
Education Guide

GO-GO DISPLACEMENT & PROTEST IN WASHINGTON, DC CITY

*A story of gentrification, resistance
and the funkier music on Earth*



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A NOTE FROM THE BERTELSMANN FOUNDATION

The Bertelsmann Foundation believes in the power of documentary film to bring to life the critical stories of our complicated times. The potential of the documentary medium extends far beyond offering a convenient replacement for the written word. Rather, Bertelsmann Foundation films seek to expose viewers to something that they might not otherwise experience. The Bertelsmann Foundation's cinematic approach values honesty and insight. The films do not promote a specific agenda. Instead, they offer candid perspectives that allow viewers to draw their own conclusions.

Bertelsmann Foundation documentaries focus on governance, economics, elections, social issues, the digital revolution and, most importantly, the intersections of these issues. From the Turkish–Syrian border to the factories of Juárez, Mexico; from political rallies in Naples, Italy to election season in southern West Virginia, Bertelsmann Foundation films place the viewer at global crossroads.



ABOUT THE FILM

For decades, **Washington, DC** has been a beacon for Black culture and community. Now, however, a wave of economic and cultural gentrification occurring at breakneck speed threatens to erase this history.

Go-Go City: Displacement & Protest in Washington, DC dives into this rich and colorful tapestry and the forces behind the gentrification that stand to mute it. The film interweaves scenes of protest as displaced communities take to the streets to rally around the city's beloved Go-Go music.

As protest organizer Terrence Odom recites from a poem that opens the film, **“Just sit back and listen. This is a new resistance.”**

USING THE EDUCATION GUIDE

This education guide is a companion piece to the documentary **Go-Go City: Displacement & Protest in Washington, DC**. It provides additional background, depth and analysis to the central themes covered in the film. It is designed for university and high-school students, or students at any level who are prepared to engage with the complex social and systemic issues broached in the film.

In American schools, students are often exposed to “big picture” concepts such as U.S. government, U.S. history and elections. But they rarely are offered time to cover many of the unique elements that comprise these broad topics. Perhaps more importantly, traditional curricula can overlook how public policy and civic engagement can affect different communities in different ways. Public policy decisions are often made with good intentions, but they can have undesired outcomes. As a result, many U.S. political debates are reduced to crude caricatures of how Americans believe issues are affecting communities outside their own.

Go-Go City: Displacement & Protest in Washington, DC offers a bridge towards a broader, more challenging conversation. Rather than offering answers, the documentary seeks to spark dialogue. As such, this guide offers a series of discussion questions associated with key themes of the film. Professors and other educators may wish to use these as potential essay questions, perhaps as part of a take-home assignment. However, we have found that the best results occur when these and other, similar questions are used as part of an in-class conversation in which students are encouraged to speak candidly, reflect on their own experiences, and discuss any relationship between those experiences and the film’s content.

The supplemental material in this guide may be assigned to students for review prior to watching the film and/or prior to addressing the discussion questions.

ORGANIZING A SCREENING EVENT IN CLASS OR ON CAMPUS

The Bertelsmann Foundation finds the best way to use **Go-Go City: Displacement & Protest in Washington, DC** as an educational tool is to screen the film in class and to follow the screening with an in-class discussion about the documentary.

1

Professors and educators should feel free to independently screen **Go-Go City: Displacement & Protest in Washington, DC** in their classrooms. The film is available for free at GoGoCity.org and www.bfna.org.

2

To include the filmmaker in the event, email Samuel George at the Bertelsmann Foundation, Samuel.George@bfna.org. Please include a proposed date, time and location.

3

For downloadable assets, such as a film poster and film images, to promote your event on your website and social media platforms, contact Samuel George at the Bertelsmann Foundation, Samuel.George@bfna.org.

4

Get the discussion rolling! Circulate an electronic copy of this educational guide in advance of the film screening.

BEFORE THE SCREENING

Prior to viewing **Go-Go City: Displacement & Protest in Washington, DC**, start a debate among students about the issues covered in the film. This may reveal preconceived notions about the topics the film explores. It may also reveal valuable experiences and insight from the student body. Here are some sample general questions and theme-specific questions that could be discussed before screening:

GENERAL

What do we know about Washington, DC as a city? What kind of understanding do we have about the nation’s capital beyond its role as the seat of the federal government?

What political representation does Washington, DC have? Is it fair?

Do you think Americans do a good job of understanding communities outside their own?

DISPLACEMENT

What is gentrification? Is it different from development? Can you improve a city or neighborhood without fundamentally changing it? Without causing displacement that affects minority communities?

What forces cause demographic changes?

What is lost when cities undergo drastic changes? Can this be avoided? If so, how?

PROTEST

How did you view the protests that occurred across the U.S. following the death of George Floyd? Why did this incident provoke such a massive response?

The protests were sparked by police brutality against African Americans, but many protesters cited additional reasons to march. What were the broader concerns of protesters?

Can protests create meaningful political and societal change? Why or why not?

GO-GO MUSIC

What is the relationship between art and society? What can a city’s art, music, food and other cultural elements reveal about a community?

What role does music play in your life? How can music be used to create meaningful cultural bonds?

Does your hometown have its own kind of music? If not, does your hometown have its own unique art form? What does that art form represent for you and your hometown?



DISPLACEMENT

This documentary presents Washington, DC as “Go-Go City”, but the nation’s capital has another historic sobriquet: **Chocolate City**. In the years following the Civil War, Washington, DC became a magnet for African Americans migrating from the South.

In the film, historian Derek Musgrove explains, “It just so happens that one of the cities where the

pullback following Reconstruction was perhaps the least violent and least disruptive to African Americans was Washington, DC. The city became a magnet for African Americans who thought, ‘**If I am going to work hard and accumulate money, there is a higher likelihood that in Washington, DC it will not be taken from me by force or law.**’”

By the second half of the 20th century, Washington, DC was majority African American. Vibrant Black working-, middle- and upper-class communities emerged throughout the city. These, in turn, gave rise to powerful cultural institutions. The **U Street** corridor in the city’s northwest quadrant became known as “Black Broadway”, owing to its many highly regarded theaters and entertainment options. These businesses employed countless African American professionals who lived and worked in the city.

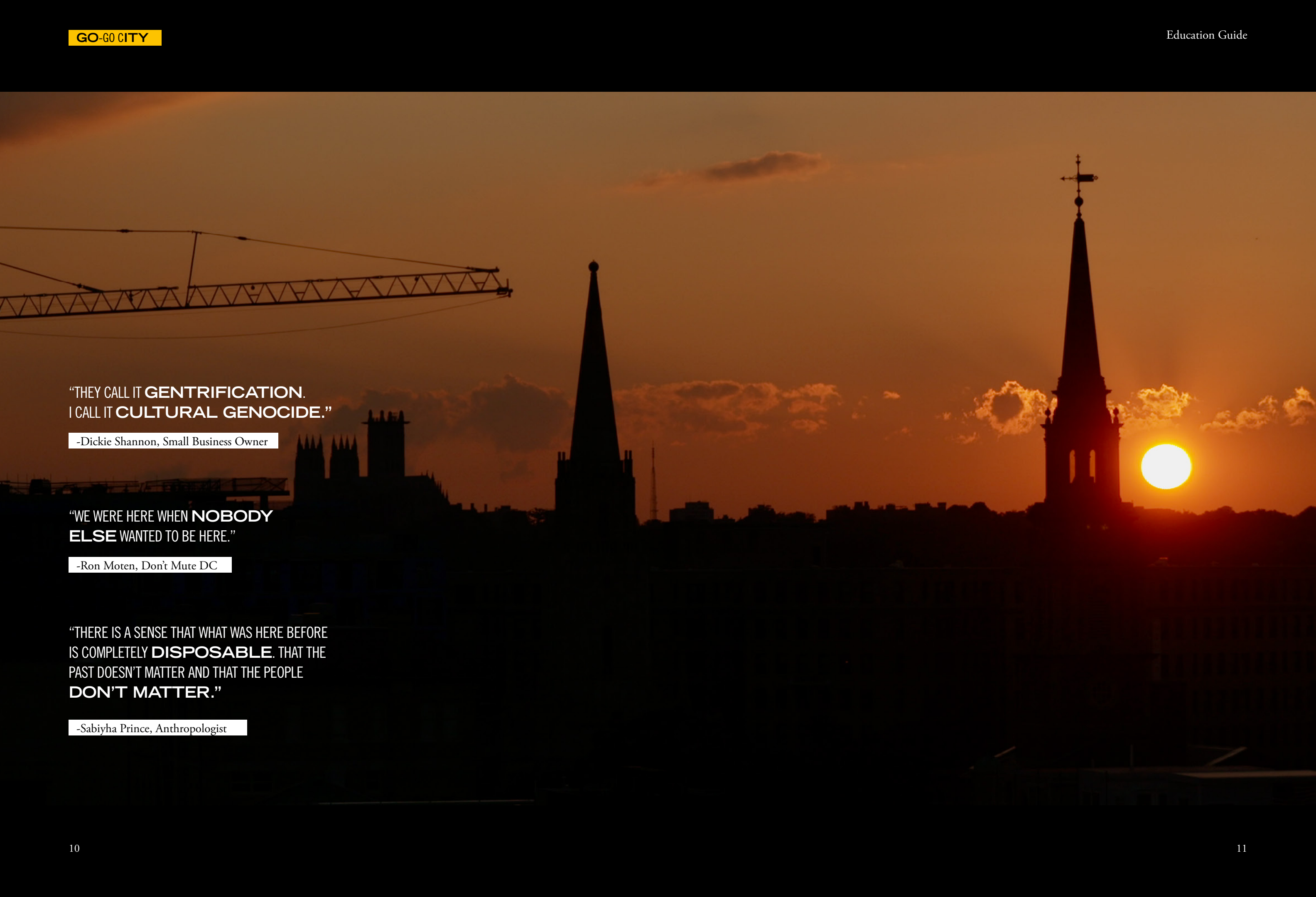
Virginia Ali recalls opening “Ben’s Chili Bowl” on **U Street** with her husband Ben in 1958. “The good thing was, we were able to find the architect, the contractor, the plumber, the electrician and the cabinet maker — all minority-owned businesses — within two or three blocks from here.”

But over the last decades, the city’s demographics have rapidly changed. With little regard to the impact on long-term residents, Washington, DC pursued a rapid development strategy that saw luxury high-rise apartment buildings replace historic rowhouses; that saw expensive, “concept” restaurants and boutique shops **replace** traditional family-owned restaurants and corner stores; and that saw the cultural institutions and traditions that made “Black Broadway” unique pushed further and further outside the city.

“We did need more tax revenue,” explains City Councilmember Robert White in the film. “But you have to be very conscious that attracting people with higher incomes will put a **downward pressure** on people with more limited means. That’s where the city fell short.”

Go-Go City: Displacement & Protest in Washington, DC explores gentrification in terms of housing, economics and culture. The film finds that these three sectors reinforce each other. Together, the forces of gentrification have created a displacement momentum that threatens to erase the cultures and communities that make the city special.



A silhouette of a city skyline at sunset. A large construction crane is visible on the left. In the center and right, there are several church spires, including a prominent one with a cross on top. The sun is a bright yellow circle on the right side, partially obscured by clouds. The sky is a mix of orange and yellow hues.

“THEY CALL IT **GENTRIFICATION**.
I CALL IT **CULTURAL GENOCIDE**.”

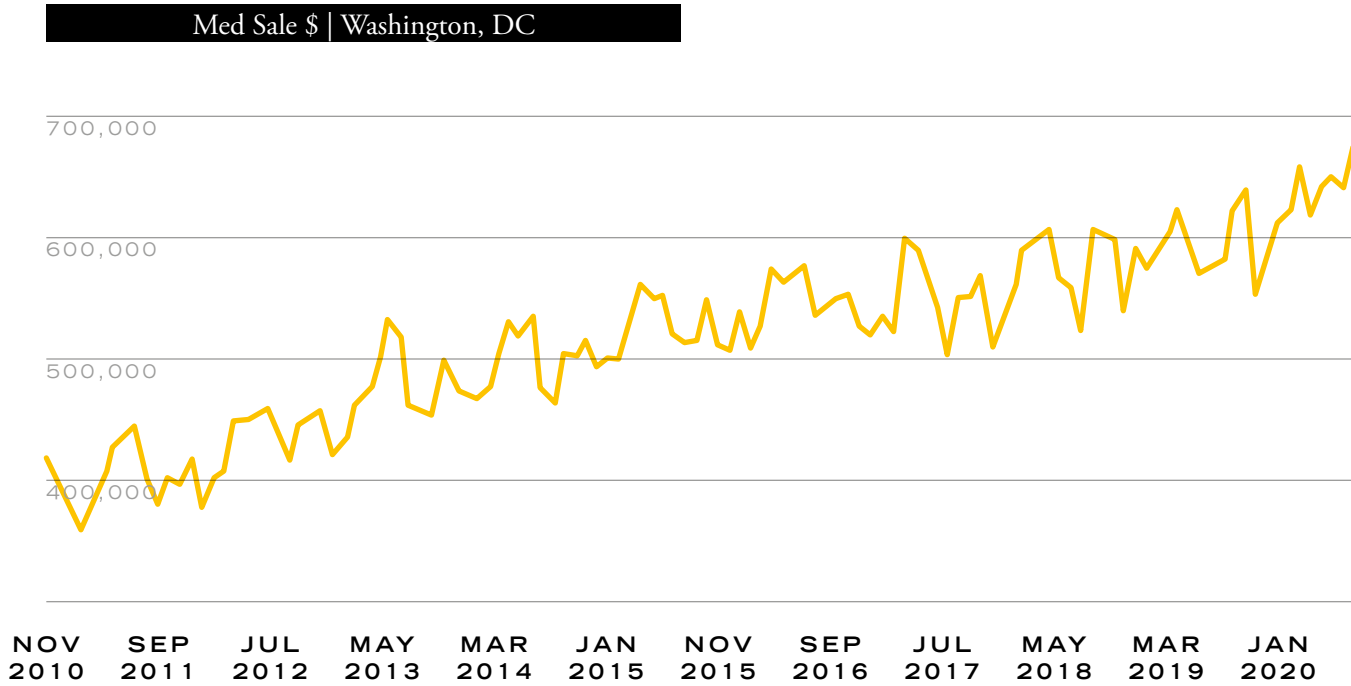
-Dickie Shannon, Small Business Owner

“WE WERE HERE WHEN **NOBODY
ELSE** WANTED TO BE HERE.”

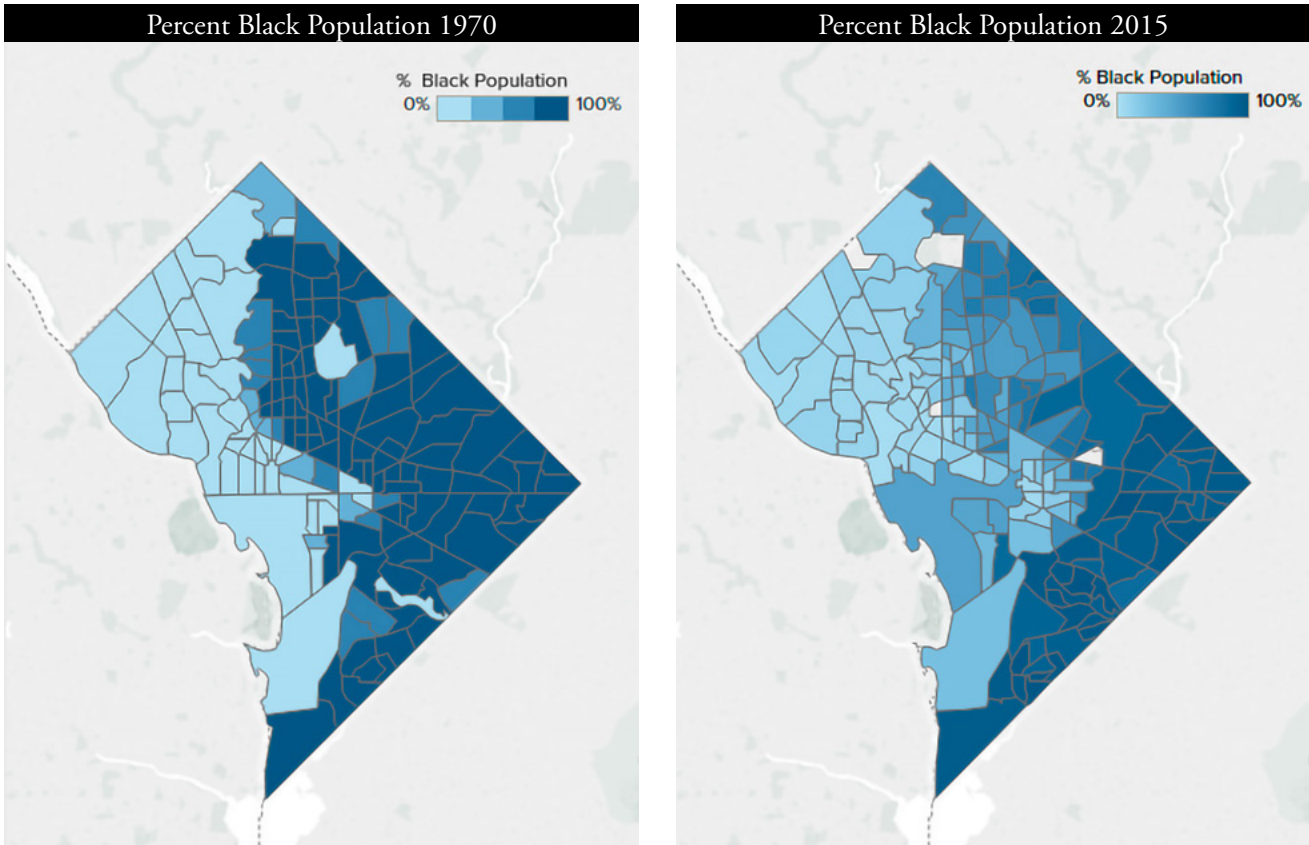
-Ron Moten, Don't Mute DC

“THERE IS A SENSE THAT WHAT WAS HERE BEFORE
IS COMPLETELY **DISPOSABLE**. THAT THE
PAST DOESN'T MATTER AND THAT THE PEOPLE
DON'T MATTER.”

-Sabiha Prince, Anthropologist



Source: Showing Time. Data Provided by Brigh MSL as of Nov 5 , 2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Maps: D.C. Policy Center.

10 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 How did Washington, DC get the nickname “Chocolate City”? What made the city unique?
- 2 Why was gentrification so intense in Washington, DC?
- 3 How can a city invest in improvements without provoking gentrification?
- 4 How can a city protect long-term residents and cultures?
- 5 Why do many old and small businesses feel like they cannot compete in gentrifying cities?
- 6 This documentary explores gentrification specifically in terms of housing, economics and culture. What is the relationship among these three elements? Does each form of gentrification reinforce the others?
- 7 Are there other forms of gentrification that were not explored in the film?
- 8 Do people who move to a new city or town have an obligation to learn about the local culture?
- 9 Is someone to blame for shifting demographics in a city or are such transitions unavoidable?
- 10 Is gentrification in Washington, DC an issue of racial or economic inequality? Both? Neither? What is the relationship between racial and economic inequality in the U.S.?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

George Derek Musgrove and Chris Myers Asch. *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation’s Capital*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
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Jason Richardson, Bruce Mitchell and Juan Franco. “Shifting Neighborhoods: Gentrification and cultural displacement in American cities.” National Community Reinvestment Coalition, 2019.
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Emily Badger and Quoctrung Bui. “Riots Long Ago, Luxury Living Today.” The New York Times, 10 July 2020.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/10/upshot/riots-redevelopment-gentrification.html>

Dr. Sabiyha Prince. “Washington D.G.: The District of Gentrification.” 18 March 2019.
<https://ncrc.org/gentrification-dc/>



PROTEST

On the morning of Memorial Day, 2020, the U.S. was already in **crisis**. The coronavirus epidemic had already shut down much of the country for months. The streets of Washington, DC were eerily silent, but that silence was about to be shattered by a distant event.

That afternoon, Minneapolis police officers responded to an emergency call related to a potentially

fraudulent check for \$20. In the resulting confrontation with **George Floyd**, one officer restrained him by holding a knee to the back of his neck for more than eight minutes. Other officers looked on the entire time. Despite agonizing pleas from Mr. Floyd and bystanders, the officer did not ease the chokehold. Mr. Floyd was pronounced dead hours later.

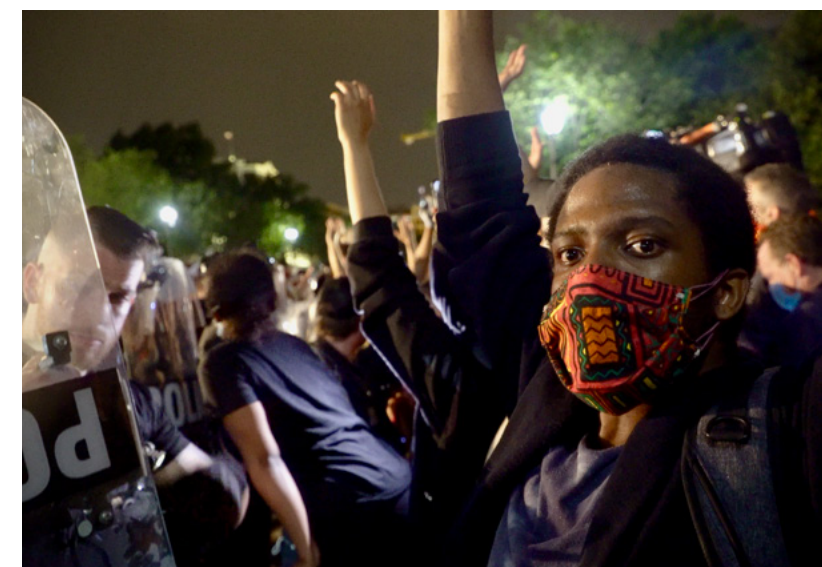
Many have long attempted to highlight the excessive force used by police when interacting with Black Americans. These claims have long been brushed aside by communities unwilling to grapple with the implications of systemic racism in policing. Yet the shocking video of the police encounter with Mr. Floyd was **impossible to ignore**.

The appalling images ricocheted around the country and the world, and generated protests that continued for weeks. The spark for the mobilization was Mr. Floyd's death. Yet the incident resonated strongly due to the **historic inequalities** faced by African Americans — systemic inequalities in policing, education, health care, employment and economics. In “Chocolate City”, the context behind the protests included also the gentrification that has displaced so many African Americans.

Go-Go City: Displacement & Protest in Washington, DC ventures into the city's streets during the weeks of mobilization in the summer of 2020. The film tracks early, smaller protests full of raw energy and frustration. It then shows these protests as they grow, becoming more organized and focused. Finally, the film shows how the city's own Go-Go music became a rallying point for the protests, with bands leading the marches by playing on flatbed trucks.

It was a poetic turn of events. After being disaffected by gentrification, the city's long-term residents turned to **Go-Go music** to bring young people back and make all their voices heard.

“A lot of the people who filled the streets don't live here anymore,” explains Dr. Natalie Hopkinson in the film. **“These protests were reason for people to come back.”**



“THERE’S A SENSE OF **COMMUNITY**. EVERYBODY IS **HELPING** EACH OTHER. I COULD GET SICK OUT HERE. WE’RE CLOSE, WE’RE NOT SOCIAL DISTANCING. BUT MY PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING. I FELT LIKE IT WAS **MY DUTY**.”

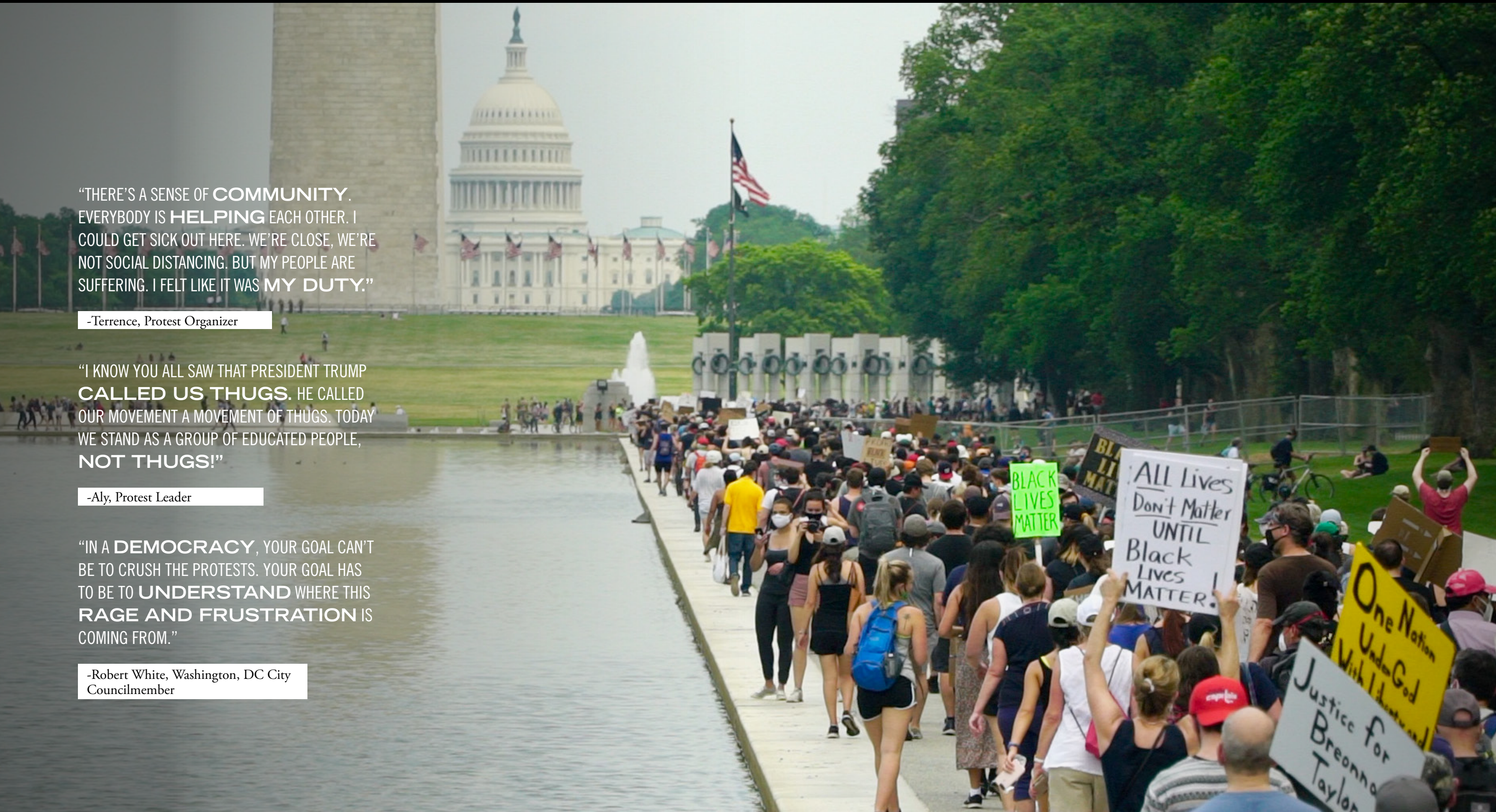
-Terrence, Protest Organizer

“I KNOW YOU ALL SAW THAT PRESIDENT TRUMP **CALLED US THUGS**. HE CALLED OUR MOVEMENT A MOVEMENT OF THUGS. TODAY WE STAND AS A GROUP OF EDUCATED PEOPLE, **NOT THUGS!**”

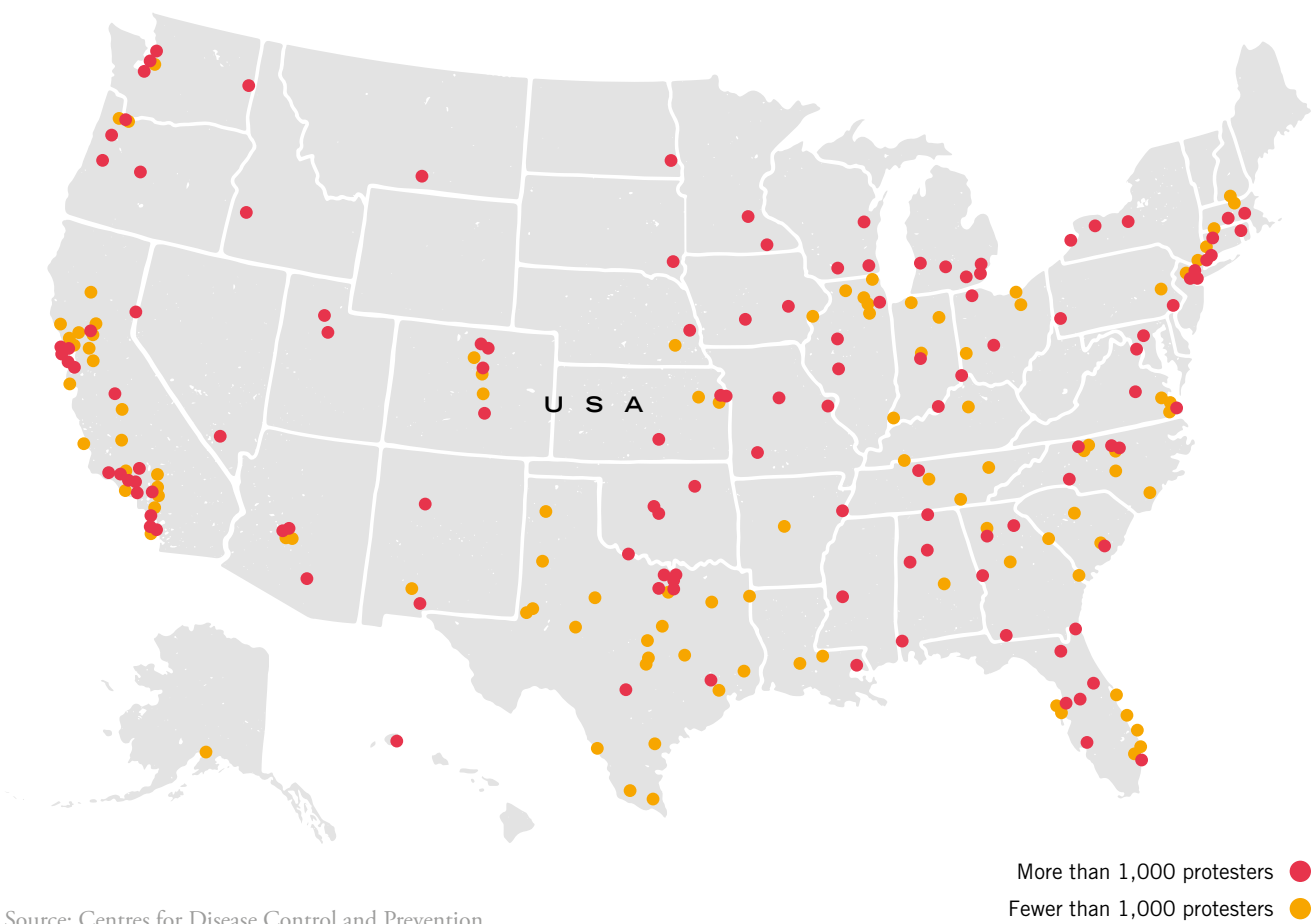
-Aly, Protest Leader

“IN A **DEMOCRACY**, YOUR GOAL CAN’T BE TO CRUSH THE PROTESTS. YOUR GOAL HAS TO BE TO **UNDERSTAND** WHERE THIS **RAGE AND FRUSTRATION** IS COMING FROM.”

-Robert White, Washington, DC City Councilmember



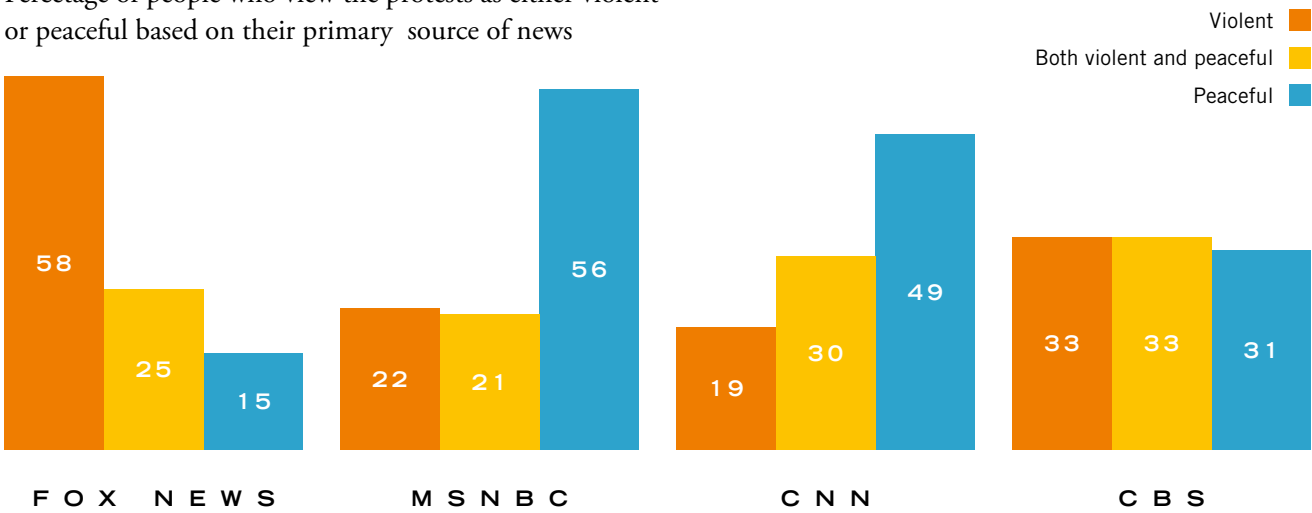
Cities with Black Lives Matter protests



Source: Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

Perception of Protests Varies By Media Source

Percentage of people who view the protests as either violent or peaceful based on their primary source of news



Source: Reuters/Ipsos Survey

10 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 There are multiple protest scenes in the film that appear in chronological order. How did the protests change over time? What caused that change? What impact did that change have?
- 2 Why did people take to the streets to protest? Did underlying issues go beyond mistreatment by police?
- 3 What were the protesters' goals? Did protesters have a variety of goals?
- 4 If protesters seek different policy outcomes, how can a movement unify to promote change?
- 5 How did the media cover the protests? Was the coverage fair? How does the media influence the national narrative?
- 6 What is the power of protest? Is that power increased or diminished by social media?
- 7 A rallying cry during the protests was "Black Lives Matter". What does that phrase mean to you? Why did protesters believe the phrase needed be repeated and affirmed?
- 8 What role did Go-Go music play in the protests?
- 9 Was there a connection between the protests and gentrification?
- 10 How can protesters leverage their movement to create long-term change?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Luke Mogelson. "The Heart of the Uprising in Minneapolis." *The New Yorker*, 22 June 2020. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/06/22/the-heart-of-the-uprising-in-minneapolis>.

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John Eligon. "Black Lives Matter Grows as Movement While Facing New Challenges." *The New York Times*, 28 August 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/28/us/black-lives-matter-protest.html>



GO-GO MUSIC

For more than 40 years, the hypnotizing sound of **Go-Go music** has been Washington, DC's soundtrack. The music surrounds you from the moment you enter the city, pouring out of windows of passing cars.

Most people outside the city may never have heard of Chuck Brown, Trouble Funk, Rare Essence, EU, Junkyard Band and Backyard Band. But for native **Washingtonians**, these musicians are spoken of with

a mixture of familiarity and reverence typically reserved for The Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix or James Brown.

Go-Go has generated an entire economic ecosystem beyond the bands. Clothing designers, audio technicians and tapers tap into the culture. A deeply knowledgeable fanbase follows musicians throughout their careers, collecting recordings as the most dedicated fans of the Grateful Dead do.

Meanwhile, love of the music is passed through the generations. "Go-Go is Black culture in DC," explains activist Yaddiya in the film. **"It's the foundation for a lot of our upbringing. It's in the DNA."**

What is this music that is so beloved in the nation's capital? "It started off as a conga driven sound," explains percussionist Ricky "Rocksteady" Brown. "And people just start moving and grooving, and it pulls you in," adds the legendary Go-Go performer Sugar Bear. The music continues uninterrupted, sometimes for hours at a time. **"Just that beat going,"** smiles guitarist Andre "Whiteboy" Johnson in the film, "and people would love it."

However, Go-Go music has felt the pressure of rapid gentrification. "U Street and Florida Avenue are filled with clubs," Rocksteady explains, "but they're **not accessible** to the Go-Go bands."

Tensions came to a head in early 2019 when residents of a new luxury condo building on U Street demanded that Don Campbell, owner of a Metro PCS store across the street, turn off the **Go-Go music** playing on speakers in front of his store. For decades Campbell had been playing Go-Go on that corner, even as the neighborhood changed around him.

Under pressure from Metro PCS, Campbell turned off the music. Many locals were outraged. "People that came into that beautiful building basically thought our music was noise," explains Ron Moten in the film. **"We became collateral damage."**

The silence proved to be a step too far. Rallying around the hashtag #DontMuteDC, a series of protests and concerts emerged to support the music and get it turned back on at Campbell's store. A short-term goal had been achieved. But the episode also revealed the potential for long-term impact. "I think it was right then and there when they realized the power of Go-Go," explains Big Tony of Trouble Funk, a superstar of the genre. "You can take a lot of stuff away from us. You're not gonna take the Go-Go."





"IT MAKES YOU PROUD TO SAY THIS IS **OUR MUSIC**. I CAN'T DESCRIBE THE FEELING. **IT'S UNREAL.**"

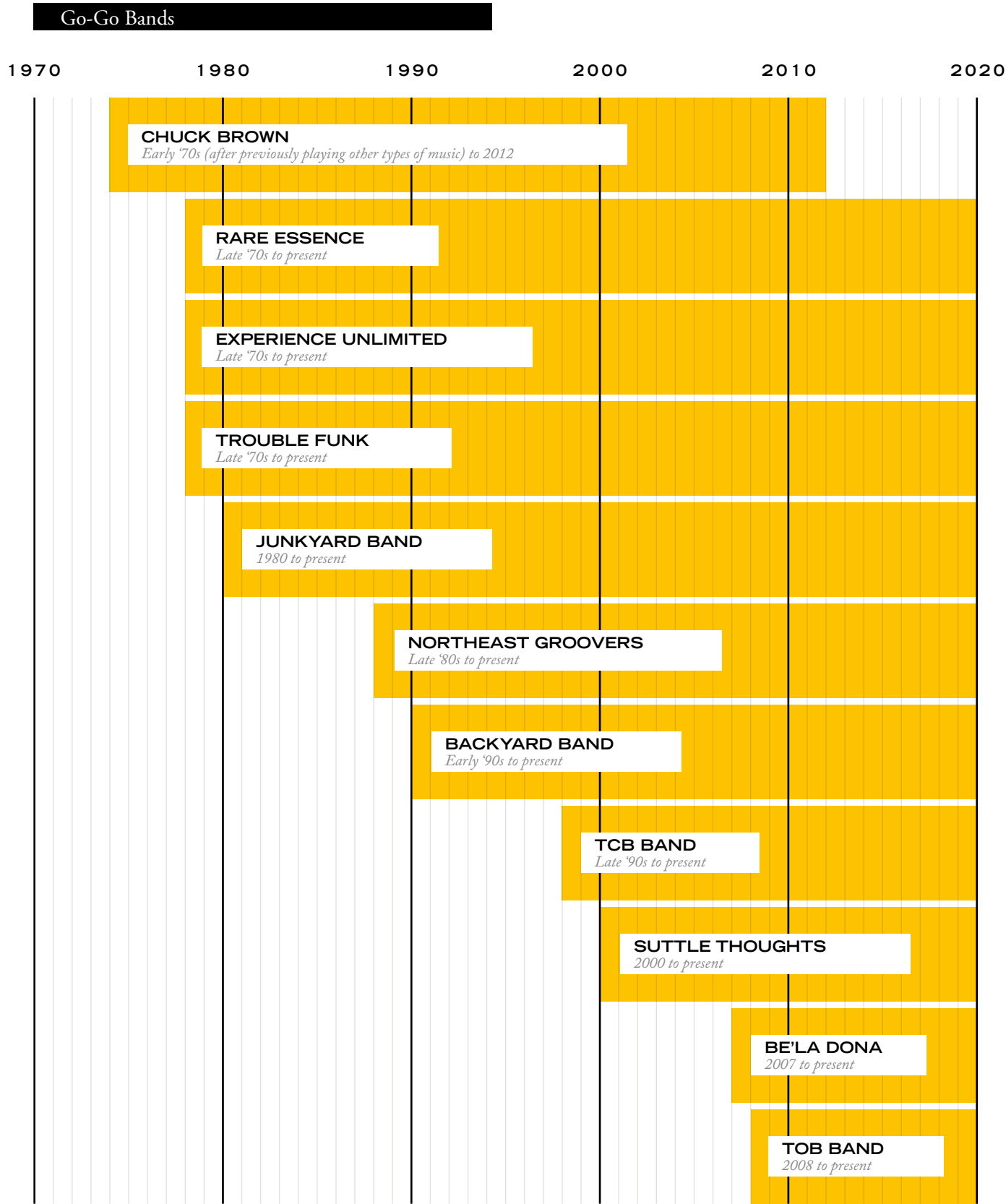
- Sugar Bear, EU

"GO-GO MUSIC IS THE **FOUNDATION** FOR A LOT OF OUR UPBRINGING. **IT'S IN THE DNA.**"

-Yaddiya, Long Live Go-Go

"GO-GO MUSIC IS SOMETHING WE **REALLY TREASURE**. YOU CAN TAKE A LOT OF STUFF AWAY FROM US. YOU'RE NOT GONNA TAKE **THE GO-GO.**"

-Big Tony, Trouble Funk



Source: Source: Sarah Godfrey, The Washingtonian and Samuel George

10 QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- 1 What makes Go-Go music unique?
- 2 Locals describe Go-Go as “party music”, but it seems to have a deep power. Where might that power come from? Why is this “party music” so powerful?
- 3 Why were some residents offended by the demand to have Don Campbell turn the music off?
- 4 Why did the phrase “Don’t Mute DC” have great meaning for Washingtonians?
- 5 Is conflict inevitable when people of different demographic backgrounds move into a neighborhood? How can conflict be prevented? If conflict occurs, how can it be resolved?
- 6 Why was Go-Go music successful for rallying people for the 2020 protests?
- 7 In 2020, Washington, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser named Go-Go the official music of the city. What could make this proclamation more than just a gesture?
- 8 What role can music play in social movements?
- 9 What steps can cities take to ensure that local culture is preserved?
- 10 If new arrivals to the city begin adopting Go-Go music, could this gentrify the music? Would it help the genre survive?

DJ Knock. “Save My City Mix.” A sample mix of Go-Go music.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y7HOVFJM5f4>

Natalie Hopkinson. *Go-Go Live: The Musical Life and Death of a Chocolate City*. (Duke University Press, 2012.) See also Natalie Hopkinson. *Go-Go Live: Washington, D.C.’s Cultural Information Network, Drumming the News, Knitting Communities, and Guarding a Black Public Sphere*. (University of Maryland, 2007.)
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ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Samuel George
Director

Samuel George is a documentary filmmaker and analyst for the Bertelsmann Foundation, focusing on the intersection of economics, politics, the digital revolution, and daily life. Filming on the ground from the Turkish – Syrian border to the factories of Juárez, Mexico, his documentaries dive inside the social impact of critical crossroads around the globe. He serves as the Foundation’s Global Markets & Digital Advisor, and is completing a PhD at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.

Jeff Cook
Editor

Jeff Cook has specialized in video editing in a career that spans four decades. Cook’s work has attracted Cine Golden Eagles, Communicator Awards, Telly Awards, Monitor Awards, Peer Awards, and the first National Daytime Emmy Nomination for The Discovery Channel.

Irene Braam
Producer

Irene Braam joined BFNA as Executive Director in April 2016. Since then she has overseen the transformation from a traditional Washington think tank to a pioneer in tackling complicated policy issues on film. During that time she executive produced 12 documentary films, and has a slate of three documentaries in development.

For more films by this team see:

Bertelsmann
FOUNDATION



GO-GO CITY

DISPLACEMENT & PROTEST IN WASHINGTON, DC