

Marginalization and Resilience from Within and Without Appalachia: Views on Place and Disruption in Eastern Kentucky and Washington, D.C.

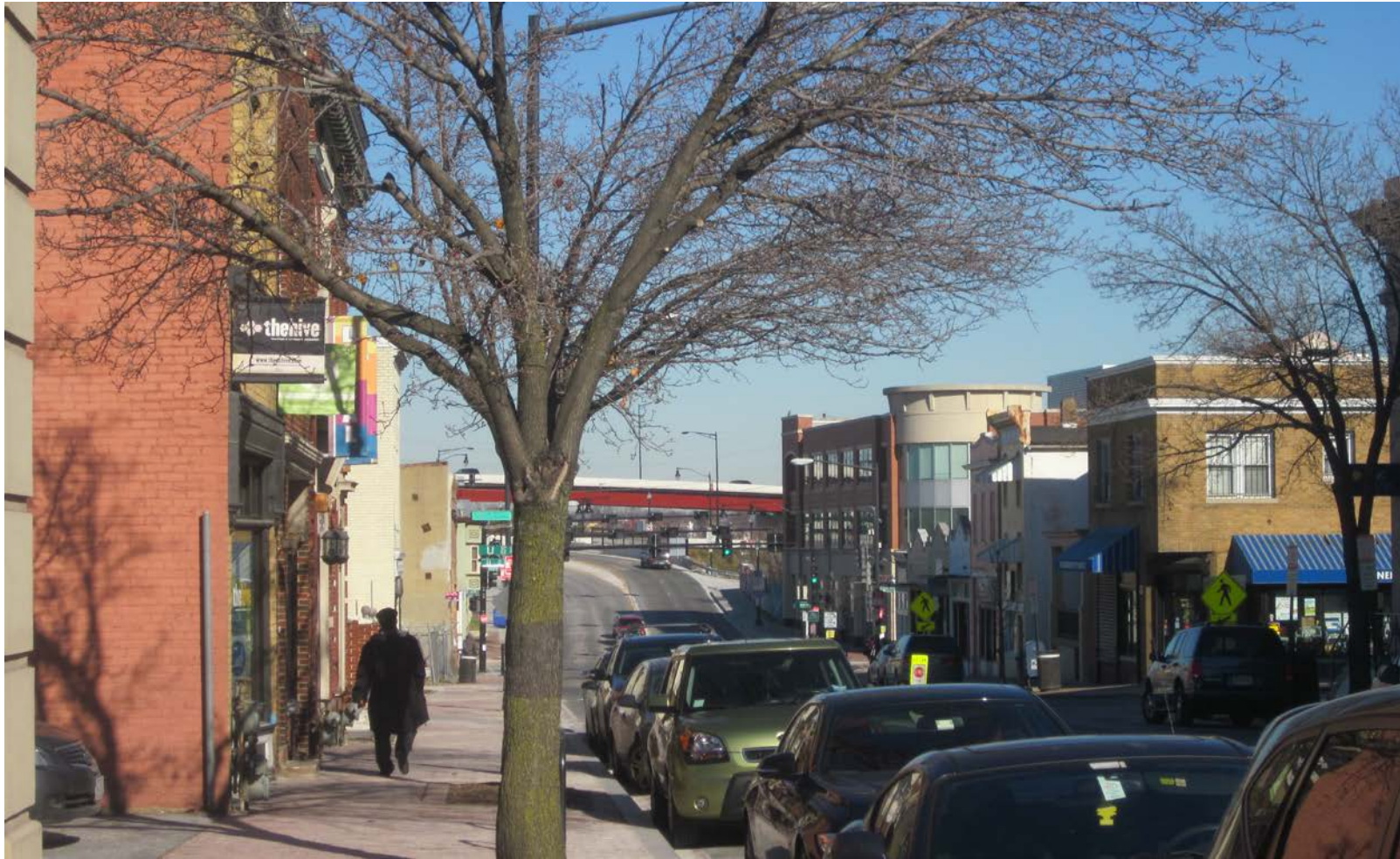
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Location A: Letcher County, Kentucky



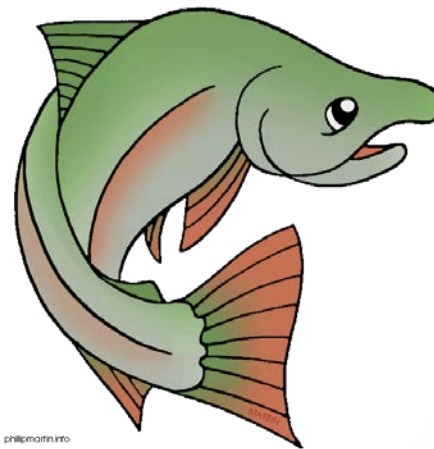
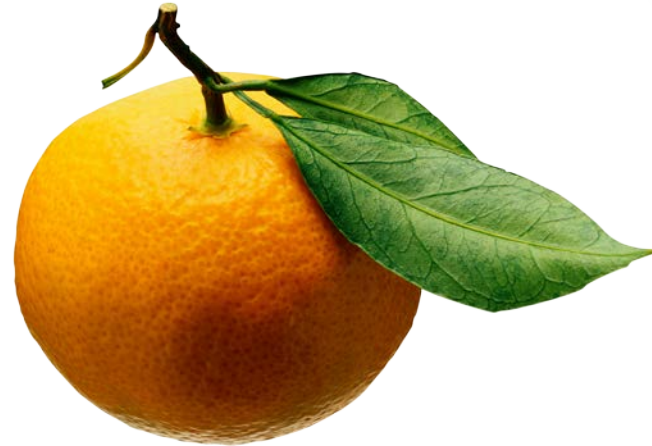
A car waits for a coal train to pass in rural Letcher County.

Location B: Southeast Washington, D.C.



View of downtown Anacostia streetscape in Southeast Washington, D.C., where the effects of gentrification are beginning to be visible

Why look at Eastern Kentucky and Washington, D.C. together?



Similarities across vast differences



Letcher County



Southeast D.C.

Three critical elements in common

- Marginalization
- Disruptions to their fabric as communities
- Sense of place

Letcher County Resident - On Pride in Family and Community History

“I was reared kind of I guess in an idyllic world, as far as I was concerned. Everything was wonderful, you know, our mom and dad loved us, we had problems, we weren’t rich, and there wasn’t a whole lot of extra, but we were happy. Mom and Dad spent time with us, on the weekends we’d get out in Dad’s old Jeep and we’d go to Pine Mountain or go to the custard stand, have an ice cream, or just ride around, he’d take us swimming in the river, so we grew up feeling really loved and secure.”

Southeast D.C. Resident - on Pride in Family and Community History

“But this was a place where you had ... I mean you had folks who came here who had skills, who were educated. Aunt Bess taught music from her house on Morris Road where my mother now lives, so you had people who wanted to be citizens of the United States, and wanted to make a contribution ... So you had all of that going for you in one place. You had teachers and preachers and doctors and lawyers and merchants and cleaners and pharmacists and all these people living in the same area, in the same village, working toward the common good.”

Letcher County Resident - on the Detrimental Effects of Marginalization and Disruption

“...I have a really hard time with how incredibly effectively the propaganda machine of the coal industry has convinced people to fight for the right to destroy their homes, like, to be angry that someone would suggest they not. And I just have so much despair, all the time, about that, and just how painful that is. And I think it has to be a pretty profound sense of dysphoria for people, whether they’re dealing with that or not, but ultimately there’s no way that you can exist in that disconnect without having a huge psychological toll, which, when you look at the drug abuse, of the epidemic here, there’s a lot of stuff attached to that.”

Southeast D.C. Residents - On the Detrimental Effects of Marginalization and Disruption

Resident 1: “Public housing residents may sometimes feel like slaves ... in that they have no control over their destiny. ‘Cause if the Housing Authority says you have to move out, you gotta move. ... You’re powerless.”

Resident 2: “Remember, we talkin’ about destitute, degraded people. So some people like, ‘My life’ll be difficult anyway, whatever happens happens.’ ... And some people have been degraded to the point that they just flow with the wind.”

Amelia Kirby, Letcher County – On Positive Place-Talk

“So Summit City I think, if it’s done anything here, it’s shifted, it’s forced some of the people, especially the people in the powers that be, to reckon with what we actually can have. We can have a place that will stand up to any place in the cities that you routinely travel to to go and have your fun, we’ll have it here, ... so now suddenly there’s a whole dialogue in Whitesburg about what role can arts play in community economic development that’s I think sprung from what we did, and from the sort of latent passion in that direction that everybody has constantly always suppressed because there’s always this sense of despair, of what’s possible and what’s not possible. So having something come out of nowhere.”

Southeast D.C. Resident – On Positive Place-Talk

“...they cleaned up the park ... and then what we discovered was ... the park was still going to pot, because it had become a haven for drug trafficking and substance abusers ... so we went to Washington Parks and People ... the first thing they did was they mobilized the community to form a group that would preserve and protect the park. ... So we started walking clubs there so people could start walking in the park, we started having movie nights on Friday nights, there’s this beautiful amphitheater in the park that nobody was using ... and it was a great attraction for the people in the neighborhood. But what it did was change people’s mentality about coming into the park and what kind of activity there could be. ... so people are taking ownership of that park now, and that’s working.”

Thank you!



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