

White House, Chocolate City: Reading DC in the Era of Marion Barry

Rachel Page

Advised by Professor Austin Graham

May 1, 2020

At the end of Ward Just's 1994 novel *Echo House*, an elderly White man topples from his home's grand staircase to his death.¹ The man is Washington political power broker Axel Behl, and his death takes place at his own birthday party—and in front of none other than the president of the United States, who has just awarded him the prestigious Presidential Medal of Freedom. As his guests applaud him with champagne glasses in hand, Axel stares into empty space, his eyes “widening as if he had seen an apparition or some half-remembered figure from the distant and irrevocable past”—some ghost embedded, it seems, in the very walls of the house he was born and grew up in. Then he releases the brakes of his wheelchair, “slowly pressed both palms over his eyes and waited.”²

If Axel's suicidal fall is positioned as a sort of flight from “the distant and irrevocable past,” it is equally significant as a gesture toward the future, or the lack thereof. In the final line of the novel, Axel's adult son Alec registers his father's death as a fatal blow to his own lifetime ambitions, musing that “This was the house he had inherited and the life he had made and he could not rid himself of either one; he guessed he had another thirty years to live.”³ But there is a fundamental paradox in Alec's hopelessness: the Behl family's future is foreclosed in the same breath as Axel is finally recognized as a figure of national importance, an achievement he has been working toward for a lifetime. The idea that there is no future for Whiteness, at the very moment that its power and security is actualized, imbues the ending of *Echo House* with a strange irony. If the future does not belong to the Behl family, Just leaves his readers to wonder, then who precisely does it belong to?

One answer to this question lies in a space that is not included in the pages of *Echo House*. Although Just, a former *Washington Post* reporter, sets his novel in Washington, DC,

¹ This essay capitalizes “White” and “Black” in order to frame these terms as socially and politically constructed categories of group belonging, in contrast to the uncapitalized adjectives “white” and “black” that are generally used to describe colors. While some texts (such as *Long Distance Life*) capitalize Black but not White, I have chosen to capitalize both terms to resist the way that Whiteness often remains unmarked in discussions about race.

² Ward Just, *Echo House* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 315.

³ Just, *Echo House*, 328.

Axel's death takes place within the confines of the eponymous Echo House, an estate whose grand interior could just as easily be located anyplace and anywhere in time. Outside the walls of Echo House, however, DC was experiencing its own melodrama of a fall from power. Just four years before the novel was published, DC mayor Marion Barry, Jr. had been arrested for crack cocaine possession and consumption in an FBI sting operation. The charge was long in the works—rumors about Barry's drug abuse had circulated around the city for years⁴—but no one could have predicted the dramatic nature with which it would play out. The footage of Barry's arrest in a downtown hotel room, played to jurors at his August 1990 trial, shows a grainy image of his silhouette against a desk lamp as he lights a pipe and inhales. Rasheeda Moore, his ex-girlfriend and an accomplice in the sting, fidgets on the bed behind him. In the abridged version, aired by news stations across the nation, the video jumps ahead and the frame suddenly fills with the blurred bodies of FBI agents, emerging apparently from behind the camera itself. Barry appears, clearly disoriented, from the darkness of the hotel's other room. "I shouldn't have come up here," he repeats. Later, he will also repeat the words made famous by the media outlets that broke the news of his arrest: "Goddamn bitch set me up. Bitch set me up!"⁵

The hotel room where Barry's fall from grace plays out is so different from the stately halls of Echo House that it seems to exist almost entirely outside the confines of the novel's imagination. And yet the two rooms also uncannily echo one another: one prestigious and expansive, the other seedy and confining; one occupied by the president of the United States, the other by the head of DC's local government; and both of them the setting for a most spectacular fall. The sense of simultaneous proximity and distance between these two scenes lays bare a

⁴ In 1984, six years before the sting, Barry was investigated for his association with another federal cocaine-related court case but was ultimately not charged. See Sandra Evans, "Barry: Politics Behind Cocaine Probe Leaks," *The Washington Post*, August 30, 1984, B1, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵ "FBI Video of Undercover Sting on Marion Barry," *The Washington Post*, November 23, 2014, video, https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/local/fbi-video-of-undercover-sting-on-marion-barry/2014/11/23/e1e35f00-7336-11e4-95a8-fe0b46e8751a_video.html. Barry's autobiography describes waking up the morning after the sting to people "selling T-shirts from vendors all over the city. 'Goddamn bitch set me up!'" Marion Barry, Jr., and Omar Tyree, *Mayor for Life: The Incredible Story of Marion Barry, Jr.* (Largo, MD: Strebor Books: 2014), 219.

contradiction at the heart of the nation's capital. On one hand, Washington, DC is the seat of a White federal government, popularly understood as a metonym for the American nation itself. On the other, it is a majority Black city with Black-led local politics whose residents have not had the right to vote for their own political representatives since the Reconstruction era—a city that has become a national and international symbol of democracy, at the same time that it is denied participation in America's democratic project.

The years between 1979 and 1999 in DC are what I am calling the “era of Marion Barry”: a two-decade stretch in which Barry rose to prominence as one of the first Black mayors of a Black urban center, lovingly termed the “Chocolate City” by its residents,⁶ and then experienced an equally infamous decline. Barry presided over an era in which DC sought to define itself as a sovereign city after being granted home rule—local power over its local government—for the first time in a century;⁷ and, after his imprisonment and subsequent reelection, saw that power once again stripped away by Congress.⁸ His administration made the city's racial divisions inescapable. Whereas the previous Black mayor, Walter Washington, had largely retained power in the hands of the White establishment, Barry was the son of sharecroppers and a former civil rights activist who filled his bureaucracy with fellow Black movement leaders.⁹ In the decades of White flight and national racial tension, Barry represented a new future for the District, and the controversy surrounding his leadership was read by many as an attack upon Black power.

⁶ DC was the first of any American cities to become majority Black, according to the 1960 Census, a demographic shift that earned it this moniker. Mitchell Brown, “Power, Identity, and the Limits of Agency,” *Du Bois Review* 5, no. 8 (2008), 373, doi:10.1017/S1742058X0808020X.

⁷ Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove, *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 156.

⁸ In 1995, the Republican Congress created a five-member Financial Control Board with complete control over the city's finances, stripping D.C. of the power to control its own budget. For a more thorough investigation of the economic implications of this move, see Natwar M. Gandhi, James Spaulding, and Gordon McDonald, “Budget Growth, Spending, and Inequality in DC, 2002–2013,” in *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington, DC*, eds. Derek Hyra and Sabiyha Prince (New York: Routledge, 2015), 159-179, doi:10.4324/9781315714486. For a political analysis of its repercussions for home rule in the District, see George Derek Musgrove, “‘Statehood is Far More Difficult’: The Struggle for D.C. Self-Determination, 1980-2017,” *Washington History* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 3-17, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90015019>.

⁹ Harry S. Jaffe and Tom Sherwood, *Dream City: Race, Power, and the Decline of Washington, D.C.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 127. Of note is the fact that Barry gave this book special attention in his autobiography, complaining that “In this book, I was essentially blamed for everything that was wrong with Washington.” Barry, Jr. and Tyree, *Mayor for Life*, 264.

Washington Afro-American columnist Lillian Wiggins went so far as to suggest in 1979 that “Many residents believe that the Marion Barry era may be the last time Washington will have a black mayor.”¹⁰ In short, the Barry era exposed the tensions that had always been constitutive elements of DC’s existence as a capital city: the antagonistic relationship between White and Black residents, between federal and local government, between the District’s aspirations for home rule and, under Barry, its political failure.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the extent to which Barry’s mayoralty has defined DC’s sense of itself under home rule. Jonetta Rose Barras argues that “If the African-American cultural narrative is being told through Barry, then his life is the District’s subplot.”¹¹ This paper takes Barras’s invocation of the “subplot” literally, focusing on representations of the nation’s capital as they emerge in two novels written in the Barry era: Marita Golden’s 1989 novel *Long Distance Life* and Ward Just’s 1994 novel *Echo House*. I argue that although the novels produce two different imaginings of DC, these imaginings come to bear on each other in surprising ways: while *Echo House* constructs a White DC defined solely by its place in a narrative of national politics, the Black characters of *Long Distance Life* encounter that imagined White DC as a material force that constricts their everyday lives in the Chocolate City.

By reading these novels in their historical context, I attempt to fill a series of critical gaps: not only have *Echo House* and *Long Distance Life* not been written about in the context of the Barry era, but DC literature writ large has also been grossly underexplored in literary criticism. This apparent critical silence is due in part to the fact that Washington is not an established setting in literary fiction in the way that other American cities have become. “There are novels set in New York, New Orleans and Los Angeles,” writes one book reviewer in 1996,

¹⁰ Lillian Wiggins, in Milton Coleman, “The Post And the Conspiracy,” *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1979, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1979/12/20/the-post-and-the-conspiracy/b0288592-71db-4cff-ad4d-b06268e49687/>.

¹¹ Jonetta Rose Barras, *The Last of the Black Emperors: The Hollow Comeback of Marion Barry in the New Age of Black Leaders* (Baltimore, MD: Bancroft Press, 1998), 283.

“tales set in Houston, Boston and Seattle, but only a handful of Washington novels.”¹² Those books that do select Washington as their setting are most often political thrillers, murder mysteries, and journalistic exposés¹³—genre fiction that fails to engage with the city itself beyond vague references to Congress or the White House. In narrowing my own frame of focus for this essay, my searches on the Library of Congress database yielded just two additional texts with a substantive focus on DC—but all four have eluded critical literary attention.¹⁴ However, by taking these texts seriously as literature, we stand to learn not only about DC’s neglected history of cultural production, but also about how our nation itself is imagined through one of its most illustrious representatives.

In the first section of this essay, “Imagining Washington, DC,” I introduce how DC is framed in the two novels as a city divided: Ward Just’s White residents distance themselves from the city while embracing the narrative of national politics that it represents, while Marita Golden’s Black Washingtonians navigate a Black DC that is nevertheless constricted by Whites in power. In the second section, “Constructing White Spaces,” I turn to how White spaces are imagined into being in *Echo House* through the introduction of the novel’s single named Black character. In the third section, “Taking to the Streets,” I examine the democratic promise of DC’s streets in *Long Distance Life*, tracing the relationship between their intended significance to the capital city and their centrality to the tragedy around which the novel’s plot revolves. Finally, in the fourth section, “Imagining the Nation,” I discuss the implications of my analysis for our conception of the American nation as understood through its capital city. In sum, I argue that

¹² David Nicholson, “Disoriented in the District,” book review of *Powertown*, by Michael Lind, *The Washington Post*, December 23, 1996, C3, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1996/12/23/disoriented-in-the-district/ab187c8c-a320-4a13-bffd-d9e8b96a6f0f/>.

¹³ Speaking to the prevalence of this last category, Michael Nelson writes that the characters of “Washington novels” can be placed “into one of two categories: thinly disguised real people whose identities the reader is teased to guess, or cardboard cutouts who are less themselves than two-dimensional representations of their titles.” Michael Nelson, “Ward Just’s Washington,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 74, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 207-208, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26438637>.

¹⁴ These texts were Carolivia Herron’s epic *Thereafter Johnnie* (New York: Random House, 1991) and Edward P. Jones’s short story collection *Lost in the City* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1992). I chose to focus only on Golden and Just due to constraints of space and time, and because I found the comparison between them to be illuminating. However, both Herron’s and Jones’s texts deserve more extensive scholarly attention in the larger project of critically recognizing DC literature.

representation has always been a site of contradiction in Washington, DC, and that reading DC literature for those contradictions shows us how fictional narratives of the city and the nation shape the lives of the people they include as well as those they erase.

I. Imagining Washington, DC

Ward Just's *Echo House* and Marita Golden's *Long Distance Life* are both family sagas set in Washington, DC: each novel extends across three generations of a family over the course of the twentieth century. *Echo House* narrates the story of a White family living in the eponymous Echo House in DC, centering on political power broker Axel Behl and his son Alec, who manipulate federal politics from their place in the shadows. *Long Distance Life*, published five years earlier, traces the life of a Black family headed by matriarch Naomi as they establish themselves in the city and come to terms with the loss of their youngest member, twenty-one-year-old Nathaniel, to an act of gratuitous violence. In this section, I argue that although the two novels are both set in DC, a matter of miles apart from one another, the gap between their imagined cities demonstrates the complex interplay between the White and Black worlds that structure Washington, DC as a capital city and an urban space. Whereas the White residents of Echo House insulate themselves against the city's Black presence, identifying instead with a national narrative that erases local histories, the Black characters in *Long Distance Life* experience DC as a Black city that is contradictorily controlled and encroached upon by Whiteness—a city that they live in, but that never completely belongs to them.

Echo House produces a very particular image of DC as the nation's capital at the same time that it renders other images invisible and even unimaginable. Ward Just tells us at the beginning of the novel that Echo House is located "high on the slope overlooking Rock Creek

Park to the north and the federal triangle to the southeast,”¹⁵ a description which places it in the vicinity of the present-day neighborhood of Georgetown, near the Oak Hill Cemetery that Just stylizes simply as the “Soldiers Cemetery” of the Union dead.¹⁶ There is an expansive history that might be told about each of these landmarks—Rock Creek Park as the historical dividing line between affluent White neighborhoods to the northwest and Black neighborhoods to the southeast,¹⁷ the federal triangle as an early twentieth-century development that replaced the impoverished neighborhood of “Murder Bay,” once famously the city’s center of prostitution¹⁸—but suffice to say that Just places Echo House just off center in the District’s geography. It is *almost* at the heart of the city, but a little further to the north, a little further to the west—in other words, a little bit Whiter.

One of the centerpieces of Echo House’s distinctive architecture is the Observatory on its top floor, modeled after the White House’s Oval Office in circumference but equipped with a telescope and massive windows. The Observatory transforms Echo House from a solely insular domestic space to a vehicle for surveying the world outside its walls: from its windows, the Behls can see “the whole sumptuous metropolis . . . arrayed on a platter.”¹⁹ But, strangely, the first full description of Washington as seen from the Observatory is evacuated of people, dominated instead by the arrangement of buildings and monumental architecture: “L’Enfant’s broad avenues connected to a dozen circles containing reminders of the tempestuous past—slender generals on horseback, admirals caressing spyglasses, heavy iron cannons left and right, parks deftly placed, symmetry triumphant.”²⁰ The city here appears collapsed into stone and the mechanics of urban planning, inanimate “generals” and “admirals” replacing the living residents that one would expect to find in an urban metropolis. The statues of Revolutionary and Civil War

¹⁵ Just, *Echo House*, 1.

¹⁶ Just, *Echo House*, 275.

¹⁷ Jaffe and Sherwood, *Dream City*, 21.

¹⁸ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 140.

¹⁹ Just, *Echo House*, 4.

²⁰ Just, *Echo House*, 3.

heroes call up the memory of the violent birth of the American nation and simultaneously consign it to the past, as if to assure us that there is no history here beyond the placards.

Compare this imagined geography with the landscape that would be visible to a mid-twentieth-century observer standing at Echo House's vantage above Rock Creek Park. From this spot in the city, it would be possible to see not only the "Capitol building and the Washington Monument,"²¹ but also the Potomac Gardens public housing project constructed in 1965 thirteen blocks from the Capitol,²² and the charred remains of buildings and empty storefronts, vestiges of the 1968 riots in downtown DC, that would not be fully restored for another four decades.²³ But these events, central to the history of DC as a Black city, are conspicuously absent from the imagined geography of Just's DC. Instead, Echo House is imagined as a climate unto itself, insulated against the external forces that act on the city as well as the Black local histories it contains. Even as the Behl's neighborhood experiences demographic change—"old people dying and moving to smaller quarters" to be replaced by young civil servants in the sixties,²⁴ the emergence of "chipped paint and damaged clapboard and mottled brightwork"²⁵ in the seventies as rowdy university students fill the once-exclusive streets—Echo House remains the same: it is occupied by the same members of the same family, taking up the same space in the social and political landscape of Washington. Indeed, the house is intentionally constructed as a refuge from DC itself, despite its physical proximity to the city's center: it is "well away from the vulgar hustle" of downtown and from the political arena of Capitol Hill, a physical separation which enables its inhabitants, like cats, "to do their business in one place and sleep in another."²⁶ For

²¹ Just, *Echo House*, 15.

²² Barbara Bradley, "Public Housing," December 1, 1996, in *All Things Considered*, NPR, transcript, ProQuest. Davy Rothbart's 2019 documentary *17 Blocks* takes a similar interest in DC's spatial contradictions, following the life of an impoverished Black family living in "America's most dangerous neighborhood" seventeen blocks from the Capitol. See *17 Blocks*, dir. Davy Rothbart (U.S., 2019), <https://www.17blocksfilm.com>.

²³ J. Samuel Walker, *Most of 14th Street is Gone: The Washington, DC Riots of 1968* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2018), 130.

²⁴ Just, *Echo House*, 162.

²⁵ Just, *Echo House*, 228.

²⁶ Just, *Echo House*, 2.

the Behls, then, Echo House is both a literal and a metaphorical refuge from the mundane realities of local politics and urban life that structure the District. It is a space imagined as thoroughly self-contained, outside of and insulated against the intrusions of the city, even as it is geographically located within that same city. And although Echo House is only occupied by the Behls, its insularity serves a similar purpose for its author and architect, allowing Ward Just to set his novel in Washington without ever having to engage with the Chocolate City.

This is not to say that Echo House is imagined as outside of history altogether, however; but it is a different kind of history that matters to the novel. Echo House is one of the oldest in its particular neighborhood in Washington, DC; its unnamed architect, in a witty gesture towards the *in-but-not-of*-politics status of the Behl family, is named as not the man himself, but “a follower of Benjamin Latrobe,”²⁷ the second major architect of the U.S. Capitol Building. From the beginning, then, Echo House is imbued with a political—and specifically a national—significance beyond that of the usual family home. Its library is the site of “one of the many inconclusive meetings between President Lincoln and General McClellan” in the midst of the American Civil War; its billiards room frequented, twenty years later, by President Grover Cleveland.²⁸ At the same time as the house is insulated against *outside* historical forces, the objects *inside* it thus take on a national historical significance. Iconic, unchanging, Echo House becomes a sort of receptacle for a narrative of American history—the chair in the library where President Lincoln once sat is “roped off, a tiny card announcing its significance”²⁹—while the local histories that surround it are erased. In a telling early passage, Just writes that “many of these rooms remained unchanged into the nineteen-nineties, giving Echo House the atmosphere

²⁷ Just, *Echo House*, 1.

²⁸ Just, *Echo House*, 2.

²⁹ Just, *Echo House*, 2.

of a museum”³⁰—precisely the space where history as object, or as an array of objects on display, is memorialized and made available.

It would be tempting to argue that, while *Echo House* makes its setting the imagined White DC of the federal government—a DC that does not really exist, either on a map or on the streets—*Long Distance Life* shows us the ‘real’ DC, an intensely local space inhabited and navigated by Black District residents. And it would also be tempting to argue that the two books are thus fundamentally opposite, neither of them fully able to imagine the world of the other. But Marita Golden’s novel complicates any rigid separation between the ‘two Districts,’ between Black and White, federal and local: by necessity, her Black characters are able to consciously imagine the White world of *Echo House* in a way that could not be said for the reverse. They discuss national politics in the crowded back rooms of neighborhood restaurants and record stores; they protest in front of the White House for the release of the Scottsboro Boys; they join Dr. Martin Luther King’s March for Jobs and Freedom at the National Mall.³¹ The political DC of *Echo House* is inseparable from their lived realities, even as the DC they live in exceeds the bounds of what *Echo House* imagines for them.

The characters of *Long Distance Life* navigate a Black DC that Just’s depiction of the city erases; and in doing so, they reveal the existence of Black Washingtonians as what geographer Katherine McKittrick calls “absented presences” in her study of Black Canada: people who can never be completely erased from the city’s landscape, although their presence there is continually disavowed.³² Early in the novel, Logan describes the two cities that exist within the District’s

³⁰ Just, *Echo House*, 3.

³¹ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 59; 50; 148.

³² Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 99. DC differs from Canada in significant ways: although both are imagined nationally as White, DC is a majority Black city, whereas Black Canadians have always been a minority in the country. Although I use McKittrick’s term here, it is thus with the recognition that the “absented presence” of Black Washingtonians is necessarily constructed through different imaginative contortions, and carries with it different contradictions, than that of Black Canadians.

boundaries: one “a Black world in which a wonderful democracy of conditions prevailed,”³³ the other a “Washington, D.C.” that “did not belong to him or anyone who looked like the people he knew.”³⁴ In Logan’s eyes, this second Washington is explicitly tied to the city’s existence as a center of federal governance: it is in “the White House, Capitol Hill” where “white men with power lived and worked. . . . and drew the lines that checked the perimeters of Black hopes.”³⁵ The “wonderful democracy” of the “Black world” stands in ironic contrast to the markedly undemocratic power over DC vested in the White House and Capitol—symbolic and literal sites of the government of a supposedly democratic nation.

Logan’s account of the Black and White worlds contained within the District blurs the boundaries between spatiality and sociality, geographical spaces and lived communities. His description is not merely of residential or physical segregation—DC’s majority Black-occupied public housing projects begin just blocks away from the Capitol,³⁶ and the city’s federal bureaucracy has always relied on Black laborers like Logan’s mother Esther herself, who works as a file clerk at the Patent Office,³⁷ to function—but also of the constriction of Black imaginations. The “white men with power” on Capitol Hill do not merely prevent Black residents from moving freely about the city; they also define “the perimeter of Black hopes,” an abstract confinement rendered in explicitly spatial terms. The profound irony of Black DC residents’ unfree position within the city where they live is made yet more explicit in a later conversation between Esther and her lover Randolph. Stealing time away with each other at a Black Maryland beach, Esther tells Randolph that she has never felt Washington belonged to her.

³³ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 13.

³⁴ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 14.

³⁵ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 14.

³⁶ Bradley, “Public Housing,” NPR.

³⁷ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 100.

“‘That’s ‘cause it don’t,’” Randolph replies, “‘It belongs to those congressmen and senators and all the tourists’”³⁸—precisely, in other words, the people who do not live in the city itself.

But the “wonderful democracy” of the Black world also persists despite these constraints, and even despite its inhabitants’ intimate awareness of them. For Logan, “the universe that was home nurtured and saved him, made [him] think that the other world simply didn’t matter.”³⁹ His language of the “universe that was home” points to a unique aspect of the Black DC imagined by *Long Distance Life*: its implicit and explicit troubling of the rigid separation between house and city. Reflecting on his life in DC at the beginning of the novel, Logan muses that “Each time he drove away from the area [he] felt that he was, in fact, leaving nothing behind, that he would take these streets with him through his front door, that he would be walking them as they had been, as they were now, no matter where he went.”⁴⁰ The image here—of the streets infiltrating the house through its very entryway—is presented as comforting rather than threatening, a testament to the way in which the city itself is experienced by Logan as home; then again, it also indicates the instability of the house’s physical and psychic borders, its inability to remain self-contained.

The central family home in *Long Distance Life* is located in present-day Columbia Heights, less than three miles from the fictional Echo House, but its characters inhabit a far different domestic space from the Behls. The house on Harvard Street where Naomi lives with her teenage daughter Esther is described with loving care as a “pale yellow-brick Victorian structure” that “guarded the lives it sheltered like a sentry,”⁴¹ but we learn in the following page that Naomi herself occupies only the first floor: the house is split into levels that are inhabited by several families at a time. Naomi’s house thus emerges almost immediately as a shared space

³⁸ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 95.

³⁹ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 14.

⁴⁰ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 15.

⁴¹ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 75.

whose social world exceeds the conventional nuclear family. The comparative lack of insularity in her home is not so much an active choice on the part of its occupants as it is a matter of necessity. Naomi's working-class origins means that she likely takes on boarders to pay off a mortgage she could not otherwise afford,⁴² and her precarious status as a Black woman homeowner is evidenced even by her house's interior decor, a lasting reminder of the years of labor she spent in the homes of others: "Naomi had gleaned a sense of decorating style from the white homes she had worked in years before, from magazines and the movies."⁴³

The street, for Golden's characters, becomes a space of sociality that complicates an easy division between the house and the city. Naomi's house on Harvard Street literally and physically opens itself up to the street as she sits on the front porch "among several of her boarders, who sat smoking, talking, laughing in boisterous celebration it seemed of nothing more momentous than life itself," while children chase fireflies in the yards before them and "young seventeen- and eighteen-year-old boys 'bopped' down the streets in pairs beneath the lamplight."⁴⁴ The social world described here extends beyond even Naomi's shared home, including not only the boarders who reside in her house but also the occupants of neighboring houses who take to the same streets to cool off from the District's ninety-degree summer. In a similar scene later in the novel, Logan describes how the stoops of Harvard Street "filled once again with people seeking relief from stuffy, humid rented rooms"—the street a communal refuge from both the physical enclosure of the room, and the psychological reminder of its "rented" status.⁴⁵ Black feminist theorist bell hooks describes her grandparents' Southern porch as a similar space, writing that "often exploited and oppressed groups of people who are compelled by economic circumstance to share small living quarters with many others view the

⁴² For a concise history of antiblack American housing practices (accompanied by a compelling spatial reading of June Jordan's *His Own Where*), see Charles Davis II, "Black Spaces Matter," *Aggregate 2* (March 2015): 1-8, <http://we-aggregate.org/media/files/f3187e84f5a0d71dc077cdc56f26af02.pdf>.

⁴³ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 75.

⁴⁴ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 114.

⁴⁵ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 172.

world outside the building proper as liminal space where they can stretch the limits of desire and the imagination.”⁴⁶ If the hopes of Golden’s Black DC residents are constricted by White power, then the Black porch and the street become spaces where those hopes can be at least partially realized. As in Logan’s early description of DC, Black spatiality is registered as inseparable from Black sociality: the “Black world” is at once a neighborhood and a “universe” of democratic communality and “Black hopes” that both are bounded by and exceed the city’s narrow limits.

Reading Ward Just’s imagined District alongside the White and Black worlds of *Long Distance Life* reveals the extent to which *Echo House*’s depiction of DC enacts a careful erasure of precisely the people and places that made the District known as the ‘Chocolate City,’ replacing all mentions of a Black DC with a sterilized narrative of White national history contained neatly within the walls of the house itself. It is no wonder that Marion Barry does not appear once in the novel’s over three hundred pages: the city’s Black mayor would be virtually irreconcilable with this White political narrative. In contrast, *Long Distance Life* describes a District that Barry knew intimately well: one in which Black social life and communal spaces flourish, even though they exist under the constant threat of encroachment by the same White federal power that the residents of *Echo House* claim as their own. Golden’s Black DC, in other words, negotiates an imagined White DC that refuses even to acknowledge its existence.

II. Constructing White Spaces in *Echo House*

Logan’s description of DC at the beginning of *Long Distance Life* distills the city’s contradictory racial imaginary: it is simultaneously the majority Black ‘Chocolate City’ and an urban space that is both controlled by Whites and imagined as a White federal city in national

⁴⁶ bell hooks, Julie Eizenberg, and Hank Koning, “House, 20 June 1994,” *Assemblage* no. 24 (August 1994), 24, doi:10.2307/3171188.

politics. In both *Echo House* and *Long Distance Life*, the constructed Whiteness of the District constitutes an inescapable material presence, one that is embraced by the White Behls of Just's novel at the same time as it limits the lives of Golden's Black characters. Reading the city's spaces as they are described in *Echo House* provides further insight into how such "White spaces" are created and negotiated by the novel's White characters, even as the city is simultaneously imagined as outside the Behl's social world.

The "White space"—a physical space implicitly racialized as White in the absence of formal segregation policies—has become an established concept in race and space scholarship. In the field of communications, for example, Ronald L. Jackson II has studied the discursive formation of White spaces by White conversants as both incomplete and uninterrogatable; and sociologist Elijah Anderson discusses the sociological formation of White urban spaces and the experiences of the Black folks who navigate them in his 2015 essay "The White Space."⁴⁷ The social implications of Jackson's and Anderson's analyses of how space comes to be imagined as racially White become even more pertinent in the non-visual medium of literature, where described spaces often function on multiple levels as stand-ins for sociality.⁴⁸

Although the Whiteness of *Echo House*'s central characters is well established, albeit only because it goes unmarked,⁴⁹ the spaces they occupy are not explicitly racialized as White until halfway through the novel, when Ward Just introduces the first Black character—and the only Black person with a speaking part—in the book's three hundred and twenty eight pages.

Wilson Slyde is first introduced when Alec Behl arrives late to a business dinner at a downtown

⁴⁷ Ronald L. Jackson II, "White Space, White Privilege: Mapping Discursive Inquiry Into the Self," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85, no. 1 (1999): 38, doi:10.1080/00335639909384240; Elijah Anderson, "The White Space," *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015), 10, doi:10.1177/2332649214561306.

⁴⁸ My framing here is indebted to David Alworth's critical text *Site Reading: Fiction, Art, Social Form*, which argues that "sites figure in novels as determinants of sociality" rather than mere spaces within which characters create their own unrelated social worlds. David Alworth, *Site Reading: Fiction, Art, Social Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 2, doi:10.2307/j.ctt21c4v50.

⁴⁹ For most of the history of White American literature, Whiteness has been the unspoken standard, assumed of both characters and readers unless otherwise specified. For a more extensive critique of this phenomenon, see Ruth Frankenberg, "The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness," in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, eds. Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 72-96, doi:10.1215/9780822381044-004.

DC restaurant with his lover Leila Berggren. From the beginning, Wilson’s presence at the table is conspicuous: he is the only character not introduced by name, but rather as “a wiry young Negro” sitting next to Leila’s business partner.⁵⁰ This namelessness might be explained away by his being a stranger to Alec, if it were not for the fact that the business partner, also being introduced for the first time, is named immediately; and that the sentence directly following this one explains that “That would be Wilson Slyde, Leila had mentioned him often.”⁵¹

For Wilson to appear first as a body without a name—as a body unattached to a name, unlike the other guests at the dinner table, who are introduced as names without bodies— instantly connotes his unintelligibility in the world of names and official positions in which Alec and his associates operate. At the same time, he is also instantly recognizable: Alec is at once able to deduce “who that is,” a familiar identificatory response that Anderson identifies when an anonymous Black person enters a White space,⁵² despite the fact that he has never seen him before. Apparently Wilson is one of few Black men whose presence at the dinner table, at a restaurant in a majority Black city, would be coherent to Alec. Ironically, his presence and Alec’s response to it establish the restaurant as a White space, even as his being there as a Black man would also seem to negate that imagined Whiteness.

Wilson remains entirely silent throughout the course of the business dinner—silent, that is, until political freelancer Red Lambardo offers Alec the job in which he is currently employed, commenting callously that “Wilson’s young and we need someone with more experience or, as I’ve said, the right kind of experience.”⁵³ It is only then, after Alec has summarily refused the position, that Wilson explodes for the first time in a sudden racially charged outburst:

“Yes, he does,” Wilson said. “He knows what it is. It’s a field hand’s work. Leave it to the field hand. Leave it to the nigger.”

⁵⁰ Just, *Echo House*, 184.

⁵¹ Just, *Echo House*, 184.

⁵² Anderson, “The White Space,” 13.

⁵³ Just, *Echo House*, 191.

Red smashed his fist on the table and snarled, “Never use that word again in my presence, Wilson.”⁵⁴

This loaded exchange is made possible only by its characters’ racialized contortions. Although Wilson has just been slighted by Red Lambardo—as an MIT-trained defense expert, he is really overqualified for the position Red has offered Alec—it is he who ends up being punished, implicitly, for charging the subject with race when it had previously remained unspoken, for bringing “that word” to bear its weight upon the dinnertime conversation. It is as though Wilson’s speaking for the first time in the novel is also race — is also Blackness — speaking for the first time, so that his utterance and the novel’s consciousness of race emerge almost simultaneously. Anderson argues that a Black presence in White spaces can become “a profound and threatening racial symbol” that spurs Whites to protect the sanctity of that space “where whites belong and black people can so easily be reminded that they do not.”⁵⁵ If for some readers, the Whiteness of the Behls has been self-evident for the entirety of the novel, Wilson’s Blackness is what makes race salient for the first time for the White characters of *Echo House*.

But Wilson’s Black anger is also counteracted, and then almost immediately quenched in the narrative, by Red’s righteous White fury. While Wilson’s outburst is rendered in pure dialogue, Red’s rebuke is intensely physical: his “smash[ing]” fist and “snarl[ing]” reestablishes his White physical presence in the room. The novel’s final say—for no more is said on this scene, and *Echo House* continues in the following pages as if having entirely forgotten it—is Red’s banishment of “that word” from the room of the restaurant. It is as though, having introduced the subject of Blackness to the political realm of his novel, Just finds himself unsure of what else to say about it. The statement itself must be enough; Wilson’s presence, silent yet unescapable, is left to speak for itself. In fact, having served his purpose, Wilson quickly disappears from the scene of Alec’s dinner, the other attendees of the dinner party wondering

⁵⁴ Just, *Echo House*, 191.

⁵⁵ Anderson, “The White Space,” 15.

aloud at his sudden absence: “Where was Wilson? He was there a moment ago, and now he’d vanished without a trace. Did anyone see him go? He was sitting right *there*, Leila said. And now he was gone like a thief in the night.”⁵⁶

There are multiple ways of critically reading Wilson Slyde’s role in this scene, and in *Echo House*. David Smit argues of precisely this moment that “Just’s portrayal of women and African Americans is sympathetic, that he is trying in good faith to ‘recreate,’ as it were, their own voices without comment.”⁵⁷ However, even Smit’s analysis ignores the racial composition of the Washington, DC that the Behls inhabit, reading Wilson Slyde’s presence instead as a commentary on race in national politics writ large. There is no doubt that Just is self-conscious about his inclusion of Wilson in the novel; by including this scene, he signals to his reader that his attitude towards race does not align perfectly with that of the Behls, who are tied so completely to the notion of themselves as part of a White national narrative that they do not consciously recognize its very Whiteness. But it would be too simple to dismiss Just’s role in shaping the novel, as Smit argues, as one of a “neutral observer.”⁵⁸ Rather than dismiss Just’s inclusion of a Black character as a ‘good faith’ effort to include an outsider perspective in his novel, I am suggesting that thinking more critically about the spaces imagined by Just’s narration allows us to see how his very inclusion of a single Black character perpetuates the erasure of Black DC writ large.

If, as my previous analysis has shown, Washington, DC is developed in *Echo House* as estranged from the lived realities of the Behls—a space they navigate during their workdays, but always end up retreating from, into the insularity of their grand home—then the scene of this dinner demonstrates how emphatically Ward Just’s DC also does not belong to Wilson. Although

⁵⁶ Just, *Echo House*, 194.

⁵⁷ David Smit, *Power and Class in Political Fiction: Elite Theory and the Post-War Washington Novel* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019), 148, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-26769-8_3.

⁵⁸ Smit, *Power and Class in Political Fiction*, 147.

Just was writing at a time when Washington was still known as the ‘Chocolate City’—when Whites had fled the city in droves for the suburbs, and when its local government was controlled, for the first time, by a Black mayor operating a Black bureaucracy—Wilson’s presence reminds readers that the spaces of power in the city remain White. In some sense, this contradictory spatial arrangement may be familiar to all Black residents of urban centers that experienced White flight during this era;⁵⁹ but the District’s unique position as a city controlled entirely by external federal power necessarily exacerbates the divide between who ‘lives’ in a city and who has the power to define its spaces and its future. Black anthropologist Tanya Price, for example, has discussed her firsthand experience with “the ‘I am physically here, but not of here’ attitude which enables federal employees to maintain ‘White public space’ within predominantly Black Washington.”⁶⁰

Wilson Slyde introduces a racial tension that lingers unresolved over the remainder of the novel. Each time he reappears (and reappear he does, like an echo that *Echo House* cannot quite manage to dispel), Wilson is characterized as a perpetual outsider: his presence draws implicit boundaries between those who belong in the novel and those who do not. When Sylvia Behl runs into a friend of Axel’s, government official Ed Peralta, on Wisconsin Avenue (one of the “most ritzy” of DC streets, extending diagonally across White upper-class neighborhoods to the Maryland suburbs),⁶¹ he initially confronts her with uncharacteristic anger—snarling “Get away from me. Go back where you came from”—before sheepishly admitting that he has mistaken her for “one of Slyde’s people.”⁶² For Sylvia herself, generally disillusioned with politics and the Washington crowd, Wilson is “so hip and easy with his Chiclets smile and street slang, his

⁵⁹ For more on the resonances of White flight in American literature, see Catherine Jurca, *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), doi:10.2307/j.ctt7sp44.

⁶⁰ Tanya Price, “White Public Spaces in Black Places: The Social Reconstruction of Whiteness in Washington, D.C.,” *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 27, no. ¾ (Fall/Winter 1998): 307, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40553346>.

⁶¹ Jaffe and Sherwood, *Dream City*, 20.

⁶² Just, *Echo House*, 205.

panther's body and upper-class tastes."⁶³ In her eyes, Wilson's Blackness becomes an entryway into an America she knows precious little about, "so cool when he occasionally admitted them to the world they knew only from their television screens and James Baldwin's books."⁶⁴ And yet Sylvia also seems unsure of whether she wants to be admitted into this world at all. "She always wanted to ask what it meant to him, being the only black key on the Steinway," Just writes, "but she never did, because she knew he would turn her aside with some black jive she wouldn't understand or would understand all too well."⁶⁵ Once again, Sylvia renders Wilson unintelligible, imagining his Black "world" as fundamentally different from her own White one—eliding the fact that Wilson's "world" does not exist only on TV and literature, but also mere miles away from Sylvia's own doorstep, in the city that she claims to know so well.

Wilson's uneasy existence in *Echo House* reveals the novel's inability to escape the Black presence at the heart of Washington, at the same time that it cannot explicitly name it. The purpose that his character serves to Ward Just is unclear—he is directly implicated neither in the Behl family drama, nor in the world of federal politics that the Behls navigate outside the walls of Echo House. But Wilson's presence allows the White characters of *Echo House* to claim DC as their own at the same time as they disavow it. Ironically, the novel replicates the very Black tokenism that its characters halfheartedly criticize. Just as Wilson's bosses at the Department of Defense "dealt him the equal opportunity account and sent him around the country talking to the NAACP and the Urban League" about government integration,⁶⁶ so too in the novel—albeit in a different way—is his Blackness made into a racial symbol. As the singular Black character, he is made to stand in for Blackness itself, allowing the Whiteness of the other characters to be

⁶³ Just, *Echo House*, 229.

⁶⁴ Just, *Echo House*, 229.

⁶⁵ Just, *Echo House*, 230.

⁶⁶ Just, *Echo House*, 219.

affirmed in opposition—even as, for people like Sylvia, that affirmation ironically takes place through their sense that they are being shut out of *his* world rather than the reverse.

If *Echo House* demonstrates how the production of White spaces is contradictorily dependent on the presence of Blackness, then *Long Distance Life* shows us the extent to which Washington is constituted as a Black city that is composed of White spaces. DC’s moniker of ‘Chocolate City’ seems utterly at odds with the image that greets Randolph as he goes downtown to see Esther after work, “her dark face among the crowd of whites streaming out of the Patent Office.”⁶⁷ Like Sylvia’s image of Wilson as “the only black key on the Steinway,” Esther’s lone Black face in a sea of Whiteness is a reversal of the actual population makeup of the District, which was over fifty percent Black—and in the Barry era, seventy percent—from the 1960 census until 2010, long after both novels were published.⁶⁸ And yet the abundance of “White spaces” that comprise DC in the national imaginary cannot be reduced to a mere demographic discrepancy. Rather, as *Echo House* demonstrates, their imagined existence enables the spatial consolidation of White power at the same time that it disavows the District’s Black inhabitants—‘representing’ Wilson while erasing the Chocolate City.

III. Taking to the Streets in *Long Distance Life*

On the night of April 4, 1968, Washington, DC erupted in flames. News of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. earlier that evening had spread steadily through the Black neighborhoods that surrounded 14th and U Streets, and as more and more District residents learned of King’s murder, the streets began to fill with people. The narrative of the

⁶⁷ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 112.

⁶⁸ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, And By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States” (Working Paper No. 56, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, September 2002), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.pdf>.

1968 riots is a familiar one, an eruption of Black despair, grief, and frustration that was replicated in urban centers across the nation. In Detroit, in Chicago, in Cincinnati, shocked and angry Black crowds were breaking windows, setting fires, and emptying the stores around them. In DC, the riots would end only two days later, after President Lyndon B. Johnson called in the DC National Guard.⁶⁹

Given the lasting significance of the 1968 riots to DC's social and political landscape, their absence from the pages of *Echo House* is striking. In fact, the 1960s are virtually erased from the novel's plot: in 1962, Sylvia Behl returns to Echo House for a brief visit, and then it is suddenly 1973, the years in between glossed as Washington changing itself to become "busier, larger, and somehow more settled, certainly more aware of itself and much, much richer."⁷⁰ In place of the violent internal racial divisions that had become more visible than ever in the nation's capital, Just gives us the remembered trauma of Axel's federal European bank being audited and the injustice of kind, bumbling government official Ed Peralta being forced to take the fall for it.⁷¹ Once again, the novel directs its focus outwards, toward federal politics abroad—as if the only history that matters to DC is the kind that does not take place in the city at all.

If the 1968 riots are omitted from Just's narrative history of DC, they are central to the city as it is imagined in *Long Distance Life*. In the novel's riots, seen through the eyes of a young Logan, protesters crowd onto Fourteenth Street, a business corridor which "determined the quality of their lives even more than the houses and the rooms where they made love and babies and returned to at the end of the day."⁷² Whereas Harvard Street in Golden's earlier description acted as a social extension of the claustrophobic "rented rooms," the street here becomes a confining border which intrudes upon the comforting limits of domestic space: "Fourteenth

⁶⁹ Walker, *Most of 14th Street is Gone*, 62.

⁷⁰ Just, *Echo House*, 201.

⁷¹ Just, *Echo House*, 214.

⁷² Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 172.

Street determined the size of their lives, the perimeters of their hopes in ways that they honored yet despised.”⁷³ Golden’s language in this passage echoes almost exactly the “perimeter of Black hopes” whose restriction Logan describes much earlier in the novel; but whereas in its first formulation this perimeter was drawn by “white men with power,” here it becomes a product of the street itself.

The ‘street’ is a physical site in the city, but it is also a potent literary object that has long been associated with Black American urban life. Farah Griffin, for example, has written in detail about the importance of the street to Ann Petry’s real and fictional Harlem; and Nilofar Gardezi reads “street life” as a central spatial imaginary in the poetry of Langston Hughes.⁷⁴ Vanessa Irvin Morris writes in her guide to the street literature genre, popularized by Black writers like Sister Souljah (*The Coldest Winter Ever*) and Omar Tyree (*Flyy Girl*), that “‘the streets’ is synonymous with ‘the ‘hood,’” a lived space which “function[s] as a stage on which powerful and meaningful acts of living are actualized and negotiated.”⁷⁵ The street plays a double-edged role in the lives of *Long Distance Life*’s Black characters: it is simultaneously a conduit for sociality and a mode of confinement that limits, rather than enables, their mobility. In Golden’s description of the riots, the adjectives ascribed to the street echo the language of Esther’s experience of a Southern prison during her civil rights activism: the streets confine and “determine” Black lives in the same way that, for fourteen days and in her memories for years after, Esther’s “life was confined and determined by the borders of a cell.”⁷⁶

The novel’s description of the 1968 riots enacts a physical movement from the house to the world outside it: Golden’s Black renters and homeowners emerge from the confines of their

⁷³ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 172.

⁷⁴ See Farah Jasmine Griffin, “Ann Petry: Walking Harlem,” in *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2013), 79-132; and Nilofar Gardezi, “Alternative Geographies of Community in Langston Hughes’s *Montage of a Dream Deferred*,” in *If The House Is Not Yet Finished”: Urban Renewal and Postwar African American Poetry* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2014), 8-26, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

⁷⁵ Vanessa Irvin Morris, *The Readers’ Advisory Guide to Street Literature* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2012), 20, EBSCOhost.

⁷⁶ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 185.

homes and into the street which both shapes and constricts their lives. The central family in *Long Distance Life* shares a similar spatial trajectory over the course of the novel: whereas Naomi, Logan, and Esther see the home as a measure of safety and security, their youngest family member, Nathaniel, is drawn instead to the streets. ““Don’t use the house as a pit stop,”” Logan admonishes his brother late in the novel, ““someplace just to change your clothes and then hit the street.””⁷⁷ But Nathaniel cannot heed his brother’s advice, and it is through his eyes that *Long Distance Life* describes the DC of the Marion Barry era—a city that has moved beyond the idyllic ‘Chocolate City’ years which Logan remembers so fondly. As the novel progresses through time from the 1960s to the 70s and 80s, the street grows in symbolic importance to the narrative, ultimately becoming the site of the novel’s greatest tragedy: Nathaniel’s violent and premature death.

The DC that Nathaniel enters into in the 1970s is not the same “Black world” that Logan navigated as a child; by the time Nathaniel is born, that old DC is an imagined space even within the bounds of the novel, available to Logan only in his memory of the past. At the start of the novel, Logan lives in the same neighborhood where his mother and grandmother raised him—what “once had been the heartbeat of Black Washington,”⁷⁸ but, implicitly, is no longer. As his narration moves from the past to the present, Logan recalls how this same neighborhood was ravaged by the 1968 riots that he himself participated in as a child. In the wake of this violence, the District has not experienced a communal rebirth from the ashes; rather, “the fires had gutted the soul of the world these streets had made for him.”⁷⁹ A new, soulless architecture replaces the “Black world” of Logan’s youth, with “squat, efficient, charmless apartment buildings” marking the spot where “bakeries and record stores” once served as community gathering places, and drug transactions “in broad daylight before once eloquent Victorian houses” like Naomi’s own

⁷⁷ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 265.

⁷⁸ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 13.

⁷⁹ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 14.

yellow home.⁸⁰ This DC is characterized by a sense of decline and ruination—scarred by the financial drain of White flight and the violence of the crack epidemic⁸¹—that mirrors the immediate devastation of the 1968 riots, decades after they occurred. Even in the Barry era, for both Golden as author and Logan as fictional character, the riots feel starkly relevant, echoing across the city’s landscape and its disintegrating social world.

It is this new cityscape, stripped of its old sense of community, that a twenty-one-year-old Nathaniel navigates as he drives from neighborhood to neighborhood delivering drugs. For Nathaniel, the street is the mode through which DC expands into a different type of social world. Indeed, Nathaniel’s street, as an illicit network connecting the disparate quadrants of the city, becomes in some ironic sense the most ‘democratic’ racial network in the entire text. His drug trade takes him across the city, linking downtown government offices to low-income Black neighborhoods in Southeast to the same Rock Creek Park neighborhood where Echo House stands, this time the residence of a prominent Black businessman who is also one of Nathaniel’s primary suppliers of cocaine.⁸² For Nathaniel, the streets promise a more intimate relationship to the White spaces of power that structure DC, one in which he can call the shots: they transform the “street corners, living rooms, bars” where he makes his deals into a “small universe in which he set the rules.”⁸³ Off the pages of *Long Distance Life*, in Barry’s DC, White District residents were shocked by the same phenomenon of Black access to White spaces provided by the drug trade. In a passage that strangely modifies the restaurant scene in *Echo House*, one reporter writes in 1998 that drug wholesalers do their business in “such haunts as the Jockey Club at the Sheraton Luxury Collection Hotel,” an establishment in DC’s Embassy Row that is ironically also “Nancy ‘Just Say No’ Reagan’s favorite luncheon place in the capital.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 14.

⁸¹ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 390-424.

⁸² Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 271; 289; 279.

⁸³ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 271; 272.

⁸⁴ Jamie Dettmer, “Capital Shame,” *Insight on the News* 14, no. 25 (July 1998), 11, ProQuest.

In a sense, the racial democracy of Nathaniel's streets echoes the function that they were originally intended to fulfill in DC's urban layout: both a physical enactment and a symbolic representation of federal democracy. French-American engineer Pierre-Charles L'Enfant designed the city's unique spatial plan in 1790 to be connected by long radiating avenues, each named after one of the new republic's fifteen states and arranged according to their geographic location in the country.⁸⁵ Pamela Scott argues convincingly that L'Enfant's avenues "function as separate yet interrelated entities, symbolizing the distinct nature of the states within the nation of united states."⁸⁶ In *Long Distance Life*, the physical space of the street echoes this democratic promise within the confines of the city itself: it connects the Black and White worlds of DC, like the "canals" that Constance Behl sees in the "great boulevards" of *Echo House's* Washington.⁸⁷ Fourteenth Street is the site of the riot in Logan's neighborhood, Fourteenth and Park; but it can also be followed downtown to Fourteenth and Constitution, where Esther works her desk job at the federal Patent Office, two blocks away from the White House.⁸⁸ Sarah Luria writes that the city's system of interconnected avenues was intended to "lead to a defined future," with each avenue terminating at a vista or national monument like the grand statues that can be seen from the Behls' Observatory.⁸⁹ But the lofty federal symbolism of the District's streets ends up meaning the opposite for Nathaniel. Even before his death, he himself recognizes that there is no future in his work: "Nobody got old doing this, either the drugs or the competitors caught up with you and blew you away."⁹⁰

The supposed democratic possibilities of the streets in *Long Distance Life* end with Samuel (Snookie), Nathaniel's partner turned rival in the drug trade—and his eventual murderer.

⁸⁵ Sarah Luria, *Capital Speculations: Writing and Building Washington, D.C.* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2006), 18.

⁸⁶ Pamela Scott, "This Vast Empire: The Iconography of the Mall, 1791-1848," *Studies in the History of Art* 30 (1991), 39, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42620451>.

⁸⁷ Just, *Echo House*, 5.

⁸⁸ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 110.

⁸⁹ Luria, *Capital Speculations*, 29.

⁹⁰ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 271.

Snookie is immediately characterized negatively: “He looked like a dummy,” Golden writes, “a black Howdy Doody.”⁹¹ But beneath that exterior is a core of rage, deepened by the belief that “the pain of others could eradicate, at least for a while, his own hurt, secret, dark, and eternal.”⁹² Snookie exists in a separate socioeconomic class from Naomi and Esther, who have experienced their share of hardships but are now secure homeowners in relatively well-to-do Black neighborhoods; he grew up in a family of “seven brothers and sisters” who “slept together on a mattress on the floor at night,” unable to afford even the glasses he needed for school.⁹³ In one striking passage, Snookie follows Nathaniel home only to discover that he lives in a “closed, tight little enclave of comfort and affluence”—a level of prosperity and security that makes drug dealing a choice for him in a way that for Snookie it never was.⁹⁴ If for Nathaniel taking to the streets provides at least “the illusion that he was free,”⁹⁵ for Snookie the streets are a reminder of the persistent inequality that differentiate his life from Nathaniel’s.

But beneath Snookie’s class disdain for Nathaniel runs an even deeper current of racial tension. “When I was a little kid, I used to have these fantasies about me growing up and becoming a lawyer,” he tells us in the section that begins the story of Nathaniel’s murder—the first and only time that the novel’s narration switches to the first person, aside from Naomi’s recurring sections. He continues:

Then when I’d go to sleep at night, got so I was having these dreams about me as a lawyer. But no matter how hard I tried, in them dreams, I always turned out white. I’d try and try to make the man in the dream Black, but only now and then could I do it. And then he was real fuzzy. But I could see him like he was standing next to me when he was white. Well, I sure didn’t want to be no white man so I forgot all about wanting to be a lawyer and did what I was good at.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 287.

⁹² Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 287.

⁹³ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 287.

⁹⁴ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 289.

⁹⁵ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 278.

⁹⁶ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 317.

In Snookie’s dream, Golden’s repeated image of the confined “perimeter of Black hopes” is made literal: Snookie literally cannot dream himself a future as a Black man. Here it is not “white men” or the “street,” but Whiteness itself that limits the aspirations of the novel’s Black characters. And yet the central conflict in Snookie’s dream is not that he wants to be White and cannot be;⁹⁷ Golden makes clear his fervent desire to “make the man in the dream Black.” It is rather that Blackness, in the space of his dream, becomes unthinkable—literally unimaginable—and fundamentally unseeable. This haunting racial imaginary is rendered in spatial terms: Snookie’s Black self is “real fuzzy,” literally undefined, but the White lawyer he dreams is perfectly clear, “like he was standing next to me.”

Snookie’s dream of the impossibility of a Black future is eerily resonant with his role in Nathaniel’s death. Although he sees himself as an antagonist to Nathaniel, the two Black men are intimately tied in the novel’s trajectory: both are marked by violence, denied a future in the city where they live. A 1990 review of *Long Distance Life* speculates that “What Golden wants the reader to see, undoubtedly, is how the hard-won gains of one generation are taken for granted by the next; how, through a loss of spirituality, people lose touch with a reality that enables them to survive.”⁹⁸ In this reading, it is Nathaniel’s refusal of the lessons his family’s past offers him that forecloses any hope for his future. But Golden shows instead how Nathaniel’s future is part of a longer narrative that extends far beyond individual responsibility. Her description of the 1968 riots as a response to the death of one Black future ramifies finally, twenty one years later, in the death of another. From their initial promise to their eventual betrayal, the streets in *Long Distance Life* map out the trajectory of Naomi’s family hopes—and in doing so, they eerily mirror the downward path of the District itself under Marion Barry. If L’Enfant’s plan for DC’s

⁹⁷ I find this notable in contrast to the image of Whiteness in the Black imagination as it is figured in better-known texts like Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970).

⁹⁸ Nagueyalti Warren, “Reviewed Work: *Long Distance Life* by Marita Golden,” *Black American Literature Forum* 24, no. 4, Women Writers Issue (Winter 1990), 803, doi:10.2307/3041804.

broad streets was to symbolize the bright future of a federal democratic system, the streets of *Long Distance Life* demonstrate how fully that future has failed the District itself.

IV. The Nation

Long Distance Life, like *Echo House*, ends with a death. Although the novel opens with Nathaniel's funeral, the scene of his murder does not play out until the final pages, when Snookie drives to Esther's house and rings the doorbell. Esther has left for church; Nathaniel is alone and unawares. He walks down the stairs in an undershirt, and "with no reason to be scared, living on a street like this," opens the door.⁹⁹ Snookie recounts the last moments of Nathaniel's life in intimate detail: "he standing there scratching his balls," his eyes half-closed with sleep, and "just as they open all the way, I unloaded my .22 in his stomach."¹⁰⁰ Nathaniel dies on the doorstep of his own house—an uncanny final iteration of his older brother Logan's prescient sense that the streets are capable of infiltrating his very home, that "he would take these streets with him through his front door."¹⁰¹

Nathaniel's murder takes place in the same city as Axel Behl's death and Marion Barry's fall from grace; and if this essay has demonstrated how different those imagined Districts can be, it has also shown how intimately they are intertwined. Nathaniel is a Black man murdered by another Black man on the steps of his own home; Axel dies in *Echo House*, perhaps the whitest of the novel's White spaces. But reading DC in the Barry era allows us to understand that the city has always contained both White spaces and Black tragedies; that, together, these real and imagined spaces comprise DC as a single, contradictory whole. What, then, do these

⁹⁹ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 319.

¹⁰⁰ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 319.

¹⁰¹ Golden, *Long Distance Life*, 15.

contradictions imply for the nation that Washington, DC purportedly represents as its capital city? How do we read these texts in the context of not only a local, but a national imaginary?

The central contradiction that structures the two novels and the relationship between them is strikingly similar to the political contradiction that accompanies DC's status as the nation's capital: in a word, both are problems of representation. In the mainstream American imagination, a Washington, DC comprised of the White House, the U.S. Capitol, and the city's monumental architecture is understood to represent the nation, at the same time that the city itself is denied political representation. While the imagined DC is seen as a metonym for the nation,¹⁰² the 'real' DC is the fundamental contradiction at the center of American democracy: a city of seven hundred thousand residents,¹⁰³ living in the same site where federal officials chart the course of the nation, who are themselves denied the right to participate in this political project at all. In *Echo House* and *Long Distance Life*, this contradictory relationship to the nation takes material form. Ward Just's White characters embrace the history of America's federal democracy as their own history, transforming DC itself into a mere backdrop for their political and family dramas. This same White narrative is fundamentally unable to represent Marita Golden's Black characters—erasing their very presence as Black residents of the city—but at the same time infiltrates their social spaces, forcing them to imagine their lives as constricted by Whites in power who may not live in DC but nevertheless control its future.

But what happens if we substitute a different imagined DC—the DC of the 'Chocolate City,' for example, or the "Black world" navigated by the characters of *Long Distance Life*—as this metonymic representative of the American nation? Then the founding contradiction of the District's political status becomes understandable not as a strange historical anomaly, or a mere

¹⁰² In fact, 'Washington' is listed as one of two examples under the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of 'metonym': "*Washington* is the metonym for the U.S. government, its chief personnel and its policies." *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (2001), s.v. "metonym."

¹⁰³ "QuickFacts: District of Columbia," U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/DC>.

omission, but rather as a reflection of the historical foundations of the nation itself. In fact, DC's unfreedom was never accidental: the city was disenfranchised in 1874, when White politicians began a campaign for the District's consolidation under a congressionally appointed Board of Commissioners in response to the city's growing free Black population and nationwide political agitation for the Black vote. "To prevent such a calamity," Asch and Musgrove write, referencing White fears of increased Black political power, "they recommended eliminating democracy in the city."¹⁰⁴ Alabama senator John Tyler Morgan, speaking on the Senate floor, phrased the conclusion differently: it was necessary, he told his colleagues, to "burn down the barn to get rid of the rats."¹⁰⁵ DC's disenfranchisement, in other words, was always tied to its existence as a Black city, long before the Barry era or the name 'Chocolate City.' Anti-Blackness is what makes DC—both the DC of the novels and the imagined political DC of the federal government—make *sense*: the city's political unfreedom is both symptom and reflection of the American nation's anti-Black origins.

Reading *Echo House* and *Long Distance Life* in this historical context thus generates two complementary understandings of the relationship between DC and the nation. First, the White metonymic DC that forms part of the mainstream national imaginary is a material force in the novels that shapes the city their characters navigate, even as, for the Black characters, it is made possible only by their erasure. Second, and at the same time, DC's political disenfranchisement—the direct result of its perceived Blackness—places it in an antagonistic relation to the federal government, which legislates the city's future without representing the needs or desires of its residents. Logan and his fellow Black Washingtonians resent the fact that Whites in power, although they are not from DC, are able to control the city through their roles as political representatives, in much the same way that outside congressmen like John Tyler

¹⁰⁴ Asch and Musgrove, *Chocolate City*, 156.

¹⁰⁵ John Tyler Morgan, in Jaffe and Sherwood, *Dream City*, 24.

Morgan cemented DC's future a century earlier. While DC is representative of the nation in a certain cultural imaginary, its political status emphasizes how fully the nation cannot represent it.

In some ways, the image of DC as a Black city in a White nation may feel reductive: the federal government is not solely White, just as DC has never been solely Black. In fact, there were more Black representatives in national government in the Barry era than there had been for the majority of the nation's history.¹⁰⁶ But reading for these imagined structures in *Echo House* and *Long Distance Life* allows us to understand how these powerful racial imaginations take hold of DC residents—how they shape social relationships, political decisions, and understandings of race and place—even when, and precisely because, they are not demographic fact. Just as DC's imagined status as a Black city was enough to justify its disenfranchisement, its imagined Whiteness has material consequences for the continued unfreedom of the city and its residents.

It should come as no surprise that the same historical forces that shaped our nation have also come to bear on its national literature. Toni Morrison argues in her seminal critical work *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* that the unfree presence of Black people in this country since its inception is precisely what grants White American literature the distinct qualities and preoccupations—with freedom, with rugged individualism, with romanticism—that allow it to be understood as uniquely American. Morrison's critique works on multiple levels in the context of DC, which was made literally unfree and undemocratic as a result of the increasing Black presence within its borders; and on yet another level, *Playing in the Dark's* 1992 publication just two years after Marion Barry's arrest means it is not only a critique of the conditions that shaped the Barry era, but also a product of that same historical period.

When Morrison writes that American cultural production has been shaped by “the presence of

¹⁰⁶ According to the U.S. House of Representatives, 78 percent of all Black Americans who have served in Congress began their terms in or after 1971. “Permanent Interests: The Expansion, Organization, and Rising Influence of African Americans in Congress, 1971–2019,” in *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007*, History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, Office of the Historian (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Permanent-Interest/Introduction/>.

the unfree within the heart of the democratic experiment,”¹⁰⁷ she could just as easily be writing explicitly about Barry’s DC itself, the so-called “heart” of a federal democratic system whose residents are denied political representation. In his 1967 essay “The Novel as a Function of American Democracy,” Ralph Ellison argues that the novel “has always been bound up with the idea of nationhood”: it provides the American writer with the unique opportunity to explore how “the great American ideals [are] made manifest in his own particular environment,” and shaped a national blueprint for those democratic ideals as the United States emerged into being.¹⁰⁸ But Morrison’s analysis pushes us to see how the ‘Washington novel’ as a particular strain of national literature is instead a reflection of democracy’s opposite: a blueprint for the unfree foundations upon which America’s “democratic ideals” were constructed in the first place.

Literary critics and authors alike have always sought after those texts that encapsulate what ‘America’ is. American literary theorist Lawrence Buell, for example, has analyzed in detail the search for a definitive “Great American Novel” across the past two centuries.¹⁰⁹ If the desire for a culturally representative American literature mirrors the ideal of a politically representative American democracy, then DC has been markedly excluded from both. The failure of DC literature to gain entrance into a nationally recognized literary canon reflects DC’s own lack of political inclusion in the American nation: both are representative precisely in their inability to be understood as representative. The racial and spatial relations in *Long Distance Life* and *Echo House* that I have focused on here—the erasure of Black histories in narratives of space and belonging; the consolidation of White spaces in Black places; the denial of Black lives and futures—are not unique to DC, although their location in the nation’s capital lends them a political weight beyond that of the average American city; they are national phenomena. But the

¹⁰⁷ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 48.

¹⁰⁸ Ralph Ellison, “The Novel as a Function of American Democracy,” in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (New York: The Modern Library, 1995), 756; 753.

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence Buell, *The Dream of the Great American Novel* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wpqcv>.

very fact that they have not been read in this way before underscores the relationship between DC literature's fundamental representativeness of America's founding contradictions, and the ways in which that representation has been denied it.

At the end of *Echo House*, in the scene with which I began this essay, Alec Behl imagines his own lost future in the wake of his father's death. Given what we know of his wealth and Whiteness, Alec's hopelessness seems absurd; but Just is right, I think, to foresee that the future of DC does not belong to Echo House. But to whom, then, does it belong? DC struggled with this same question throughout the Barry era. No longer entirely under federal control, the city's residents at last had the freedom to decide for themselves what DC's future could look like; but Barry's spectacular failure proved just how tenuous that freedom would be. Two decades after Barry's final term as mayor, DC is in a still more precarious position when it comes to race and space: the city is increasingly gentrifying, with new developments and rising rents pushing long-term Black residents out of the city proper, at the same time that the federal government has been commandeered by a man who Ta-Nehisi Coates has called "the first white president."¹¹⁰ In this historical moment, it is more imperative than ever to look to the stories that the history and literatures of the Barry era have to tell us. If *Echo House* and *Long Distance Life* are any indication, the political power in DC may be vested in the Capitol and the White House—but the city's future, circumscribed and uncertain as it may be, can only be found in the Chocolate City.

¹¹⁰ Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Donald Trump is the First White President," *The Atlantic*, October 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>.

Works Cited

- Alworth, David. *Site Reading: Fiction, Art, Social Form*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. doi:10.2307/j.ctt21c4v50.
- Anderson, Elijah. "The White Space." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1, no. 1 (2015): 10-21. doi:10.1177/2332649214561306.
- Asch, Chris Myers, and George Derek Musgrove. *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.
- Barras, Jonetta Rose. *The Last of the Black Emperors: The Hollow Comeback of Marion Barry in the New Age of Black Leaders*. Baltimore, MD: Bancroft Press, 1998.
- Barry, Jr., Marion, and Omar Tyree. *Mayor for Life: The Incredible Story of Marion Barry, Jr.* Largo, MD: Strebtor Books, 2014.
- Bradley, Barbara. "Public Housing." In *All Things Considered*, December 1, 1996. NPR. ProQuest.
- Brown, Mitchell. "Power, Identity, and the Limits of Agency." *Du Bois Review* 5, no. 8 (2008): 369-386. doi:10.1017/S1742058X0808020X.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Dream of the Great American Novel*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wpqcv>.
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "Donald Trump is the First White President." *The Atlantic*, October 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>.
- Davis II, Charles. "Black Spaces Matter." *Aggregate 2* (March 2015): 1-8, <http://we-aggregate.org/media/files/f3187e84f5a0d71dc077cdc56f26af02.pdf>.
- Dettmer, Jamie. "Capital Shame." *Insight on the News* 14, no. 25 (July 1998): 8-11. ProQuest.
- Ellison, Ralph. "The Novel as a Function of American Democracy." In *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, New York: The Modern Library, 1995.
- Evans, Sandra. "Barry: Politics Behind Cocaine Probe Leaks." *The Washington Post*, August 30, 1984, B1. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
- "FBI Video of Undercover Sting on Marion Barry." *The Washington Post*, November 23, 2014. Video. https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/local/fbi-video-of-undercover-sting-on-marion-barry/2014/11/23/e1e35f00-7336-11e4-95a8-fe0b46e8751a_video.html.

- Frankenberg, Ruth. "The Mirage of an Unmarked Whiteness." In *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, eds. Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Eric Klinenberg, Irene J. Nexica, and Matt Wray, 72-96. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001. doi:10.1215/9780822381044-004.
- Gandhi, Natwar M., James Spaulding, and Gordon McDonald. "Budget Growth, Spending, and Inequality in DC, 2002–2013." In *Capital Dilemma: Growth and Inequality in Washington, DC*, edited by Derek Hyra and Sabiyha Prince, 159-179. New York: Routledge, 2015. doi:10.4324/9781315714486.
- Gardezi, Nilofar. "Alternative Geographies of Community in Langston Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred*." In "If The House Is Not Yet Finished": *Urban Renewal and Postwar African American Poetry*, 8-26. PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2014. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Gibson, Campbell, and Kay Jung. "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, And By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For the United States, Regions, Divisions, and States." Working Paper No. 56, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.pdf>.
- Golden, Marita. *Long Distance Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1989.
- Griffin, Farah Jasmine. "Ann Petry: Walking Harlem." In *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists and Progressive Politics During World War II*, 79-132. Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2013.
- hooks, bell, Julie Eizenberg and Hank Koning. "House, 20 June 1994." *Assemblage*, no. 24 (August 1994): 22-29. doi:10.2307/3171188.
- Jackson II, Ronald L. "White Space, White Privilege: Mapping Discursive Inquiry Into the Self." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85, no. 1 (1999): 38-54. doi:10.1080/00335639909384240.
- Jaffe, Harry S., and Tom Sherwood. *Dream City: Race, Power, and the Decline of Washington, D.C.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.
- Jurca, Catherine. *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. doi:10.2307/j.ctt7sp44.
- Just, Ward. *Echo House*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.
- Luria, Sarah. *Capital Speculations: Writing and Building Washington, D.C.* Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005.
- McKittrick, Katherine. *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006.

- Miller, Stephen. "The Washington Novel." *The Public Interest* 52 (Summer 1978): 34-51. ProQuest.
- Morris, Vanessa Irvin. *The Readers' Advisory Guide to Street Literature*. ALA Readers' Advisory Series. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2012. EBSCOhost.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Musgrove, George Derek. "'Statehood is Far More Difficult': The Struggle for D.C. Self-Determination, 1980-2017." *Washington History* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 3-17. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90015019>.
- Nelson, Michael. "Ward Just's Washington." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 74, no. 2 (Spring 1998): 205-220. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26438637>.
- Nicholson, David. "Disoriented in the District." Book review of *Powertown*, by Michael Lind. *The Washington Post*, December 23, 1996, C3. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1996/12/23/disoriented-in-the-district/ab187c8c-a320-4a13-bffd-d9e8b96a6f0f/>.
- "Permanent Interests: The Expansion, Organization, and Rising Influence of African Americans in Congress, 1971–2019." In *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007*. History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, Office of the Historian. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008. <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Permanent-Interest/Introduction/>.
- Price, Tanya. "White Public Spaces in Black Places: The Social Reconstruction of Whiteness in Washington, D.C." *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 27, no. 3/4 (Fall/Winter 1998): 301-344. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40553346>.
- "QuickFacts: District of Columbia." U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/DC>.
- Row, Jess. *White Flights: Race, Fiction, and the American Imagination*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2019.
- Scott, Pamela. "This Vast Empire: The Iconography of the Mall, 1791-1848." *Studies in the History of Art* 30 (1991): 36-58. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42620451>.
- Smit, David. *Power and Class in Political Fiction: Elite Theory and the Post-War Washington Novel*. Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-26769-8_3.
- Walker, J. Samuel. *Most of 14th Street Is Gone: The Washington, DC Riots of 1968*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Warren, Nagueyalti. "Reviewed Work: *Long Distance Life* by Marita Golden." *Black American Literature Forum* 24, no. 4, Women Writers Issue (Winter, 1990): 803-806. doi:10.2307/3041804.

Wiggins, Lillian. In Milton Coleman, "The Post And the Conspiracy." *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1979.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1979/12/20/the-post-and-the-conspiracy/b0288592-71db-4cff-ad4d-b06268e49687/>.