of public authority" (p. 18).

Habermas claims this civil society as the emerging "corollary of a depersonalized state authority" (p. 19) where the increased wealth in the West (attributed to the mercantilist trade) furnished the "development of a commercial economy" that catapulted the common man out of the intimate household and into the capitalist market:

It is a familiar story how the opening up and expansion of markets for foreign trade, in which the privileged companies managed to attain monopolistic control through political pressure—in a word, new colonialism—step by step began the development of a commercial economy at home. In parallel fashion the interests of capitalists engaged in manufacture prevailed over those engaged in trade. In this way one element of the early capitalist commercial system, the trade in commodities, brought about a revolution, this time in the structure of production as well. The exchange of imported raw materials for finished and semi-finished domestic goods must be viewed as a function of the process in which the old mode of production was transformed into a capitalist one...this shift was reflected in the mercantilist literature of the seventeenth century. Foreign trade no longer counted per se as the source of wealth, but only insofar as it aided the employment of the country's population—employment created by trade. Administrative action was increas-

ingly oriented to this goal of the capitalist mode of production. (Habermas, pp. 18-19; italics added).

Although Habermas does not properly correlate this “employment created by trade” with the slave industry, it becomes clear from the implicit nature of this aspect of his theory that the “goal of the capitalist mode of production,” one that “aided the employment of the country’s population” necessitated the omission of slaves from the emerging public sphere. Interestingly, Habermas glosses over this omission in order to sustain the logic of his political public sphere: “The issues discussed became “general” not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to be able to participate” (p. 37) in order to legitimize the restricted participation to property owners in forming public opinion. In fact, everyone did not participate, if they did, the public sphere based on Habermas’ notion would theoretically collapse because it [the public sphere] emerged as a precondition of increased employment due to the mercantilist trade.

The exclusion of others, in particular, the act of denying them their “equal active participation” created a false notion of “public” opinion in democratic society “from its very inception contradict[ing the] essential premises of its self-understanding” (p. 428). If democratic society has not acted “democratically” by contradicting its essential premises, then the putative inclusive practices of the present liberal public sphere only clouds the existential exclusion from which Western self-understanding truly was formed. As much as blacks have entered the public sphere and established a very distinctive personal, private sphere since the Emancipation, the notion of blacks as a sub-group within the public sphere is still imbedded in a Western culture that formed the basis of its own self-understanding relative to familial, administrative, and state practices that favored explicit othering in order to unconsciously justify the societal benefits of the mercantilist trade.

Habermas attempts to account for alternative public spheres in *Further Reflections on the Public Sphere* (1992). He reticulates his previous notion and contests the polar sense of the public sphere by finally acknowledging “the coexistence of competing public spheres and takes account of the dynamics of those processes of communication that are excluded from the dominant public sphere” (p. 425). Although Habermas superficially deals with the exclusion of women[iii] in

this article, his consideration of alternate and plural public spheres provides evidence to suggest the structural transformation of the public sphere demanded a certain degree of otherness in its initial conception. According to Habermas, the “exclusion of the culturally and politically mobilized lower strata entails a pluralization of the public sphere in the very process of its emergence. Next to, and interlocked with, the hegemonic public sphere, a plebeian one assumes shape” (p. 426). If this theory is to maintain form, it must accommodate the multiple interlockings of multiple spheres, each having their own hegemonic and plebeian sub-groups. One of the facets of exclusion is that it “locks out and represses [and] at the same time calls forth countereffects that cannot be neutralized[iv]” (p. 427).

The contemporary public sphere exists under the premise that there are multiple coexisting spheres that, unlike Habermas’ notion of consensus[v], enjoy the plurality present in the public sphere. Markell illustrates that Habermas’ conception of democratic politics requires “an unending process of contestation, conducted with the critical awareness that no actually existing settlement can constitute a satisfactory embodiment of the regulative idea of agreement” (p. 379). However, the public sphere is much more oriented towards hegemonic consensus than a true democratic consensus. It would be highly unlikely for a society that, according to Habermas, formed its “self-understanding” during the colonialist upheaval and proceeded to design its modern power structures from that point forward, could easily orient itself towards consensus unless the consensus, by and large, was that of the group that benefited during the transformation of the public sphere.

Locating Black Cultural Artifacts in the District

The History of Blacks in Washington, DC is as old as the city itself. On every corner of the City, there is evidence of the contribution of Blacks if we know where to look. The City was built with the help of black slave rented labor. The area around the Capitol Building was filled with tents for the blacks that had come from neighboring Maryland and Virginia plantations. On top of the Capitol Building is the statue "Freedom" which was cast in Bladensburg, Maryland with the efforts of slave labor. This study highlights some prominence figures, institutions and memorials in the nation's Capital. Their roles were significant enough to change the course of the history of the African Americans in the U.S. The African American

Memorials in the nation's capital are not in the same exposure to the average visitors as the other memorials. Not only the physical locations of the African American Memorials are remote away from the national mall, but also their existing in the publishing materials that available for tourists are very limited. Although most of the populations of Washington, DC are African Americans, but their heritage and memorials are not exposed and publicized enough to the public. Habermas' theory of the public sphere does not address the issue of public space in Washington, DC.

Major tour operations in the Nation's Capital were contacted, but none of them has regular black heritage tours conducted daily. One of them tried for three years, but it was discontinued since it was not profitable to operate. One company authorized by the National Park Service conducts tours to Fredrick Douglas National Historic Site from June 15 to Labor Day. Other than that Black heritage tours would be conducted on request for groups only. How often? The oldest and largest Tour Company's sales and marketing director (co-researcher) stated that black heritage tours are less than one percent of the operation. The following African American figures, memorials and the black heritage in Washington, DC show that Habermas' theory of public sphere can not be applied to Washington DC's use of public space.

Archie Alexander was an African American architect, who designed the famous tidal basin in the southwest quadrant of Washington. A man made body of water. The purpose was to control the flood of the Potomac. 3300 cherry blossom trees are surrounding the tidal basin. Washington Monument, Jefferson Memorial and Franklin Roosevelt Memorial are located east, west and north of the tidal basin. When you read the tour books or brochures, usually, the name of the designer of the landmark is mentioned. When it comes to the tidal basin, the designer is not mentioned. The tourist information materials should give Archie Alexander his credit in designing the tidal basin.

DC war Memorial is located not far from Lincoln Memorial, but is hidden behind trees. It is very hard to find it. After dark, the memorials in Washington, DC are illuminated, but DC war memorial is not. There is no brochure or written information is available about DC war memorial. If you make an effort and locate the memorial, you

will not see any visitors there, while there are hundreds of visitors around Korean War, Vietnam war and Lincoln memorials during the spring and the summer times. DC war memorial is not publicized in the tourists' books or visitors' centers.

African American Civil War Memorial is located at U and 10th Streets NW Washington DC 20009. The location is remote from the tourists' attraction sites in the city. No average visitor will go to visit the memorial at that location. No written information is available about this memorial in the visitor centers, or in the tourists printed materials. Most of the visitors to the memorial are African Americans only. The memorial, seven years in the planning, is the first in the country to honor all the African American Union troops and their white officers. For most of the time since the war ended in 1865, the black contribution to the North's victory was forgotten or ignored. After the Confederate surrender at Appomatox, Gen. William T. Sherman organized a two-day victory parade of more than 200,000 troops through Washington, and not a single black regiment

was invited to participate. A bill written two years after the war by a USCT veteran would have built a memorial, but it was passed by the Senate only to fail in the House.

The memorial is part of a new recognition of the role played by African Americans, both freed men and slaves, who volunteered for service. The statue, named The Spirit of Freedom, was designed by sculptor Ed Hamildton, of Louisville. The semicircular work depicts soldiers from various armed forces on the outer side and a supportive family as the inner circle.

Benjamin Banneker Circle is a small circle without a statue (so far) dedicated for Benjamin Banneker across from L'enfante Plaza hotel in the southwest of Washington.

There is a rumor around that Banneker Circle will be changed to Reagan Circle. The Republicans gathered millions of dollars and ready to cast a great statue for President Ronald Reagan at that circle. Banneker Statue Approved For S.W. A memorial for Benjamin Banneker will be located in front of the U. S. Postal Service headquarters building on 10th St. S.W. That is the recent recommendation of the National Capital Memorial Commission, which oversees placement of memorials for the National Park

Service. Banneker was a free black who helped lay out the boundaries of the new federal district in the 1790s during the term of President George Washington. At the waterfront end of 10th St. is an overlook park that has been named for Banneker. Placing the statue in

that park was the original proposal of Washington Interdependence Council, the group spearheading the memorial campaign. A walkway to the waterfront was in the original proposal. The Banneker Memorial will not be built at Banneker Circle - the end of 10th St. S.W. overlooking the waterfront, among the L'Enfant Plaza buildings, closer to the Smithsonian Museums. (SW DC news 12/99). Benjamin Banneker deserved to be honored for his accomplishment. He was a mathematician, astronomer, compiler of almanacs, inventor, and writer, one of the first important black American intellectuals.

The Minnehaha Theater (1213 U Street) was D.C.'s first silent moving picture theater. It operated at this location and was later renamed the S.H. Dudley, after the famous comedian. In 1958, Ben and Virginia Ali opened up Ben's Chili Bowl in the building, promising "the Finest Hot Dogs and Chili Served with a Touch of Class." The Ali family has operated it ever since, celebrating the 40th anniversary with a street party in 1998. Ben's has become a D.C. landmark, and has survived its share of ordeals, such as the '68 riots and the building of the Metro stop across the street (where the Duke Ellington mural can be seen). Ben's Chili Bowl is Bill Cosby's favorite restaurant, as he courted his wife Camille here. Cosby makes a point to visit Ben's whenever he is in D.C. Scenes from "The Pelican Brief" were also filmed here and in the nearby Metro stop. The walls in the back room are covered in the remembrances of Shaw culture, including some pictures of the original Minnehaha, the facade of which can still be seen behind the Ben's sign.

For a period of time after the Civil War, more and more freedmen came to Washington. As their numbers increased among the black bourgeoisie in the city, racial tolerance decreased. This lack of tolerance left the U Street community, including its businesses, increasingly more segregated from white Washington. Black business people decided to go it alone as they began their own black business movement. The hub of this effort was in the U Street neighborhood. U Street gained its fame in these venues, especially at the Howard Theater, but also in its nightclubs. All jazz was performed in this culture of excitement, glitz, high fashion. U Street was a hotbed of artistic innovation and expression. (<http://www.shawdc.com>)

As you walk east on East Capitol Street, through the center of Capitol Hill,

you'll discover Lincoln Park, an urban oasis and active neighborhood park surrounded by an almost unbroken line of 19th-century Victorian homes. Enhancing this site are two major sculptures offering an interesting commentary on race relations in the United States. The first, Thomas Ball's Emancipation Monument shows Abraham Lincoln bequeathing freedom on a rising slave. Frederick Douglas spoke at the dedication of this moving monument. The second, the Bethune Statue, is a contemporary sculpture by Robert Berk. This memorial statue presents Mary McLeod Bethune, educator and presidential adviser, handing off her sum of learning to the next generation of African Americans. This park, a public space, cited in L'Enfant's plan for the city, was the site of a Union encampment during the Civil War. In the 1960s, it was the scene of civil rights rallies. It was redesigned in 1974 and today provides the neighborhood a place to congregate and relax with some shade, some open space, a child's playground, a sunken promenade, and plenty of space for dog walking. (<http://www.dcheritage.org>)

This provocative, bronze statue portrays Abraham Lincoln bequeathing freedom on a rising slave. Lincoln's hand rests on the Emancipation Proclamation. Symbols of the horrors of slavery - whipping post, chains, fetters, frayed whip - surround the kneeling freed slave. To convey slavery as something that has past, a rose vine climbs up the whipping post. Frederick Douglas delivered the principal speech at the dedication ceremony attended by Ulysses Grant and his cabinet. Funds for the sculpture came solely from the contributions of emancipated slaves. Charlotte Scott of Virginia, freed by this proclamation, contributed the first five-dollars; it was the first money she earned as a free person. (<http://www.dcheritage.org>)

This memorial honors Mary McLeod Bethune, educator, scholar, activist and founder of The National Council of Negro Women. The 17-foot-high bronze statue shows Bethune handing off her sum of learning to two black children, representing the next generation of African Americans. In her right hand Bethune holds a cane, a gift from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Etched on the six-sided pedestal that supports these three dramatic figures is Bethune's moving message from her "Last Will and Testament" - her farewell advice to America's black youth: "I leave you love. I leave you hope. I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another.

I leave you a thirst for education. I leave you a respect for the use of power. I leave you faith. I leave you racial dignity. I leave you a desire to live harmoniously with your fellow men. I leave you, finally, a responsibility to our young people." (<http://www.dcheritage.org>) The Black Fashion Museum preserves and exhibits antique and recent garments designed made, and worn by people of the African Diaspora located on 2007 Vermont Ave N. W.

Black Public Space in Washington, DC

As a federal district, Washington, D.C. is neither a state, nor part of one. In this respect, the nation's capital differs from every city in the country. The immense federal presence contributes to the duality of the city, with its complex layering of Monumental Washington downtown around the Mall and the numerous neighborhoods that constitute the local community (Fitzpatrick and Goodwin, p. 13). For two hundred years the threads of two distinct communities have been woven through the intricate web of federal and local interests in Washington--the traditionally dominant White population and a vibrant, thriving Black community which has attained majority status over the past three decades (Fitzpatrick and Goodwin, p. 13).

Black neighborhoods were known as a "secret city" with their own separate social and economic institutions. Forced to overcome the barriers imposed by segregation and discrimination, Black Washingtonians molded a virtual social and economic culture within their carefully delineated neighborhoods (Fitzpatrick and Goodwin, p. 14). Like many other American cities, Washington is undergoing dynamic changes through shifting demographics and gentrification. There are whispers about The Plan—whether Washington is finally succumbing to the design for returning the city to White domination (Fisher, p. 1). Thus the question that begs to be answered---does Black public space still exist, and if so, where is it?

Public space enhances our appreciation of the connections between political principles, social and urban processes and our everyday environments. Public spaces define what kind of society we are—they reflect our values. The "street" is not only the basic structuring device of the city's form but also the locus of its civilization. According to recent legislation to establish

a process for review and approval of proposed commemorative works on public spaces in the District of Columbia, "public space" means (1) any public street, alley, circle, bridge, building, park, other public place or property owned or under the administrative control or jurisdiction of the District of Columbia (Appendix 2, p. 2). Public space does NOT include property that is both owned by the Federal government and under the administrative control or jurisdiction of the National Park Service, the General Services Administration, the Department of Defense, or other federal agency (Appendix 2, p. 2). As Habermas posits,

The misplaced faith in the efficacy of bracketing suggests another flaw in the bourgeois conception. This conception assumes that a public sphere is or can be a space of zero degree culture, so utterly bereft of any specific ethos to accommodate with perfect neutrality and equal ease interventions expressive of any and every cultural ethos. But this assumption is counterfactual, and not for reasons that are merely accidental. In stratified societies, unequally empowered social groups tend to develop unequally valued cultural styles. The result is the development of more powerful informal pressures that marginalize the contributions of members of subordinated groups both in everyday life contexts and in official public spheres. Moreover, these pressures are amplified, rather than mitigated, by the peculiar political economy of the bourgeois public sphere (1989, p. 64)

Public space, then, becomes the focal point-- the veritable heartbeat of a community. The use of public space in Black Washington takes on new dimensions, representing and preserving the past while embracing the transformations and diversification of the future.

U Street was at the heart of the secret city. According to Fitzpatrick and Goodwin, "Often called Washington's "Black Broadway", U Street was the leading commercial and business district by day and the center of nightlife and sporting activity after dark for all of Black Washington (p. 206). Just as U Street's popularity arose from the restricted life of Washington's segregation when "Black folks just didn't go downtown," it declined with desegregation after 1954. U Street simply couldn't compete with downtown Washington (Fitzpatrick and Goodwin, p. 207). Marion Jackson Pryde remembers growing up in the Shaw area. "We couldn't go to any of the big concerts downtown, the churches provided most of the cultural

activities for us. We had three theaters on U Street—The Booker T., The Republic, and the Lincoln. The Lincoln, of course, is still standing” (p. 2). Now U Street is the vanguard of Washington’s most dramatic gentrification since World War II, an economic transformation that has returned the street to its roots as an entertainment corridor and is replacing the Shaw area’s urban decay with \$400, 000 town houses and shops selling \$2,000 coffee tables (Fisher, p. 1). Fisher (2001) says that some see this as “destruction of a piece of Black Washington” (p. 2). One of the most compelling examples of the issue of Black Public Space is that of the African American Civil War Memorial, located on the corner of 10th Street and U Street, NW.

The African American Civil War Memorial is an eleven-foot-high, bronze tribute to African American soldiers and sailors who served with Union forces in the Civil War. Named the Spirit of Freedom, it was sculpted by Ed Hamilton and has 185,000 names of African Americans who served inscribed on stainless steel plaques. One side of the statue depicts three soldiers and one sailor, while a family appears on the statue’s far side.

A perusal of Military Monuments and Memorials of Washington, DC on the Internet will only yield information and pictures of the Marine Corps Memorial (Iwo Jima), the U.S. Navy Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Vietnam and Vietnam’s Women Memorial---all located on the National Mall. Not a mention of the African American Civil War Memorial. Nor is it mentioned in guidebooks or tourist literature.

To some extent, an answer may be found in the legislation, which deals specifically with commemorative works and public space. In considering a proposed commemorative work on public space, the Mayor, the Council and the Committee will be guided by the following two criteria:

- (1) To the maximum extent possible, a commemorative work shall be located in surroundings that are relevant to and compatible with the subject of the commemorative work.
- (2) A commemorative work shall be situated in a manner that prevents interference with or encroachment upon any existing commemorative work, and that protects and enhances, to the maximum extent practicable, open space, existing public and private uses, and cultural and natural resources (Appendix 2,

p. 4).

A beautiful photograph of the Memorial is included in “365 Days of Black History: 2001 Engagement Book. The text beside the picture says (in part), “the commemorative sculpture is located in an area of Washington, DC celebrated for its cultural significance” (Appendix #1). What inference should be drawn from that statement in particular and from the omission of the Memorial from all tourist literature and its “fellow” war memorials located on the Mall?

Current legislation submitted by Councilman Jim Graham is entitled “Sense of the Council African American Civil War Memorial Grimke Museum and Institute Support Resolution of 2001,” PR 14-42. The following findings of the Council have relevance:

(2) The African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation has successfully completed the construction of the long overdue first National Monument honoring the 209,145 Black soldiers and their 7,000 White officers whose courage and sacrifice helped to end slavery and keep America united under one flag.

(3) Having completed the monument in Shaw, the African American Civil War Memorial Board of Directors is now seeking a suitable, permanent home for an African American Civil War Legacy Institute and Museum to add to the attraction of the monument and increase tourism in the U Street corridor.

(4) The Grimke Building on Vermont Avenue, NW is located adjacent to the

Monument and would make an ideal location for the Museum and Institute.

(5) It is both District and Federal Government Policy to assist in locating national

monuments and museums such as the Civil War Memorial, away from the

downtown Mall area into neighborhoods throughout the Nations Capitol, to

enhance economic development.

(11) The African-American Civil War Memorial Legacy Institute and Museum will

add greatly to the tourist appeal of the monument and encourage many of the 20 million tourists who visit Washington each year to leave the Mall area and explore the rich culture and heritage of our neighborhoods (Appendix 4, pp. 2-3).

According to Padro (2001), “the city government regularly proclaims that the District’s rich African American heritage is a great draw for tourists. But it is selling off or neglecting the very buildings that tourists would want to visit” (p. B08). Moreover, the very areas of the city that are home to the Black memorials, monuments and historic landmarks are themselves being gentrified. Carter G. Woodson’s home, the Howard Theatre and the home of Frederick Douglass are all located in parts of the city where the majority will soon be the minority. Some of these sites are not even listed in the brochures and guides most consumed by the touring public. Given that the District’s population is overwhelmingly African American, there is a devastating under-representation of and lack of appreciation for the Black voice in the public sphere.

Consensus and the Public Sphere in the District

In order to have influence in the public sphere consensus must be reached. Consensus is defined herein as private persons with public concerns that lead to common interests. Habermas would assert that African American concerns are a “private interest” even though the majority of residents in the District are African American. In order to explore how African American concerns are reflected in public discourse, data collected from interviews with African American Washingtonians were compared with concerns expressed in the editorial/opinion sections of the District’s on-line newspapers, what Habermas purports, as a forum (editorials) where public ideas are discussed. The four co-researchers, who are African American

Washingtonians, have resided in the city for over 30 years. Two of the co-researchers are male and two are female. They were interviewed regarding their concerns about the city and several themes emerged.

Five issues emerged from Sam’s interview. He is concerned about the phlegmatic state of the African American community in Washington, drugs in the community, the youth, statehood, and public schools. Sam, a 42-year-old disc jockey, views the Washington African American community as stagnant. He posits that “We [African Americans] need to be more aware and not content with the way things are. We can’t go to politicians and ask for whatever” (personal communication, April 21, 2001). Sam stresses a need for self-sufficiency within the community.

According to Sam, the African American community needs to clean up itself before they can think about monuments. Sam believes the community needs to reconnect with the youth, and educate them about their culture. There is a need, Sam contends, to teach the youth about their history and their lineage. He sees the lack of self-esteem as a major problem among the youth in the Washington African American community. Drugs in the African American community also concern Sam. Sam also considers statehood as an issue worth pursuing. Lastly, he is concerned about the public school system. In his words, “DC public schools suck” (personal communication, April 21, 2001). He maintains that students are never challenged.

Wayne has resided in the district since the 1970s. Taxation is the first of his concerns. He feels the federal government should not tax DC residents. He also contends that there is a move to rid the city of African Americans. Wayne notes the shortage of rental properties as an example. Other co-researchers feel the same and further substantiate this claim. Like Sam, Wayne sees a need to re-educate the youth. Wayne would also like to see more African American policemen on the street. He says, “the neighborhoods are patrolled by too many other ethnicity’s” (personal communication, April 22, 2001). Unemployment among African Americans also concerns Wayne. Wayne also feels that there should be areas in the city that reflect the dominant DC culture.

Audrey’s first concern evolves around affordable housing for African American Washingtonians. She notes that a lot of housing is going up, but it is out of the range of certain people. Affordable housing, according to Audrey, is around \$80,000. She observes

that African Americans started to be relocated in the 1960s. Audrey says, “they fled to the suburbs and the counties. Many couldn’t afford to leave and they wound up in public housing”(personal communication, April 23, 2001).

Public schools also concern Audrey. She sees no improvement in public education, particularly as it pertains to African Americans. Employment, taxation, and statehood also concern Audrey. African American representation in the downtown area is not a major concern for Audrey. However, she feels that African Americans should be represented in some fashion downtown. The researcher posed this question to Audrey: “What three changes would you make as mayor?” Audrey says she would try to produce literature inclusive of the entire city and make it available to tourists. When it was pointed out that her effort would duplicate one of the functions of the tourism board, she replied “they’re all White” (personal communication, April 23, 2001). Essentially, she is saying that the tourism board does not reflect or relate to the interests of African Americans. Audrey’s second change would be to enforce the laws already on the books regarding truancy. She would also fight for affordable housing. Audrey is concerned about the elderly in the city who cannot keep up their homes. She said she would try to identify these people and provide assistance to repair homes where needed and provide a housekeeping service for the elderly.

As a native African American Washingtonian, 30-year-old Wendy has quite a few concerns. Wendy resides in the Southeast quadrant of the city and, in accordance with Audrey and Wayne; she is primarily concerned with the exodus of African Americans from the city and the influx of Europeans. She feels the mayor makes it easy for this to occur by abolishing rent control. Wendy states, “They’re [the city] tearing down projects and building townhouses and renovating the apartments. So, they will probably raise the rent and the people that were there won’t be able to come back” (personal communication, April 21, 2001). Like Audrey, Wendy states that African Americans will not be able to afford the new townhouse and renovated apartments. Therefore, Whites are free to come back to the city. Regarding Black flight, the 2000 U.S. Census shows a 5.7 percent decrease in the District population since 1990. Since there is an influx of Whites into the District, one could reason that this decrease represents Black flight.

Wendy wants to open a recreation center. She believes Whites will probably frequent the new Southeast Tennis and Learning Center that opened on April 22, 2001. Wendy points out that there are other recreation centers in the city, but they have summer hours and are not conducive to the needs of African American youths. She feels that the city will start building more recreation centers, but African Americans will not benefit from that effort. Wendy, like Sam, insists that African Americans need to be more involved in their community. She says, “People don’t want to get involved. They’re not a lot of people willing to give of themselves” (personal communication, April 21, 2001). Wendy notes that everyone, Black and White alike, must get involved in the community.

Schools are another cause for concern for Wendy. She says, “they don’t address college, they don’t have proper school supplies, they don’t have this or that and our kids are getting the short end of the stick” (personal communication, April 21, 2001). Giving businesses that support enterprise schools a tax break will help the schools with funding that the city cannot provide. Wendy expressed concern about the lack of African American monuments in the Mall area downtown. She is interested in the monuments and attractions that celebrate African Americans. For example, the Anacostia Museum, a part of the Smithsonian, focuses on Black history. Wendy asserts that tourists are not familiar with the Anacostia Museum. Furthermore, they would not be encouraged to visit the museum because it is in the southwest quadrant of the city. Wendy believes that every quadrant has a section that one would not want to frequent. She notes that there are \$300,000 homes in the Southeast quadrant of the city.

The gentrification of U Street in the name of multiculturalism also troubles Wendy. She says, “when you merge cultures, you lose some of your own” (personal communication, April 21, 2001). The plight of DC General hospital concerns Wendy as well. She states that it has the number one trauma center in the city and the city wants to move the trauma center to Greater Southeast Community hospital. Wendy is not very concerned about statehood because she tries to stay out of the political arena. She admits that she detests the proposed new name—the state of New Columbia.

Again, according to Habermas, consensus mandates that private persons with public concerns lead to common interests. The individual interests of the co-

researchers were reviewed to determine their common interests. An interest had to be cited by at least three co-researchers to be recognized as a theme. Consequently, four themes emerged: schools, Black flight, the youth, and statehood or taxation. Although only four Washingtonians were interviewed, the themes generated also reflect the views expressed by African Americans in the District's black press.

The newspaper editorials found in the city's newspapers on-line, for the most part, are divergent from the interests of the co-researchers. Some of the editorials focused on veterans making a financial sacrifice when they retire, the China incident, and complaints about the racist, sexist, and homophobic slurs police made over squad car computers. Specifically, there were spin-offs of the China dilemma in several papers. One editorial touted lobbying against Beijing hosting the 2008 Olympics. Other editorials either applauded Bush's handling of the incident or accused China of being corrupt. Out of the ten newspapers surveyed, the *Georgetowner* was the only paper with editorials that addressed concerns of the co-researchers. The paper ran editorials on schools and DC voting rights, which leads to the issue of statehood. The editorial on schools addressed funding. While funding is a major consideration, the co-researchers disclosed deeper educational issues. They are concerned about truancy, students encountering educational challenges, and encouraging students to attend college.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 30.8 percent of the 572,059 Washingtonians are White, 2.7 percent are Asian, and 60 percent are African Americans. African Americans constitute the dominant group in the District. Interestingly, while Habermas suggests that in the political public sphere: "The issues discussed became "general" not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to be able to participate" (p. 37) there is no question that everyone does not participate in the determination of which social issues are firstly addressed within the District. Additionally, policies in the public sphere do not operate "to the advantage of dominant groups" as Fraser notes (1992, p. 66). If, indeed, this were the case, African American concerns would be addressed. Consider the case of District historian Louise Hutchinson. She feels that it is important to have African American representation among the downtown attractions. Milloy (2001) points out "In 1971, after several years of lobbying, Hutchinson persuaded government officials to change the name of the 10th Street Overlook, a circle near L'Enfant Plaza, to Benjamin Banneker Overlook

Park" (p. C1). For the past 30 years, she has tried to erect a memorial of Benjamin Banneker and a visitor's center in L'Enfant Plaza. To date, she has not raised enough money to start the project. Coincidentally, the idea of placing a statue of Ronald Reagan in L'Enfant Plaza surfaced. So far, over 40 million dollars has been raised (Milloy, 2001, p. C1). Milloy (2001) also notes "The National Capital Planning Commission's memorials and museums master plan, released in December, now refers to Banneker Park by its old name, the 10th Street Overlook. And it includes an artist's rendering of a Banneker statue on the promenade—not inside the circle overlook (p. C4). Dominance in the Western world does not reflect numbers it reflects power.

This notion of dominance by power and not by numbers has been articulated by Karim (1993) whose article focuses on competing discourses and how the dominant discourses, with the help of social structures, are more likely to be held in place:

The ideological bases of terminology networks and meanings proposed by dominant discourses may, however, be challenged more seriously by alternative discourses. New words expressing alternative ideas or new meanings of existing terms may appear through deconstructive processes and may even be enshrined in legislation. But ultimately, and often with the collusion of conservative populist discourses manifested in daily conversations, dominant discourses reconstruct the previous meanings of the older terms or place the newer ones proposed by alternative discourses into ideological frameworks of the status quo. (p. 201)

Karim's argument illustrates the difficulty alternative discourses have in truly challenging the dominant discourses. By the same logic, the public sphere then, could not likely be "transformed [by] these [alternative] discourses," contrary to what Habermas tends to suggest in *Further Reflections on the Public Sphere* (p. 429). In fact, contact with these alternative discourses rather enables the reconstruction of the dominant's previous meanings and their adaptation of any newer ones. Habermas' view of the "self-transforma[tive]" potential of these universalistic discourses again romanticizes the public sphere because it assumes that all participants are not only members but are operating "within"[vi] the forum of public opinion. Markell suggests that Habermas' universalizing concept bene-

fits a particular public and thus, in an extension of this argument, must also legitimate the exclusionary principles on which Western society was formed.

Mass Media and the Black Public Sphere in the District

Because of its legal status as the capitol of the United States of America, Washington, D.C. is home to our nation's three highest branches of government: Congress, the White House, and the Supreme Court, along with numerous specialized federal departments, agencies, commissions, and boards. At another level, this city, which has at least a 60% Black population, is home to a locally elected Black Mayor, City Council President, and School Board Superintendent, and a White majority City Council, and a racially integrated, yet White-controlled court system, along with many other local government departments and agencies that are headed and staffed by a racially integrated workforce.

Collectively, both levels of government institutions in Washington, D.C. represent what Habermas has described as a "political public sphere," one in which the state obtains its public character through its responsibilities in providing for the public (p. 398). And in noting how the political public sphere becomes transformed into a public sphere, Habermas argues:

Only when the exercise of public authority has actually been subordinated to the

requirement of democratic publicness" [does such a change occur, and that it is only through 'public opinion'] or a public that is engage[d] in rational discussion [that such publicness] exists" (p. 399).

Furthermore, Habermas posits a single public sphere where all people regardless of their individual differences i.e., race, class, gender or other identities, would shed such identities, at least momentarily, to focus on public issues of concern to all.

A public sphere defined in this manner is problematic because it constructs such a concept within a framework of White male Eurocentric discourse, wherein

conflict, emotion, and personal or relational experiences are all marginalized as the means by which such a public sphere can be formed and the people within it can become engaged. Secondly, because of this view of a single public sphere, many of the issues that are likely to emerge are ones that have broad, universal appeal, since they are the ones that reach across the widest possible cross section of the public. What this means, then, is that issues that reflect local problems and thus demand local solutions, which may resonate with different publics, will not receive the attention they deserve within a framework of a single public sphere. Finally, Habermas' single public sphere concept implies that cultural differences among the public can, like educational or income disparities, be subordinated to issues of commonality. But in America, given its history of racism and continued racial discrimination against African Americans, for example, cultural differences are a critical component concerning the particular issues that many African American view as important e.g., racial profiling or the differences in the criminalization of crack cocaine versus powdered cocaine.

Thus, for the reasons stated above, we believe that Habermas' concept of a single public sphere does not accurately reflect the many publics that exists here in our Nation's Capitol, as well as in other places in this country and abroad. And because of the District's majority African American population and government, along with the historical significance of Blacks who have lived here in the past and contributed greatly to this area and the nation, we believe it is important to undergo an investigation of the Black public sphere in D.C.; specifically, focusing our attention on the role that the local D.C. mass media perform in its formation and engagement.

Habermas states that "when the public is large, this kind of communication requires certain means of dissemination and influence; today, newspapers and periodicals, radio and television are the media of the public (p. 398). But not all mass media possess the same characteristics, nor do all media practitioners produce identical messages that reflect the same underlying assumptions or values of their profession.

For example, Rosen (1999) describes the often-contentious battles among many editors and journalists of mainstream American newspaper concerning reactions to the public journalism movement in the United States, a reform movement he helped to create in 1993. Advocates of this movement urge newspapers to

connect their reading publics to the communities in which they resided in order to promote civic involvement in issues of common concerns (p. 74). Such a call was being made because it has been shown that many people, including most newspaper readers, feel disconnected from their communities and government, and that a steady diet of newspapers coverage focusing on social problems and conflicts as well as newspapers' reliance on experts and other "insiders" (e.g., pollsters, policy and opinion leaders, media pundits), has contributed to this view (see generally, pp. 19-55). However, many American newspapers, including the elite dailies, the New York Times and the Washington Post, strongly oppose such calls, arguing that this movement violates newspapers' time-honored principles of objectivity, or detached reporting of events, and that it simply turns them into civic boosters or community promoters (see generally, pp. 206-248).

On the other hand, the Black Press, through its historic practice of advocacy journalism, presents a distinctively alternative view of the relationship between their newspapers, the Black reading public and its connection to the Black community -- both locally and diasporically -- as well as such newspapers' connection of Blacks to their local, state and national governments (Pride and Wilson II, 1997; Wolseley, 1990). Indeed, the Black Press was created to provide African Americans with their own public forum -- that is, to represent the interests of Blacks ('We wish to plead our own cause') -- as well as to educate Black people, to improve Black life, and to fight for Black civil rights, including urging Black citizens to vote and to participate in the struggle for freedom and equality on behalf of all African Americans (Pride and Wilson II, p.13; Wolseley, pp. 9-14).

Today, however, while the Black Press is no longer the type of protest medium it once was, it, nonetheless, continues to be an outlet for African American life, issues and concerns. This sentiment was echoed at a recent panel discussion on the "The Future of the Black Press," held at Howard University in March 2001, in which a distinguished panel of Black press scholars, a Black newspaper publisher and a Black Press Association director, all agreed that the Black Press remains a significant institution today because of its connection to the Black community, its control over how issues affecting Blacks will be presented, and its continued need to preserve Black life and freedoms (HU Panel, 2001).

Within the District of Columbia today, there exists a wide range of diverse print, electronic, cable, and telecommunications media. However, for this study, we chose to examine textually certain selected D.C. media; namely, selected editions of four different local Black weekly newspapers in an attempt to identify possible relationships between these news media and the Black public sphere in the District.

Specifically, we investigated the following newspapers: The Capital Spotlight (April 12, and 19, 2001 editions), The Washington Afro-American (March 24, and 31, 2001 editions), The Washington Informer (January 25, April 12, and 19, 2001 editions), and The Washington Sun (April 19, 2001 edition). The content of these newspapers were analyzed to identify how public issues as well as Black voices from the community were presented, to assess what identities and relationships were constructed between the writer and reader, and how the order of discourse might have been structured, shifted or related to other discursive orders

Additionally, a personal interview was conducted with Denise Rolark-Barnes, an African American publisher of the Informer and a native Washingtonian, at the publication's offices located in the Anacostia section of the city. A second personal interview was conducted with Kojo Nnamdi, a Black Caribbean American journalist and a longtime District resident, and host of WAMU's "Public Interest" radio show, as well as WHUT-TV's "Evening Exchange" program, at his home in the District, as well as by telephone.

According to Fairclough (1995), a critical discourse analysis of the media entails an analysis of "communicative events" as well as "the order of discourse" (p. 56). Fairclough describes the "communicative event" as the relationship between the "text, discourse practice, and the sociocultural practice" (p. 57). And with respect to the text, Fairclough views it as having three different functions: one, ideational i.e., as "particular representations and recontextualizations of social practice"; two, interpersonal i.e., "particular constructions of writer and reader identities"; and three, textual i.e., as "particular construction of the relationship between writer and reader" (p. 58). Finally, Fairclough describes the "order of discourse" as referring to how its constituent elements -- genres (language that is structured according to "a particular social practice," and discourses (language that is used to represent a "particular social practice from a particular point of

view") -- are structured, shifted and related to "other socially adjacent orders of discourse (p, 56).

Applying the above approach, we now turn our attention to an analysis of the aforementioned media, specifically beginning with *The Capital Spotlight*, a newspaper which describes itself as the District's oldest Black weekly (April 12, 19, 2001 editions). Printed directly under the masthead of this paper is the phrase "Information is Power," which appears to reflect the publisher's attitude regarding the importance of the paper's content to its readers: that such content is empowering. Information in the paper seems to be defined by articles that inform readers about people, events and activities involving or affecting other Black people or Black groups.

For example, there were several Black "firsts" stories where prominent Blacks had received certain awards for the first time or had been appointed to a new position. For example, when former civil rights leader, Andrew Young, is the first to be named to a visiting professorship in human rights at a Virginia college, or when a Black female Ph.D. president of a White engineering college is the first Black female to receive the Black Engineer of the Year Award by a Black engineering organization.

There were also several "opinion" articles, which presented the views of prominent Blacks or well-known Black journalists. These included former *Emerge* magazine editor, George Curry, who argued on behalf of Black reparations; political conservative and TV talk show host, Armstrong Williams, who offered a response to Urban League President, Hugh Price, regarding his previous comments in another issue on the new U. S. Census figures that showed Hispanic being the largest minority group; and progressive journalist and author, Earl Ofari Hutchinson, commenting on why he believed the federal government would not investigate allegations of police brutality preceding the Cincinnati disturbances

The Black "firsts" types of articles represent Blacks within a context of individual achievement and success, which ideologically promotes a message that individual persistence and hard work will eventually result in rewards. Implicit in this message is the idea that one who does not adopt a Puritan ethic of hard work will not reap (or continue to reap) certain benefits or rewards available within the system, because one has made poor individual decisions. These types of stories construct a world that is shaped and influenced not

primarily by material or other systemic forces, but because of individual decision-making. And the opinion articles represent knowledge as contested, yet still the product of reasoned debate supported by factual evidence.

In both types of articles, writers' identities were constructed around status and role; namely, that these writers' seemed to identify prominent Black individuals as worthy of awards and recognition, which suggested continued efforts by Black newspapers to counter society's historic negative portrayal of Black life and its absence in recognizing Black achievement. Wherein, readers' identities were constructed around individual identities and the need to feel good about themselves.

For the opinion articles, these writers' identities were constructed around their status as prominent journalists or media critics, which placed them in a privileged position to discuss anything they chose to, thus making them "experts" on practically any topic. The identities of readers were also constructed around status and role, which meant that they should simply listen and learn from these "experts," since they probably knew little, if anything, about the subject because of their subordinate identity position to the writers.

What type of relationship is constructed between the writers and readers above? It is one that is formal, because of the formality of language used, in which rational discourse is presented, and it is distant, since it presents the writers as "speaking to" the readers rather than "speaking about" them.

What, then, is the discourse practice regarding the production and consumption of these articles? Black "firsts" stories can be produced with little or no effort because the subject or sources for such articles are generally not difficult to acquire or reach. Such stories also reflect the paper's "publicity" function, that is, these types of stories are produced as news items when in fact they are primarily providing public relations for the individuals or organizations who are named. These "subjects" are always interested in getting "free" publicity that is presented as news, since readers are likely to attach greater acceptability and credibility to it as a news item than as a promotional item. As for the production of opinion articles, such items are usually obtained through the process of syndication, a practice that offers papers a variety of materials, such as opinion items, comics, advice columns, among others, at a flat, bulk rate. It is far less inexpensive to obtain these articles through such a method, than to contract indi-

vidually with each writer. Finally, readers are likely to consume these articles in private spaces, such as at home around other family members who are able to share in its content, as well as in public spaces, such as libraries where readers who are indigent may have to go to access it.

What is the sociocultural context in which these articles appear? These types of articles and the newspaper they appear in are the products of a sociocultural environment that has historically marginalized Black people, Black achievement, and Black opinions. And despite the integration of Black people into the pages of mainstream White papers, Black newspapers like the Capital Spotlight continue to define themselves within this context, i.e., in reaction to this legacy of oppression and discrimination by the dominant majority culture in America.

What is the order of discourse of these articles? The Black "firsts" articles are presented as soft news (or not serious) stories, but are given the attention that is normally reserved for hard news (or serious) stories. Furthermore, such items are presented as "news" rather than as "community announcements," and as such their placement and construction as a news item helps to blur the line between what might be considered news or publicity, or a combination of both.

What absences did we observe in the Capital Spotlight? First, readers were not provided with any outlet for expressing their views in the newspaper, such as in a "Letters to the Editor," or "Person on the Street" section. Second, readers' views were not published in the form of opinion items. Indeed, throughout the newspaper, there was an absence of voices that simply represented Black citizens. Because of these absences along with the aforementioned analysis, this newspaper's construction of the Black Public Sphere was limited to professionals and other prominent voices, and appears to ignore or exclude ordinary Black folks.

At this time we should note that our analysis of The Washington Informer, and The Washington Sun both revealed the same patterns presented by our review of The Capital Spotlight. Thus, rather than replicate such information again, we simply incorporate our views from the above newspaper to the Informer and Sun.

However, in our analysis of The Washington Afro-American (March 24 and 31, 2001 editions), while we observed certain notable differences among this news-

paper when compared to the others, we will, where applicable, incorporate relevant comments made in reference to the Capital Spotlight.

This paper describes itself as a "Proud Paper for a Proud People," which suggests to its readers that the publisher is very conscious about projecting a positive image of Blacks that we (Blacks) can feel good about. As noted in our earlier analysis, this suggests a reactive position in response to Blacks' historic marginalization, and the struggle to offer a counter-narrative. This self-description is initially apparent in the physical layout of the paper, with regard to how similar its physical appearance resembles a mainstream national White newspaper, such as USA Today.

Its physical layout consists of 36 pages of bright, colorful photographs, banners, bold headlines, and two different sections (i.e., "A" and "B"). Additionally, it includes a variety of content, ranging from hard news, sports, editorials and opinion items, to entertainment, church, and society news. And its stories are reported from a variety of sources: including national news wire services (i.e., ones that are Black-owned as well as and White-owned), as well reports from staff journalists whose bylines appeared in their stories. Thus, this paper appeared to generally represent itself and text as a highly professional news organization, much like its White counterpart, which we all would want to read and share with others.

How did the paper's text function interpersonally? In our view, the paper constructed the identities of its writers and readers as both middle and upper class professionals, who were talking among themselves. Thus, the paper's text clearly was constructed along class lines and as such gave little, if any, attention to the problems or concerns of the Black working or poor classes. For example, front-page news articles addressed such matters as a prominent television talk show host being fired; President Bush's meeting with Black Clergy; proposed congressional legislation; and the possible launch of a national Black television network.

What types of relationships were constructed in the text between writers and readers? In the editorial and opinion sections of the paper, writers and readers' relationships were constructed along the lines of class, where both writers and readers were members from the same highly educated and affluent segment of the Black community.

Indeed, an editorial cartoon poignantly expressed this construction of class. It showed two buses, one labeled "Black Flight" and the other "White Flight," speeding further away into the suburbs to "escape" living in the major cities, while a well dressed older Black man and a neatly attired young boy standing together watch as the busses speed away. The thought line above the man reads, "Where do we go from here?" (March 24, 2001, p. A4). Interestingly, there is no depiction of the Black working and poor classes whom these Black and Whites people are shown "escaping" The opinions items that are included also reflected this class bias in that they were all written by prominent Blacks, e.g., Rev. Jesse Jackson or academic scholars like, Ronald Walters, generally included many of the same people that appeared in the above Capital Spotlight newspaper.

However, unlike that paper, the Afro-American published "Letters to the Editors," and, indeed, invited comments from all of its readers. Individuals had submitted many of the letters published which simply identified them by name alone. Still, at least a third of the letters published were from prominent Black opinion leaders, such as Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., or from individual affiliated with particular organizations.

Finally, our description of the discourse and sociocultural practices of the Afro-American were the same as for the previously reviewed newspaper, The Capital Spotlight. And the order of discourse for the Afro-American reflected the genres and discourses of a mainstream newspaper, that is, it separated news from opinions items, and divided the paper into different sections that reflected particular interests. Clearly, this paper had adopted a traditional model of journalism, which it had taken and integrated into the social practices of a professional class of Blacks. Curiously, the paper's coverage of local D.C. was relegated to a short section on the back pages.

Now we turn our attention to the comments of two individuals who were interviewed for our investigation of the mass media and its relationship to the Black Public Sphere: Denise Rolark-Barnes, publisher of The Washington Informer, a Black weekly newspaper; and Kojo Nnamdi, a radio-TV public affairs programming hosts with two noncommercial broadcast stations: WHUT-TV and WAMU-FM.

With regard to the relationship between Black newspapers and the Black Public Sphere, Rolark-Barnes defined it as one that was fully reflected in what her

newspaper (and other Black newspaper as well) continued to do on a daily basis: serve the needs and interests of Black readers. Thus, she viewed the overall content of her paper as a public forum, and, therefore, did make a distinction between certain types of content e.g., hard or soft news, opinion articles, among others. According to Rolark-Barnes, the Black Press' continued struggle to exist, and in some instances thrive, despite pressing financial difficulties, limited advertising, and lesser circulation figures, demonstrates its continued existence as a public forum for Black people, because of its alignment with the struggles of Black people. Moreover, Rolark-Barnes emphasized how crucial Black ownership was to determining the contours of any relationship of Black newspapers to the Black Public Sphere.

However, a markedly different view of this relationship was advanced by Kojo Nnamdi, who notes that because of the changing nature of Blacks in D.C. and America since the Civil Rights Movement, both the Black Press and the Black Public Sphere are no longer as clearly defined as they once were.

For example, Nnamdi states that although there is a significantly high percentage of educated and affluent Blacks living in this area, many no longer view public issues or their own problems in strictly racial terms, but are increasingly focused first on the impact that various public issues might have on them economically i.e., as members of the middle and upper classes, and not as Black Americans. Nnamdi cites the recent controversy surrounding D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams' proposal to privatize D.C. General Hospital, the District's only health facility that is open to its poor and working class residents, and the failure or absence of a organized Black middle and upper class effort to oppose this. Indeed, Nnamdi notes that Black in this class will challenge law enforcement administrations on racial profiling and corporations on the glass ceiling, because they see these issues as racial in nature, but will ignore the D.C. Hospital controversy, because such is characterized as a class issue that is applicable only to poor people.

Thus, Nnamdi argues that race and class often intersects now, and that because of this factor, he resists trying to define the Black Public Sphere. Instead, Nnamdi offers the following:

Try to define the Black Public Sphere in such a way that there is room for intra-family disagreement. That is how I see my role as an Afro-Caribbean American

trying to help redefine the Black Public Sphere as a sphere, which because of class and other differences, can have an intra-family dialogue characterized by disagreement but can come to a fair resolution where no one can corner the market of defining the Black Public Sphere (Personal Interview)

Conclusion

Exclusivity was very much an integral part of informing the Habermas' notion of consensus in the public sphere. The new found wealth in Britain and France, then eventually in the United States, can largely be attributed to the colonial initiative that enabled this emergence of the bourgeois public sphere, one that increased the awareness of the conjugal family, and helped foster the private man's public use of reason. Dana Polan (1990) discusses Habermas' fallacy in sentimentalizing the "supposedly pristine space of eighteenth-century bourgeois reason" without effectively implicating "economic interests as distorting this supposedly liberal reasoning" in his original theory:

most especially, in the gap between the disinterested reason of public debate and the real economic interests that this debate depended upon. He reminds us (and himself) that bourgeois society's reasoners were representatives of a system of exchange. But even here, economic interest seems contingent. Yes, only certain people are part of the public sphere, and, yes, the things they evaluate have a bearing on their capitalist efforts, but the sphere of reason bears nonetheless a certain degree of relative autonomy from the origins and interest of its members. (p. 263)

With this new class of citizens emerging as the "reasoners" of society, the maintenance of the slave trade and oppression of the subservient others would be mandatory in order to maintain capital gains. Habermas' theory consequently helps to illustrate that slavery is as much a part of the political, economic, social, public sphere, as it is part of the personal, familial, private sphere of Western societies. "The bourgeois public sphere was much more run through by the interests of capitalist exchange than Habermas wants to admit" (Polan, p. 264).

However, everyone is still not participating equally within the District's public sphere. In fact, if they were, the supposedly inclusive principles of the present liberal public sphere would clearly bring to light its exclusive practices thus enabling genuine self-reflection such that true critical analysis would ensue from the citizen's needs. Consider how the discourses of the four co-researchers and the issues addressed in the black press had such a historical resemblance to the historically lackadaisical attitudes and legislation towards memorializing visibly black cultural artifacts in the public sphere. With the unspoken agreement that alternative spheres exist within society, these considerations of black space in the District illustrates that the public sphere cannot do justice to plurality when the notions of blacks as an "alternative," "tertiary," or "private" interest voice (even though these issues are reflections of the numerical majority) are imbedded in the motivations of the white decision-makers within the city. Complete participation becomes unachievable when the inequalities between an alternative sphere, whether black, female, gay etc., and the dominant are normalized by labeling their concerns as "special interest." Real equality would require an intensive scrutiny of the premises and conditions from which the public sphere and Western liberal democracy originated.

If alternative spheres are considered by the dominant, as compensatory measures for accommodating the "others" in society, as the allocation of resources towards blacks in the District suggests, then contact with these alternative spheres provides the dominant with the necessary tools for upholding its previous meanings. Any restructuring that does occur within the public sphere occurs as the result of a dialogue between the (various) alternative spheres and the dominant sphere, rather than within a general public sphere. The public sphere cannot be self-transformative, as Habermas' view suggests, because the very nature of its transformation acknowledges the presence, "personhood" and power existing within these alternative spheres. Markell suggests an inherently "agonistic political action" exists within the public sphere where universalism is shattered and "differences are expressed [and] not treated as alien and threatening, but is paradoxically embraced and encouraged as a condition of the fragile presumption of democratic legitimacy" (394). Although there is an obvious power in diversity, more structures within the public sphere exist to reinforce the normalizing claims of liberalism than do those that affect change.

Habermas' conception of the public sphere cannot fully account for the multiple spheres existing within civil society. Postmodernism has challenged notions of universality by maintaining the importance and validity of coexisting, interlocking truths. Although Habermas attempts to unify his original theory with the demands of postmodernism, *Further Reflections on the Public Sphere* reconstructs the dominance of the hegemonic group by implying that the alternative spheres enable the transformative potential of the public sphere. The existence of alternative spheres then, by this logic, is for the purpose of maintaining the integrity of the public sphere rather than in furthering the development of these alternative spheres. If bourgeois discourses can be both universalistic and self-referential as Habermas claims, then alternative spheres must move towards this universalistic force if they too, are to be self-referential and self-transformative. In short, alternative spheres desire the public sphere, a notion very familiar in colonial discourse, where the other longs to be the center. Habermas maintains the bourgeois public sphere as the precursor of contemporary societies and in doing so, he further assuages any modest efforts he made at considering the diversity that alternative spheres bring to civil society and the autonomy and power these spheres enjoy from their difference.

The black public sphere in the District is in a dialogical relationship with the public sphere. The dialogue contributes to and resists rational consensus as it engages in the production of its own discourse, in forums such as the black press. The dialogical relationship is necessary, as Foucault notes, because relations of power are always in flux and are thus always creating newer relations. The dialogue existing between the public sphere and the black sphere is necessary to illuminate the true nature of hegemonic dominance as well as necessary in forcing the public sphere to become self-reflective, before claims of consensus are falsely promoted in public discourse.

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Notes

[i] Habermas notes how "the relationship between the authorities and the subjects thereby assumed the peculiar ambivalence of public regulation and private initiative" (1996, p. 24). This ambivalence can be contextualized in terms of the black sphere because it was both publicly and privately regulated, giving authority to a new class of citizens that previously would not have been privileged to such authority.

[ii] This public sphere is also exclusive to men, which for the intents of this paper will not deal very much with the exclusion of white women as much as the exclusion of black men and women alike. In *Further Reflections on the Public Sphere* (1992) Habermas notes that this exclusion of women "affects not only the economic system but has an impact on the private core area of the conjugal family. This shows that the exclusion of women has been constitutive for the political public sphere not merely in that the latter has been

dominate by men as a matter of contingency but also in that its structure and relation to the private sphere has been determined in a gender-specific fashion. Unlike the exclusion of underprivileged men, the exclusion of women had structuring significance" (p. 428).

[iii] Women by default means white women unless otherwise racially specified.

[iv] Habermas comments: "If we apply the same perspective to the bourgeois public sphere, the exclusion of women from this world dominated by men now looks different than it appeared to me at the time" (1992, p. 427). Liberty has been taken to apply this perspective, on his behalf, to illustrate how "different" the public sphere is at this particular time.

[v] Markell discusses Habermas' communicative action theory in conjunction with the notion of the public sphere and summarizes the idea of orienting toward consensus: "If Habermas regards the public sphere as an extension of a form of communication directed...at immediate solidarity and transparency among people...then perhaps [his project also suggests] overcoming the plurality of the political world" (p. 385).

[vi] This concept draws on Foucault's ideas on relations of power always existing "within" this system. "Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibria which occur in the latter, and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations" (1978, p. 94).

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