

## PRODUCING AND PROTESTING INVISIBILITY IN SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND

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### Introduction

Silver Spring, Maryland, developed during the early twentieth century as a sundown suburb: an area covering more than ten square miles where racial restrictive deed covenants prevented African Americans from owning or renting homes.<sup>1</sup> Located in Montgomery County about 6 miles north of downtown Washington, D.C., Silver Spring did not begin desegregating its businesses until the late 1950s and housing discrimination remained legal there until 1968, when the county's open housing law went into effect. Despite dramatic changes in Silver Spring's demographics and politics, the community's history and historic preservation efforts remain as segregated as its earlier public culture. New residents with no diachronic attachments to the community and a historically white and wealthy power regime complicate local efforts to make history and historic preservation more inclusive. African Americans, the Jim Crow era, and the civil rights actions that helped break down racial barriers in Silver Spring in the 1960s remain invisible in published histories and in the commemorative landscape.

I live in Silver Spring and I make my living in public history. In recent years, my work has focused on suburban gentrification and how people of color are displaced from communities and erased from the historical record.<sup>2</sup> In 2011, my family moved from Silver Spring to an Atlanta, Georgia, suburb where African Americans were being displaced by aggressive real estate practices that were converting the city into a new wealthier and whiter suburban enclave. As Decatur was emerging as an Atlanta-area destination for new residents and as a hipster-friendly playground for Atlanta's burgeoning middle class, its history was being rewritten and imagineered to fit the city's new image—its brand. In the 1980s, when Decatur officials sponsored city-wide historic resource surveys, those products included African American

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historic places and stories about the black experience in Decatur.<sup>3</sup> By the first decade of the twenty-first century, newer historic preservation efforts covering the same spaces and time periods omitted African American history and historic sites.<sup>4</sup> It is as if Decatur had always been a wealthy white Atlanta suburb. When we returned to Silver Spring in 2014, I found the same erasures in Silver Spring's official histories. My work at the intersection of history, historic preservation, race, and gentrification began exposing how the processes that led to the displacement of residents of color are tied to the production of histories and historic preservation programs that render them invisible by omission.

Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Silver Spring has experienced a substantial amount of reinvestment from the public and private sectors resulting in community rebranding efforts and large-scale redevelopment projects. At the same time that capital began flowing back into the community, a historic preservation advocacy organization formed to preserve old buildings and to "create and promote awareness and appreciation of downtown Silver Spring, Maryland's heritage."<sup>5</sup> Though the organization has been unsuccessful in its preservation of the community's bricks and mortar, it has become a highly visible presence in Silver Spring through its quixotic and adversarial historic preservation advocacy efforts, the publication of books and articles about Silver Spring's history, its walking tours in the central business district, and the design and placement of heritage trail signs throughout the downtown.<sup>6</sup> Cumulatively, these efforts have produced a nostalgic and racially biased version of Silver Spring's history that excludes people of color and mutes their experiences in the community.<sup>7</sup> These histories have influenced official county planning documents, statements by elected and appointed officials about the community's history, and the general population's understanding of Silver Spring's past.

During the summer of 2016, I began asking my neighbors, people in the Saturday farmer's market, and Montgomery County's elected and appointed officials if they could tell me where to find sites associated with African American and civil rights history in downtown Silver Spring. Scott Whipple, the supervisor in the county's historic preservation office since 2007, could not identify any. Gwen Wright, the county's planning director and Whipple's predecessor in the historic preservation office, replied that the only one she could think of was a historical marker recounting an episode involving an enslaved person during the Civil War.<sup>8</sup>

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Despite the lack of sites identified in my informal survey, in my research on the black experience in Silver Spring, I was able to identify about 20 stops in the central business district. The locations included sites of oppression (businesses that discriminated whose buildings are preserved and celebrated as part of Silver Spring's nostalgic past) and sites of resistance. I then began conducting Black History Tours in Silver Spring's central business district to help raise awareness of the community's missing African American history. After one of the tours in June 2017, there was an event in one of Silver Spring's historical parks where residents shared stories of discrimination and participants could submit comments to Montgomery County agencies undertaking renovations in the park. The event invited people to "protest invisibility and help make Acorn Park more inclusive."

This chapter examines twentieth century history in Silver Spring and how history and historic preservation are produced there. Using documentary research and interviews with residents, county officials, and others done between 2014 and 2017, I explore the intersection of race, history, historic preservation, and the commemorative landscape in a community undergoing rapid change. The essay ends with the June 2017 event in Silver Spring's Acorn Urban Park. It was an experiment combining activism and history in an attempt to reframe how history and historic preservation are produced in Silver Spring. Though unresolved as of this writing, the event may be used as a model for similar grassroots efforts to make community history and commemorative landscapes more inclusive and accurate.

### A Little Silver Spring History

Silver Spring is an unincorporated community that shares a boundary with the District of Columbia. The community's origin legend is that Francis Preston Blair (1791–1876), a Washington journalist, was riding his horse through the area in 1840 when he discovered a mica-flecked spring. Blair subsequently bought 289 acres and named his new plantation Silver Spring. By the time the Civil War broke out, Blair was one of the largest landholders and enslavers in Montgomery County (twelve slaves in 1860).<sup>9</sup> Though Blair became a prominent advisor to President Abraham Lincoln and his son, Montgomery Blair, served as Lincoln's postmaster-general, the family quickly abandoned the Republican Party during Reconstruction. They rejoined the Democratic Party and became supporters of a movement to relocate formerly enslaved people to Africa.<sup>10</sup>

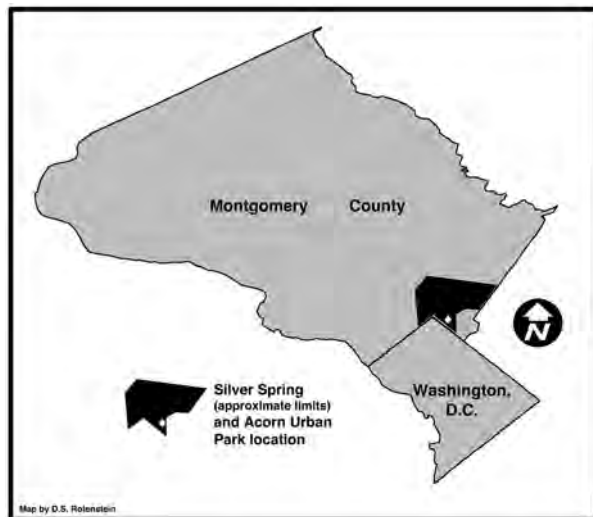


Figure 1: Location Map showing Silver Spring Maryland and Acorn Urban Park.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Blairs had substantial real estate holdings in Montgomery County bordering the District of Columbia. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, Edward Brooke Lee (1892–1984), Montgomery Blair’s great-nephew, expanded his family’s real estate investments by buying up and consolidating large farm tracts to develop “restricted” and “exclusive” residential subdivisions. In the 1920s, Lee founded the North Washington Realty Company, which developed most of his properties through the 1940s.

In 1925, Lee was one of several real estate entrepreneurs who founded the Silver Spring Chamber of Commerce.<sup>11</sup> Two years later, in 1927, they embarked on a branding and marketing campaign that included display advertisements in Washington newspapers touting “Maryland North of Washington” as a prime investment opportunity: “the logical place in which to build for posterity.”<sup>12</sup> Maps published in these ads illustrated new and proposed residential subdivisions, proposed parks, major roads leading to downtown Washington, and the area’s two country clubs.

Despite Lee’s planning and branding efforts, Silver Spring never became anything more than a collection of geographically contiguous nineteenth century hamlets and twentieth century residential subdivisions. In speculating on regional toponymy, contemporary writers have ignored the 1920s

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efforts to create a sprawling Washington suburb and the 1955 Montgomery County legislation that fixed the unincorporated area's boundaries as a county-regulated "suburban district."<sup>13</sup> Twenty-first century bloggers and journalists have written that the sprawling Silver Spring area is the product of United States Postal Service ZIP Code assignments.<sup>14</sup> However, the area is generally coterminous with the extent of racially restricted residential subdivisions platted between 1904 and 1948.<sup>15</sup> Race, not postage, informed the creation of Silver Spring.

As he was acquiring substantial real estate holdings, Lee also was consolidating political power in Montgomery County and heavily Democratic Maryland. Lee had enlisted in the Maryland Infantry in 1912 was a founder of Silver Spring's National Guard armory. After World War I, Lee returned to Montgomery County a decorated officer and became Comptroller of the State of Maryland (1919–1922) and he served as Maryland's Secretary of State (1923–1925) before being elected in 1927 to the Maryland House of Delegates. Lee was a founder in 1925 of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission and he provided influential support for the creation of the Montgomery County Civic Federation.<sup>16</sup>

Lee was Montgomery County's uncontested political boss through World War II. He frequently is described as Montgomery County's political boss and the "father of modern Silver Spring." Though his political power waned after a new Montgomery County home rule charter was enacted in 1948, Lee remained fierce defender of the segregated suburbs he helped to create.<sup>17</sup> Even as late as 1967 as civil rights laws were being debated and enacted by the U.S. Congress, state legislatures, and local jurisdictions like Montgomery County, Lee was railing against legislation that he believed would dismantle the suburbs that he had helped create.<sup>18</sup> "Since law-enforced opening of homes and home communities is only aimed at White owned homes and White occupied communities, the law-enforced open housing statutes are Anti-White laws," Lee wrote in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Advertiser in March 1967.<sup>19</sup>

Although Lee became the best-known among Silver Spring's early land speculators, there were earlier efforts to establish residential subdivisions there. Some of these were classic streetcar suburbs platted in the 1880s. Most, however, began appearing during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The automobile and the demand for housing in an expanding Washington metropolitan area in suburban Maryland and Virginia acceler-

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ated development during 1920s.<sup>20</sup> That decade kicked off a real estate boom in suburban Montgomery County that continues through the present.

Real estate development in Silver Spring, in many respects, reflected national trends. In an era before zoning and in which segregated housing was the rule throughout the United States, restrictive covenants attached to residential subdivisions used minimum house costs and explicit language excluding African Americans, Jews, and others as barriers to entry in many neighborhoods. Subdividers and community builders touted these exclusions as a means for protecting their investments and the investments of the white middle-class homeowners they were courting.<sup>21</sup>

The first restrictive covenants attached to properties in Silver Spring were included in deeds executed by Virginia attorney and real estate speculator Robert Holt Easley (1856–1941). In 1902, Easley bought 67 acres near Silver Spring’s B&O Railroad station; two years later, he filed a plat of “Building Sites for Sale at Silver Spring” in Montgomery County land records with 156 lots.<sup>22</sup> Easley’s deeds prohibited the people buying his lots and all subsequent owners from selling or renting the properties, “the whole or any part of any dwelling or structure thereon, to any person of African descent.”<sup>23</sup>

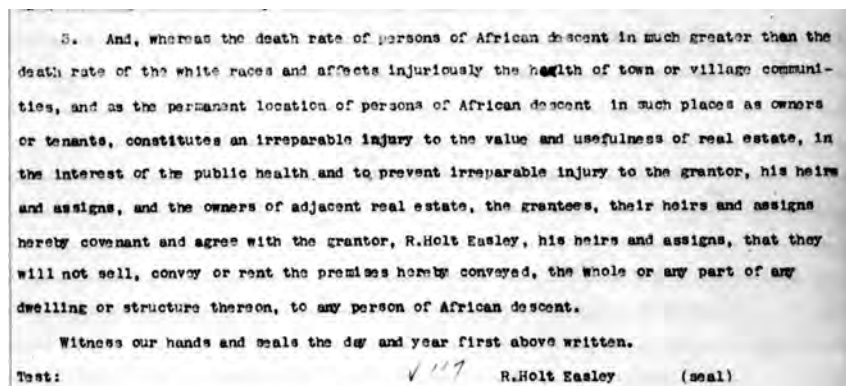


Figure 2: Earliest known racial restrictive deed covenant filed in Silver Spring. R. Holt Easley to William and Hannah Jouvenal, April 7, 1904. Montgomery County Land Records Liber 178, folio 88.

Easley’s subdivision was the first of more than 50 racially restricted residential subdivisions that were platted and developed between 1904 and 1948 in an area roughly bounded by the District of Columbia, Rock Creek

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Park, the Prince Georges County line, and the unincorporated community of White Oak. This area, which Lee and his real estate cohort called “Maryland North of Washington,” came to be known during the remainder of the twentieth century as “Greater Silver Spring.”

In 1948, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Shelley v. Kraemer* that racial restrictive covenants were unenforceable.<sup>24</sup> For the next 20 years, however, redlining, steering, and discrimination in multi-family housing kept Silver Spring almost exclusively white.<sup>25</sup> Though there were pockets of African American households on the margins of Silver Spring’s historic core (e.g., Lyttonsville and Chestnut Ridge), these nineteenth century unincorporated hamlets occupied areas where real estate speculators were unable to consolidate sufficient lands to create twentieth-century subdivisions. Many of these areas were also so sufficiently stigmatized because of their African American residents that they were unattractive real estate investments.

As late as 1967, *Washingtonian* magazine was reporting on the appeal Silver Spring had for whites moving away from Washington: “They love it because it’s easy to commute to Washington,” Judith Viorst wrote. “And, they love it because Negroes, so far, have been safely left behind at the District line. Virtually everybody says so, one way or another.”<sup>26</sup>

Only after interventions by civil rights activists in the late 1950s; the relocation of about 200 African American Department of Labor employees to Silver Spring in 1961 and the subsequent enactment of an open accommodations law in 1962; and the passage of an open housing law in 1968 (just before federal legislation) did Jim Crow’s racial barriers finally begin falling in Silver Spring. The civil rights era in Silver Spring was incredibly tumultuous and exacerbated by the community’s proximity to the nation’s capital with its massive demonstrations, white flight, and Cold War policies dispersing federal offices into the suburbs and exurbs.<sup>27</sup>

### Producing Silver Spring History

The ways in which history and historic preservation are produced in Silver Spring effectively *reproduce* the exclusion of people of color from earlier periods by rendering them invisible in published histories, designated historic properties, and heritage-themed place-making. Historians researching housing, businesses, and commercial architecture omit the African American experience from Silver Spring’s narratives. These books, articles,

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historic preservation documents, documentary videos, and heritage trail signs privilege and celebrate stories of segregationists like Lee, his Blair kin, and other early community boosters.<sup>28</sup>

Some of the erasures are easily identifiable. In 2005, Jerry McCoy and the Silver Spring Historical Society published a book titled *Historic Silver Spring* in Arcadia Publishing's Images of America series. That book did not mention African Americans, 1960s civil rights protests held in downtown Silver Spring, and it did not include the historically black Lyttonsville community, which abuts Silver Spring's historic core.<sup>29</sup>

Earlier examples include *Silver Spring Success: an Interactive History of Silver Spring, Maryland*, a book first published in 1995, and a comprehensive historic resources survey of Silver Spring's central business district that was completed in 2002.<sup>30</sup> Neither of these works addressed Jim Crow policies and housing segregation, neither contained the words "black" or "African American," and neither discussed the sites in Silver Spring's central business district where substantial civil rights actions occurred. These include Crivella's Wayside Inn where, in 1962, African American Department of Labor employees were declined service, touching off nearly four years of highly publicized complaints with Montgomery County's Human Relations Commission and litigation in state court.<sup>31</sup> Civil rights activists also demonstrated at apartment communities in downtown Silver Spring and in streets where segregationist developers and apartment community owners and managers had their offices.<sup>32</sup>

More academic studies of Silver Spring's history include several articles on the community's commercial architecture and planning by The George Washington University architectural historian Richard Longstreth. These works analyze suburbanization in the Washington metropolitan area by focusing on development in Silver Spring during the middle part of the twentieth century. Longstreth's work omits African Americans and the role Jim Crow segregation played in Silver Spring's formative years.<sup>33</sup> Like other writers on Silver Spring's history, Longstreth ignores the white supremacist policies of Silver Spring's early community builders that were crucial to its development.<sup>34</sup>

Though Longstreth's work has focused on Silver Spring's commercial properties and multi-family housing, his students have drilled down in into Silver Spring's residential subdivisions. A 1994 George Washington University master's thesis in American Studies examined Silver Spring's



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development between 1920 and 1955. The thesis included a chronological history of Silver Spring's development as a Washington suburb and a substantial appendix with every residential subdivision recorded in Montgomery County. The author fails to address racial restrictive covenants, African Americans, or the stark demographic reality (virtually all white, except for domestic servants) of the area in which the subdivisions were developed.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 3: Silver Spring Heritage Tour sign, 8200 block Georgia Avenue, commemorating the Little Tavern hamburger stand. Photo by David S. Rotenstein.

Other erasures are less accessible. These include the many racial micro-aggressions people of color experience when walking through downtown Silver Spring, i.e., heritage tour signs that omit segregation from celebratory narratives about local businesses during Silver Spring's "heyday" and narratives that minimize the role Jim Crow segregation played in that period.<sup>36</sup> One example is embedded in a heritage trail sign in the 8200 block of

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Georgia Avenue. The sign marks the location of the Little Tavern, a popular hamburger stand that had opened in the 1930s. When the Silver Spring Historical Society sought to have the building designated in the Montgomery County Master Plan for Historic Preservation, longtime African American residents questioned the proposal because of the restaurant's well-known (among African Americans in Washington and Montgomery County) practices prior to 1962 of refusing service to blacks.<sup>37</sup>

After failing to secure designation and protection, the building was demolished and the heritage tour sign was placed in 2010. The sign makes a concession to the history of Jim Crow policies first introduced to the Silver Spring Historical Society during the 2003 historic preservation campaign, but it does so in ways that minimize the restaurant chain's white supremacy. The sign reads:

In 1957, the Montgomery County branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People conducted a survey of 18 cafes—nine in Silver Spring, nine in Bethesda. Six were cited for refusing sit-down service to African-Americans, including the Little Taverns in each community (*they only offered carry-out*).<sup>38</sup>

The heritage tour sign misrepresents the NAACP efforts to identify and eliminate segregation in Montgomery County businesses. The 1957 survey described in the sign text was one of several done by the NAACP and Montgomery County organizations between 1955 and 1962. The parenthetical statement that the Little Tavern only offered carry-out suggests to readers that the discrimination there wasn't so bad because no one could get a seat at the hamburger stand. According to the *Washington Post* account of the 1957 survey, African American testers "were refused all but carry-out service" in the chain's Silver Spring and Bethesda locations.<sup>39</sup> The Little Tavern was the only Silver Spring establishment tested that year; by December 1961, Silver Spring's Little Tavern was one of 19 establishments surveyed that did not discriminate based on race, whereas another 10 continued to discriminate.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout Silver Spring, the erasures and misrepresentation of the community's contested racial history create a hostile environment for longtime African American residents and for newcomers. It is an environment where, by ignoring African American experience, locals and developers celebrate

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white supremacy. If a community's monuments and commemorations are a window into its social values—its soul—then Silver Spring's commemorative landscape conveys troubling messages connoting inclusion for its white residents and exclusion for people of color.<sup>41</sup>

### The Silver Spring Memory Wall: Erasure by Insertion

A very public example of erasure is embedded in one of five murals comprising a public artwork installed in the 1990s. The Silver Spring "Memory Wall" is a series of murals in Acorn Urban Park depicting five important elements of Silver Spring's history: Francis Preston Blair's 1840s mansion; the Civil War; Silver Spring's first armory on the eve of World War I; the B&O Railroad station in 1941; and, the rehabilitated 1938 Silver Shopping Center.



Figure 4: Acorn Urban Park and the Silver Spring Memory Wall, May 2017.  
Photo by David S. Rotenstein.

Installed on the façade of a commercial building, the Memory Wall was conceived as mitigation for exceeding zoned development standards. Baltimore-based Caldor, Inc. had proposed building a new three-story department store in a disinvested industrial area in the Silver Spring central business district. The vacant site where Caldor wanted to build its new store once had been a printing plant and was located adjacent to Acorn

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Urban Park, a historic site regulated by the Montgomery County Historic Preservation Commission. Under Montgomery County's "optional method of development," applicants could get additional density by providing on- and off-site amenities. The Caldor improvements also enabled Montgomery County parks officials to renovate Acorn Park. Cumulatively, the Caldor proposal would offer shopping alternatives then unavailable in Silver Spring and it would "provide significant improvements to an historic resource."<sup>42</sup>

The Silver Spring Memory Wall was created, in part, to proclaim that Silver Spring was alive and again open for business.<sup>43</sup> A Washington mural artist was contracted to paint five panels "depicting historical images or moments from Silver Spring's past."<sup>44</sup> The Maryland-National Capital Planning Commission and a Silver Spring art advisory group had control over the mural contents and the property owner granted a perpetual easement to Montgomery County for "periodic maintenance."<sup>45</sup>

The murals' content was developed by the artist Mame Cohalan, a Silver Spring residents' arts advisory board, and officials in Montgomery County's Planning Department. Planning Department memoranda note that the murals were the "first attempt to realistically depict Silver Spring's history in a representational public art form."<sup>46</sup> Planners memorialized Cohalan's observations that the historical photographs she was using to design the murals failed to show people of color: "The artist would like to explore having more cultural diversity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century images."

Cohalan confirmed this in an interview I did with her in April 2017. In our conversation, Cohalan explained to me how she used photographs as the basis for the three scenes depicting Silver Spring in the twentieth century. And then she added some artistic license. "I felt that at a train station there should be some diversity because everybody takes a train," she said. "There was just a little part of my doing, my participation in this, where I knew I was manipulating, sticking myself and my opinions into the picture."<sup>47</sup>

Cohalan recalled working with an engaged community interested in celebrating Silver Spring's history while also cultivating a carefully crafted image. The artist described the Memory Wall project as a marketing campaign for Silver Spring: a branding tool for the community that, by the 1990s, had become increasingly ethnically diverse. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, Silver Spring could boast of a large African American population in addition to a substantial immigrant community that included

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Latinos and a large enough Ethiopian population to be dubbed Washington's "Little Ethiopia."<sup>48</sup>



Figure 5: Silver Spring Memory Wall mural illustrating the B&O Railroad platform c. 1941. Photo by David S. Rotenstein.

The Silver Spring Memory Wall, with its insertion of black bodies into spaces and in a time where they never would have been found establishes erasure by creating an imaginary visual narrative. African Americans who see the murals recognize that African Americans could not have stood alongside whites on the train platform in 1941. Or 1951. Or even 1961. Charlotte Coffield, a lifelong resident of Silver Spring's historically black Lyttonsville community recalls growing up in a segregated Silver Spring. In 2017, she told an interviewer what she thought about the Memory Wall's images: "I noticed that they had black people there and white people standing in line to catch the train but in 1941 that would not have happened."<sup>49</sup>

To look at Silver Spring today and the many representations of Silver Spring's past, it would be easy for a newcomer to assume that the community had always been diverse and that it never was a sundown suburb that excluded people of color. Public art like the Silver Spring Memory Wall reinforces that false sense of history. The timing of the inception of my black history tours, collaborations among Silver Spring nonprofits that address social justice issues, and the renovations in Acorn Urban Park created

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a space for confronting the racialized ways in which history and historic preservation are produced in Silver Spring.

### Protesting Invisibility in Acorn Park

In early 2017, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission began soliciting public input for proposed renovations in Acorn Park. A pair of local nonprofit organizations, IMPACT Silver Spring (IMPACT) and Montgomery County chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice Montgomery County (SURJ), and I collaborated to organize an event to protest the invisibility of African Americans in the ways history is presented in the park and to take direct action with Montgomery County officials. We dubbed our small collaboration “Invisible Montgomery” and our efforts culminated in an event on Saturday June 10, 2017, in Acorn Park.



Figure 6: Participants in the Protesting Invisibility event June 10, 2017. Photo by David S. Rotenstein.

The Acorn Park protesting invisibility event was inspired by an account in architectural historian Dell Upton’s 2015 book, *What Can and Can’t be Said: Race, Uplift, and Monument Building in the Contemporary South*.<sup>50</sup> Upton recounted efforts by residents of Savannah, Georgia, who protested against invisibility in Savannah’s commemorative landscape by demanding

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an official African American monument.<sup>51</sup> Silver Spring's African American residents had much in common with their Savannah counterparts: both communities celebrated their white supremacist histories in public monuments and historical representations while omitting official commemorations dedicated to people of color.

Representatives from IMPACT, SURJ, and I met several times in the weeks leading up to the June 10 event. We drafted publicity flyers and shared them via social media and in businesses near Acorn Park. We also drafted a petition letter addressed to county officials, which participants could sign, and a postcard with a brief excerpt from the petition letter and space for individualized comments.

In addition to inviting the community at large, we also asked a couple of lifelong residents of Lyttonsville to share their memories of life in Jim Crow Silver Spring and about how they think history and historic preservation are produced in the community. They recalled being excluded from Silver Spring's businesses and living in a neighborhood that lacked running water and paved roads until well into the Cold War. And, they described the marginalization they felt by being excluded from published histories and Silver Spring's commemorative landscape.

After the dialogue in Acorn Park concluded, participants were invited to move to Bump 'N Grind, a popular coffee shop in the next block. The store's owners helped to publicize the event and they allowed us to set up several laptops connected to the store's Wi-Fi where participants could file their comments on Acorn Park directly to the Montgomery County Department of Parks via the agency's open town hall web portal. Conversations begun in the park continued inside the store and seven people filed comments electronically.

Suggestions for making Acorn Park's history more inclusive included adding another bank of murals above the existing ones in the Memory Wall and commissioning a sculpture of a local civil rights leader. Participants also contemplated replacing the existing signage that celebrates Silver Spring's white supremacist founders with signs that also discuss slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the civil rights actions (demonstrations, litigation, etc.) that occurred in Silver Spring during the 1960s.<sup>52</sup> Discussions among IMPACT and SURJ staff and volunteers also identified a need for a county recognized advisory body to participate producing a more inclusive history in the park and beyond.



Figure 7: Participants in the Protesting Invisibility event file comments electronically. Photo by David S. Rotenstein.

### **The Long Road to Visibility**

In scheduling the yearlong effort to renovate the park, the Montgomery County Department of Parks announced plans to hold one meeting with stakeholders in the summer of 2017 to present the results of the agency's outreach efforts. Parks agency officials expect to deliver finalized plans to the Montgomery County Planning Board for approval in early 2018. Nearly a month after the Protesting Invisibility event, Montgomery County Parks' Director Michael Riley acknowledged receiving our petition letter and comments. Riley's letter thanked us for our comments and welcomed our participation in future public meetings. The letter also underscored the privileged role that the Silver Spring Historical Society has among Montgomery County officials as an authority on Silver Spring history and historic preservation. "The Silver Spring Historical Society also shares an interest in interpreting the history and resources of the park," Riley wrote.<sup>53</sup>

The loose coalition formed under the "Invisible Montgomery" umbrella to produce the protesting invisibility event in Acorn Park will be following future releases by county officials and we plan to attend all additional public meetings. We hope that the example set in Acorn Park will be a model for additional efforts in Silver Spring and elsewhere in Montgomery



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County to reframe how history and historic preservation are produced to make them more inclusive and accurate. Silver Spring's downtown privileges white experiences at the expense of African Americans, presenting a whitewashed history that overlooks the ways white residents accumulated capital and influence by excluding African Americans. Future efforts may be directed at replacing existing heritage trail markers and creating public art that engages and strives to tell the story of all of Silver Spring's residents, including the many new immigrants who have moved here since the turn of the twenty-first century. One step I plan to take is to work with a Spanish language interpreter to adapt my existing Black History Tour to create a bilingual tour that helps create attachments to the community for new residents.

Silver Spring, like many communities throughout the nation, has invested heavily in promoting its diversity as part of its brand.<sup>54</sup> That diversity is of recent vintage and it was not easily achieved. By protesting invisibility in Acorn Park, we took the first steps towards reframing Silver Spring's history and opening public spaces for a more honest and inclusive history for all of our residents and visitors.

### *Acknowledgments*

The Protesting Invisibility project would not have been possible without the organizing expertise of IMPACT Silver Spring and SURJ. IMPACT's executive director Jayne Park and staff members Carolyn Lowry, Lanita Whitehurst, and Michael Rubin have been enthusiastic supporters from this project's inception. SURJ's Danielle Ring's skills in canvassing and attention to detail helped make the Acorn Park event successful. I could not have begun to understand Silver Spring's complicated and contested racial history without the help from such longtime Lyttonsville residents Charlotte Coffield and Patricia Tyson. I am truly indebted to them for sharing their time and their memories of a difficult time in our community's history and their candid observations on how history and historic preservation are produced in Silver Spring. This essay is dedicated to them and to Lyttonsville.

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### Notes

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- 4 Keystone Preservation Associates, LLC and Morrison Design, LLC, "Historic Resource Survey Final Report" (Decatur, GA: City of Decatur, September 1, 2009), <http://www.decaturga.com/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=2105>.
- 5 "Silver Spring Historical Society - About," microblog, *Facebook*, accessed July 21, 2017, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/sshistory/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/sshistory/about/?ref=page_internal).
- 6 As a consultant to land use attorneys and developers I have participated in several undertakings reviewed by the Montgomery County Planning Department and County Council where the Silver Spring Historical Society has been the leading proponent for designating properties under the county's historic preservation ordinance that my clients opposed. My consulting practice has not included such work since 2013.
- 7 Bruce Richard Johansen, "Imagined Pasts, Imagined Futures: Race, Politics, Memory, and the Revitalization of Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland" (Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2005), <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/handle/1903/3210>.
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- 10 Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).
- 11 "News of the Capital's Suburbs," *The Washington Post* (1923–1954), April 26, 1925.

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- 51 *Ibid.*, 75–76.
- 52 Civil rights actions in Silver Spring include efforts to desegregate local eateries after Montgomery County enacted an open accommodations law in 1962 and demonstrations against local builders and apartment community managers who refused to rent to African Americans. Some of these actions are summarized in a publication commemorating the twentieth anniversary of Montgomery County’s Human Relations Commission. Bruce Johansen also deftly covers this period in his dissertation on nostalgia and historic preservation in Silver Spring. Brack, “Twenty Years of Civil Rights Progress”; Johansen, “Imagined Pasts, Imagined Futures: Race, Politics, Memory, and the Revitalization of Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland.”

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- 53 Mike Riley to David S. Rotenstein, "RE: Acorn Urban Park Petition Letter & Comments," July 11, 2017. The agency's reliance on the Silver Spring Historical Society as an authority is an area the Protesting Invisibility partners have identified as problematic considering the society's established record of producing racialized histories (See Johansen, "Imagined Pasts, Imagined Futures: Race, Politics, Memory, and the Revitalization of Downtown Silver Spring, Maryland.").
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