The Fight For a Neighborhood:

Flood Control and Race on the Anacostia Tributaries

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I. Introduction

On June 22, 1972, a man found himself trapped on Rock Creek Parkway in Washington, D.C. while returning home from work. The water outside was rising rapidly, and he was only able to survive by opening his car windows, letting his car fill up with water, and swimming to safety. In Montgomery County, Maryland, another resident was less fortunate. He, too, tried to escape through his car window, but he could not avoid the floodwaters. His body was found 200 feet away from the car.[1] These are two of the most memorable stories from the Washington Metropolitan Area of Tropical Storm Agnes. The storm forced 12,000 local residents to evacuate their homes. Eleven inches of rain fell in just twenty-four hours, causing some of the biggest flooding in the history of the region.[2]

Lakeland, an African American neighborhood in College Park, Maryland, adjacent to the University of Maryland, also suffered severe flood damage. Residents evacuated between seventy-five and eighty-five of the 140 homes in Lakeland, and all the basements flooded.[3] This type of flooding was not uncommon in the small neighborhood of roughly seventeen square blocks. Much of Lakeland was located on the floodplain of Paint Branch and Indian Creek. Both waterways are tributaries of the Anacostia River, which flows through Southeast Washington into the Potomac. A 1968 report on the floodplain by the Army Corps of Engineers determined that only major floods would endanger most of the development along these tributaries. Some of

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[1] Bart Barnes, "12,000 Evacuate Dwellings, Roads, Bridges Out, Water Supply Periled," *The Washington Post*, June 23, 1972.
[2] *Ibid.;* and Mike Bowler, "Storm hit year ago today: Reminders of Agnes still around," *The Baltimore Sun*, June 22, 1973.
[3] Alvin J. Kushner, "Statement: To National Capital Planning Commission," August 2, 1972, p. 2; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

the development in Lakeland, though, was so low that routine small floods posed a risk.[4] A slightly above average storm could flood this area.[5] *The Washington Post* called spring flooding in Lakeland "a way of life."[6]

Tropical Storm Agnes flooded Lakeland at a critical moment in debates over the neighborhood's future. The Army Corps of Engineers planned to build a new flood control project on the Anacostia tributaries, officially called the "Anacostia River and Tributaries, Prince George's County, Maryland, Local Flood Protection Project." Congress first directed the Corps to study the feasibility of a flood control project on May 7, 1956. The Corps eventually proposed a channelization project to widen and deepen various portions of the Northeast Branch, Northwest Branch, Paint Branch and Indian Creek.[7] During the final stages of the approval process in the early 1970s, a vigorous debate emerged over the merits of channelization and the place of development in the floodplain. Environmental advocates, including students from the University of Maryland, objected to the project because it would destroy formerly undisturbed streambeds and banks. Government officials and Lakeland residents supported the project as a means to protect the community of Lakeland. The project would have a twofold benefit for Lakeland: flood control and neighborhood improvements planned in the Lakeland Urban Renewal Project, for which flood control was a prerequisite.

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[4] Department of the Army, Baltimore District, Corps of Engineers, *Flood Plain Information, Northeast Branch, Northwest Branch (Anacostia River), Paint Branch, Indian Creek, Sligo Creek, Prince George's County, Maryland* (Baltimore: Department of the Army, 1968), 10.

[5] "Transcript of Testimony by: Delegate Arthur Dorman, O.D., Chairman Prince George's County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly, August 2, 1972 Before the Special Committee to of the National Capitol Planning Commission," p. 1; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[6] Eugene L. Meyer, "Urban Renewal and Lakeland, Black Community Eyes Future with Hope, Fear," *Washington Post*, December 26, 1976.

[7] U.S. Army Engineer District, Baltimore, Maryland, "Preliminary Environmental Impact Statement: Anacostia River and Tributaries, Prince George's County, Maryland, Local Flood Protection Project. Draft," 17 June 1971, 1.

The 1971-2 debate over the project, ending in its approval, highlights the internal tensions within the environmental movement of the early 1970s. Important aspects of the movement had developed in the years after World War II and particularly in the 1960s. Efforts to preserve open space, often led by suburban housewives, originated in rapid postwar suburban expansion. In 1962, Rachel Caron's landmark book *Silent Spring* forced Americans to question their relationship with the environment. Concern over nuclear tests and power and toxic pesticides increased throughout the decade. Students connected to the radical student movements took up environmental causes.[8]

A July 31, 1972 *Washington Post* article called the Lakeland debate "a case study of the conflicts between environmentalists—whose paramount concern is preservation of the natural environment—and others—who believe the man-made environment of homes and businesses next to the streams must come first."[9] The controversy, though, illuminates more than just two sides of the environmental debate. Indeed, both sides claimed, throughout the debate, to be environmentalists. The dispute over the flood control project exposes more intricate tensions in environmentalism and specifically the campaign to save open space, especially tensions related to race. Those opposed to the flood control project were largely white. On the other side, government officials and Lakeland residents who favored the project stressed the preservation and protection of the African American community of Lakeland. They argued that flood control for the neighborhood was a civil right of the residents that the government had the duty to provide.

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[8] Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2005), 125-158; and Adam Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," *The Journal of American History* 90, No. 2 (Sep., 2003): 525-554.
[9] Eugene L. Meyer, "Flood Control Plans Debated," *The Washington Post*, July 31, 1972.

The Lakeland debate shows how environmentalism struggled with issues of race and civil rights. The local case study can provide answers to questions concerning this relationship. How did, for example, environmentalists address the reality of the existence of an established African American neighborhood located on the floodplain of Paint Branch while opposing the flood control plans for the neighborhood? Did Lakeland's location on the floodplain undermine its right to continue to exist? How did each side of the debate attempt to frame broader trends in environmentalism and civil rights and the history of these issues to its advantage during the debate? Who were the local environmentalists, and why did they identify Paint Branch as worth trying to save? How did local African Americans secure flood control? Did the debate mirror or break with the national discourse between the two movements?

The writing on the environmental movement of late 1960s and early 1970s gives little attention to the relationship of the movement and race. The environmental justice movement has resulted in a substantial exploration of racial themes and environmentalism, but the movement began in the mid-1980s. When literature investigating environmentalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s addresses issues of race, it notes tension at the rhetorical level but provides few specific examples.[10] Whitney Young of the Urban League provided a vivid example of this tension when he called for society to refocus its attention on the "most dangerous and most

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[10] Robert Gottlieb, in his book *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, speaks in general of the "tension between mainstream environmentalists and social justice and civil rights advocates, especially in two key areas: policy priorities and the racial implications of certain environmental themes." He notes a 1971 Sierra Club survey of its membership that asked if the Club should become involved in "the conservation problems of such special groups as the urban poor and the ethnic minorities," to which 41% of respondents "strongly" disagreed and only 15% "strongly" agreed. However, he does not provide specific examples of conflicts between environmentalists and African Americans or other minorities. (Gottlieb, 327-8) Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) does not mention the relationship between race and the environmental movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Likewise, Adam Rome's article "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," an essay that attempts to bridge the gap between literature on the environmental movement and literature on the movements of the 1960s, does not discuss the relationship of the movement to the Civil Rights Movement.

pressing of our problems," those of social and racial injustice, instead of "copping out" by "inventing new causes" such as environmentalism.[11] The Lakeland debate provides an example needed to explore the racial tension on a local, project-specific scale.

Specifically, little has been written on the interaction between race and the campaign for the protection of open space, one of the key early issues that invigorated the environmental movement and led to its rise in popularity. Adam Rome, in his book *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, traces the importance of the rise of the campaign to preserve open space, which stemmed from the rapid rate of postwar suburbanization, to the development of the environmental movement. Perhaps because suburbs, especially earlier postwar suburbs, have largely been seen as white spaces, Rome does not address race in his book.[12] When the relationship of the environmental movement and race has been investigated, urban issues such as air and water pollution remain the focus.[13]

The debate over the flood control project on the Anacostia tributaries in 1971-2, especially the portion of the project that involved Paint Branch and the African American community of Lakeland, reveals an often tense relationship between environmentalism, especially open space preservation, and race. In the debate surrounding the flood control project, itself a prerequisite for the proposed Lakeland Urban Renewal Project, African Americans and white environmentalists were often at odds. African Americans, though, attempted to claim a type of environmental protection—protection against the vicissitudes and hazards of the

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[11] Gottlieb, 327-8.
[12] Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For a discussion on how African Americans have largely been left out of discussions of suburbanization and the history of suburbs, see Andrew Wise, *Places of Their Own: African American Suburbanization in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 32.
[13] Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995) traces the involvement of African Americans in the rise of local opposition to U.S. Steel's practices at its plants in Gary, Indiana.

environment—as a civil right. The relationship confirms the broad tension between environmentalism and civil rights at the rhetorical level but also reveals an interesting pattern in which both sides at times attempted to argue that they best represented the true interests of the African Americans of Lakeland. Similarly, both sides positioned their arguments within different national or international environmental debates and ideas of appropriate environmentalism. In the end, the Corps channelized Paint Branch, yet urban renewal nonetheless changed Lakeland forever. Politicians who supported the flood control project continued to support urban renewal even after residents began to oppose it, potentially casting doubt over the original rhetoric of civil rights. Both environmentalists and Lakeland residents showed a resistance towards the respective government improvements of flood control and urban renewal, yet allied with the government at times to attempt to achieve their goals. The debate cannot definitively resolve the complicated relationship between race and the open space movement. Instead, it provides an opportunity to begin to incorporate race into the dialogue surrounding the campaign to preserve open space. Furthermore, it can add to the broader discussion of race and the environmental movement at the rhetorical level by illuminating the strained nature of this relationship on the ground in a small, local community.

II. Flood Control for Lakeland

Slowly but surely flowing towards the District of Columbia and the Potomac River, the Anacostia begins at the junction of the Northeast and Northwest Branches in Bladensburg, Maryland. Its fourteen subwatersheds feed water into the river from approximately 176 square miles of the District of Columbia, Prince George's County and Montgomery County, Maryland.[14] The watershed is in two physiographic provinces, the Piedmont Plateau and the Atlantic Coastal Plain. The boundary of these two provinces approximates the county line between Montgomery and Prince George's County. Most of the Northwest Branch subwatershed and the northwestern portion of the Northeast Branch subwatershed are in the Piedmont, which contains rocky channels, irregular hills and steep valleys. The sloping hills and large valleys of the Coastal Plain constitute the rest of the watershed. Here, shallow streams "meander through the valley floors between low vegetation-covered banks."[15]

During the Colonial Period, the river connected large tobacco plantations in Maryland to the Chesapeake Bay. Bladensburg, Maryland, founded in 1742, was an important tobacco port for the eastern portion of Prince George's County. Early politicians and city planners of the District of Columbia thought the Anacostia was a more important commercial river than the Potomac because it did not freeze. But the very nature of the river changed over time and made the Anacostia less valuable. Deforestation associated with widespread tobacco farming caused siltation, inhibiting navigation on the river. As the river silted in, real estate developers acquired land in Northwest Washington and shifted the focus of development to this region. The

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[14] *Anacostia River Watershed Restoration Plan and Report*, Final Draft, February 2010, accessed December 4, 2011, http://anacostia.net/Restoration_Plan/download/Anacostia-Report-Web-Quality.pdf, 15-16.
[15] Department of the Army, Baltimore District, Corps of Engineers, *Flood Plain Information, Northeast Branch, Northwest Branch (Anacostia River), Paint Branch, Indian Creek, Sligo Creek, Prince George's County, Maryland*, 8.

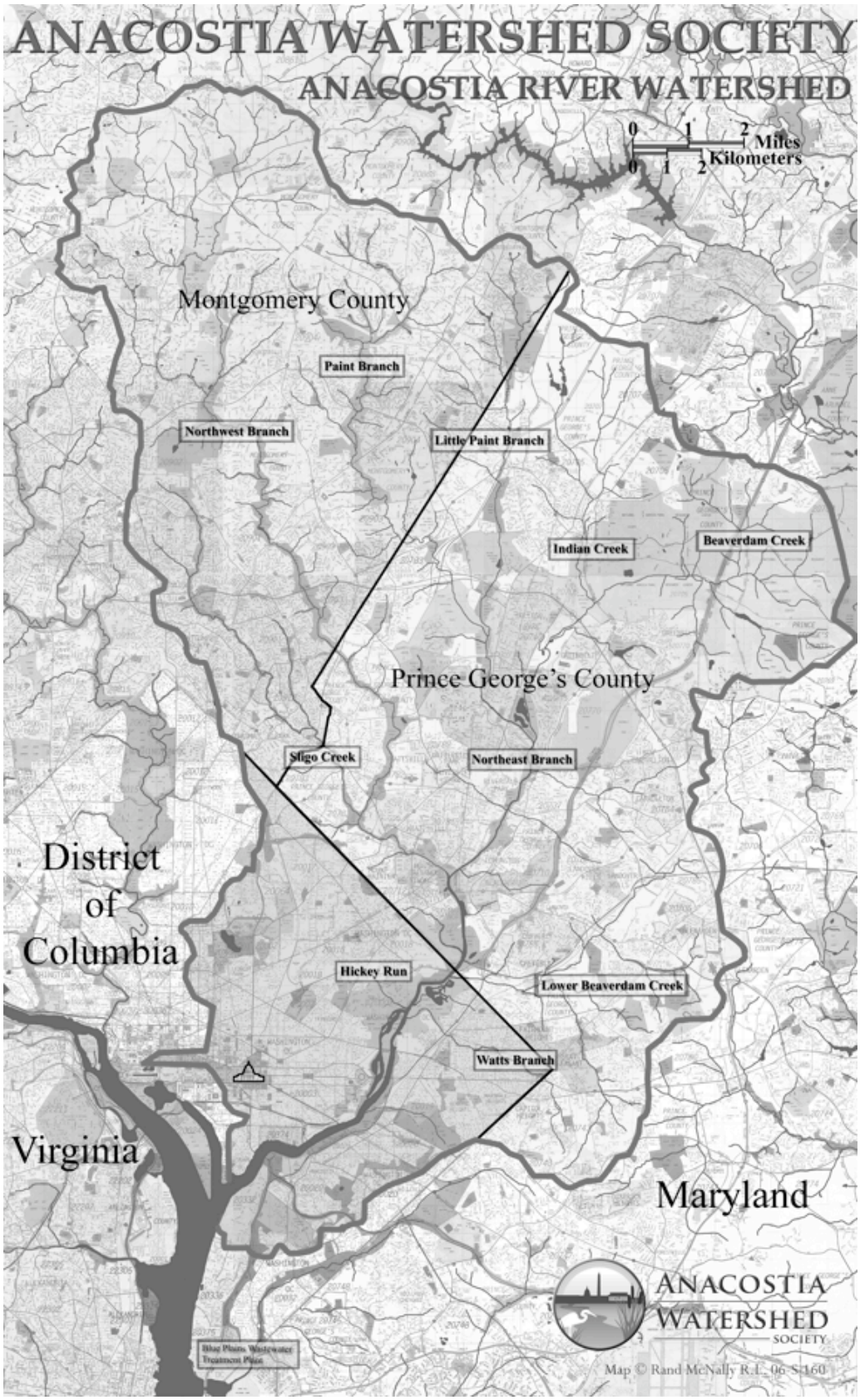

Figure 1: Map of the Anacostia Watershed. Courtesy of the Anacostia Watershed Society.

Anacostia became host to industrial development, a prison, and the Washington Navy Yard. Pollution in the river increased as the city grew, and the Anacostia, with its dirty water and unappealing development, soon became the "forgotten river" of the District of Columbia.[16]

The history of development on the tributaries of the Anacostia River is a newer story. Prince George's and Montgomery Counties experienced explosive growth in the middle of the twentieth century as the metropolitan region expanded and suburbanization increased. In the 1920s, the two counties had a combined population of approximately 100,000; by 1960, 700,000. Parking lots, homes and apartment buildings sprang up, which increased runoff and exacerbated the traditional floods of the tributaries. Flooding became political when residents voiced their desire for increased government funds for flood control. The Army Corps of Engineers, previously only involved in dredging the river and filling the Anacostia Flats in the District, stepped in to carry out the flood protection project for which citizens had called.[17]

The 1950s project, the Anacostia River Flood Control Project, consisted of a system of levees, pumping stations, and channel realignments and widening in seven Maryland towns.[18] Public opinion was strongly in favor of this project. Residents of towns such as North Brentwood and Hyattsville spoke in support of it at public hearings during the 1940s.[19] The Corps built 5.5 miles of levees and channelized three miles of stream on the Northeast and Northwest Branches. Construction ended in 1959.[20]

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[16] John R. Wennersten, *Anacostia: The Death & Life of an American River* (Baltimore: The Chesapeake Book Company, 2008), 22-51, 77-8; John R. Wennersten, "D.C. Builds: The Anacostia Waterfront," *The Public Historian* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 96; and *Anacostia River Watershed Restoration Plan and Report*, 2.
[17] Wennersten, *Anacostia: The Death & Life of an American River*, 114-129, 173-78.
[18] The towns receiving flood control were: Bladensburg, Edmonston, Colmar, Riverdale, Hyattsville, Brentwood, and Cottage City.
[19] H. Doc. No. 81-202, at 38-9 (1949).
[20] H. Doc. No. 81-202, at 6, 44-6 (1949); and "Army Plans Cut in Peace Cross Project Cost," *Washington Post*, March 11, 1953.

Figure 2: Flooding on the Tributaries in the 1950s. Courtesy of the D.C. Public Library.

The 1950s project only addressed flooding in certain areas, however. Other regions of the watershed continued to suffer from severe flooding. The Lakeland neighborhood of College Park was one such neighborhood. The community predated the explosive post-WWII growth in the Anacostia watershed. In 1892, developer Edwin Newman built what would become Lakeland.[21] When College Park was incorporated in 1945, Lakeland became part of the town.[22] Though originally intended for white families, African Americans settled in Lakeland during the first decade of the neighborhood's existence, forming a sub-community in its eastern portion. Blacks first bought land, as opposed to renting, in 1903, and whites soon left the area. Many African

[21] George D. Denny, *Promising Past, Promising Future: Cities and Towns in Prince George's County, Maryland* (Brentwood, MD: Tuxedo Press, 1997), 118.
[22] Prince George's County Community Renewal Program, *The Neighborhoods of Prince George's County* (Prince George's County, MD: The Program, 1974), 97.

Figure 3: Flooding in Bladensburg in the 1950s. Courtesy of the D.C. Public Library.

American residents worked for the adjacent University of Maryland, while others commuted to Washington, D.C. to work for the government.[23]

Over the course of the twentieth century, Lakeland developed into a vibrant neighborhood. Residents of Lakeland remember it as a small, tight-knit community, with multiple generations of the same family often living on the same street. Elmer Gross**,** born in 1933, recalls that everyone knew each other when he was young. Betty Greene, born in 1938, describes Lakeland during her childhood as poor but never in need due to the community. The

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[23] *Lakeland East of the Railroad Tracks, 1890-1970: A Historical Report Prepared by the Students of AMST 629D/HISP 635 in Cooperation with The Lakeland Community Heritage Project* (College Park, MD: The University of Maryland, Department of American Studies, College of Arts & Humanities, School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, 2010): 11-68; and Elmer Gross. "Oral history with Elmer Gross," in Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership, Item #50, http://otal.umd.edu/omeka/lakeland/items/show/50 (accessed December 7, 2011).

entire neighborhood would look out for each other's welfare, so that even though individuals often "did not have much," Lakeland provided an important safety net.[24]

Lakeland had a dense neighborhood fabric because of a variety of organizations. The women would host dinners that would serve as social clubs, which would often be elaborate occasions complete with the host's best china. Sunday evening baseball games were an important event for the boys, and a local cub scouts organization provided them with further activities. Croquet games would take place in backyards. Two churches, the Embry AME Church and the Baptist Church, played key roles in the social fabric of the community. The American Legion had a local post in which community members participated.[25] Lakelanders regarded their vibrant neighborhood with pride, despite infrastructure that lagged behind the rest of College Park. Mrs. Hazel Thomas, of 1902 Lakeland Road, told the National Capital Planning Commission on August 2, 1972 that "our community is safe; we have 'togetherness' with our neighbors. Our community is 80 years old. We are proud of it."[26]

The 1970s flood control project built off the earlier Army Corps project to attempt to provide flood control for Lakeland and other neighborhoods on the tributaries. The Corps decided to use the same technique for flood control that it used in the 1950s to target areas that engineers had not yet modified. The plan described in the 1971 Environmental Impact Statement proposed realigning, deepening and widening the Northwest Branch, Northeast Branch, Paint

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[24] Betty Greene. "Oral history with Betty Greene," in Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership, Item #35, http://otal.umd.edu/omeka/lakeland/items/show/35 (accessed December 7, 2011); Dervey Lomax. "Oral history with Dervey Lomax," in Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership, Item #49, http://otal.umd.edu/omeka/lakeland/items/show/49 (accessed December 7, 2011); and Elmer Gross. "Oral history with Elmer Gross," in Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership, Item #50, http://otal.umd.edu/omeka/lakeland/items/show/50 (accessed December 7, 2011).

[25] *Ibid*.

[26] Hazel Thomas, "Testimony Presented to the National Capital Planning Commission, August 2, 1972"; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

Figure 4: Home of Dervey Lomax. Courtesy of Lakeland Community Heritage Project-UMCP Partnership.

Figure 5: Lakeland Tavern. Courtesy Lakeland Community Heritage Project-UMCP Partnership.

Figure 6: Lakeland American Legion Post. Courtesy of Lakeland Community Heritage Project--UMCP Partnership.

Figure 7: Lakeland Road. Courtesy of Lakeland Community Heritage Project-UMCP Partnership.

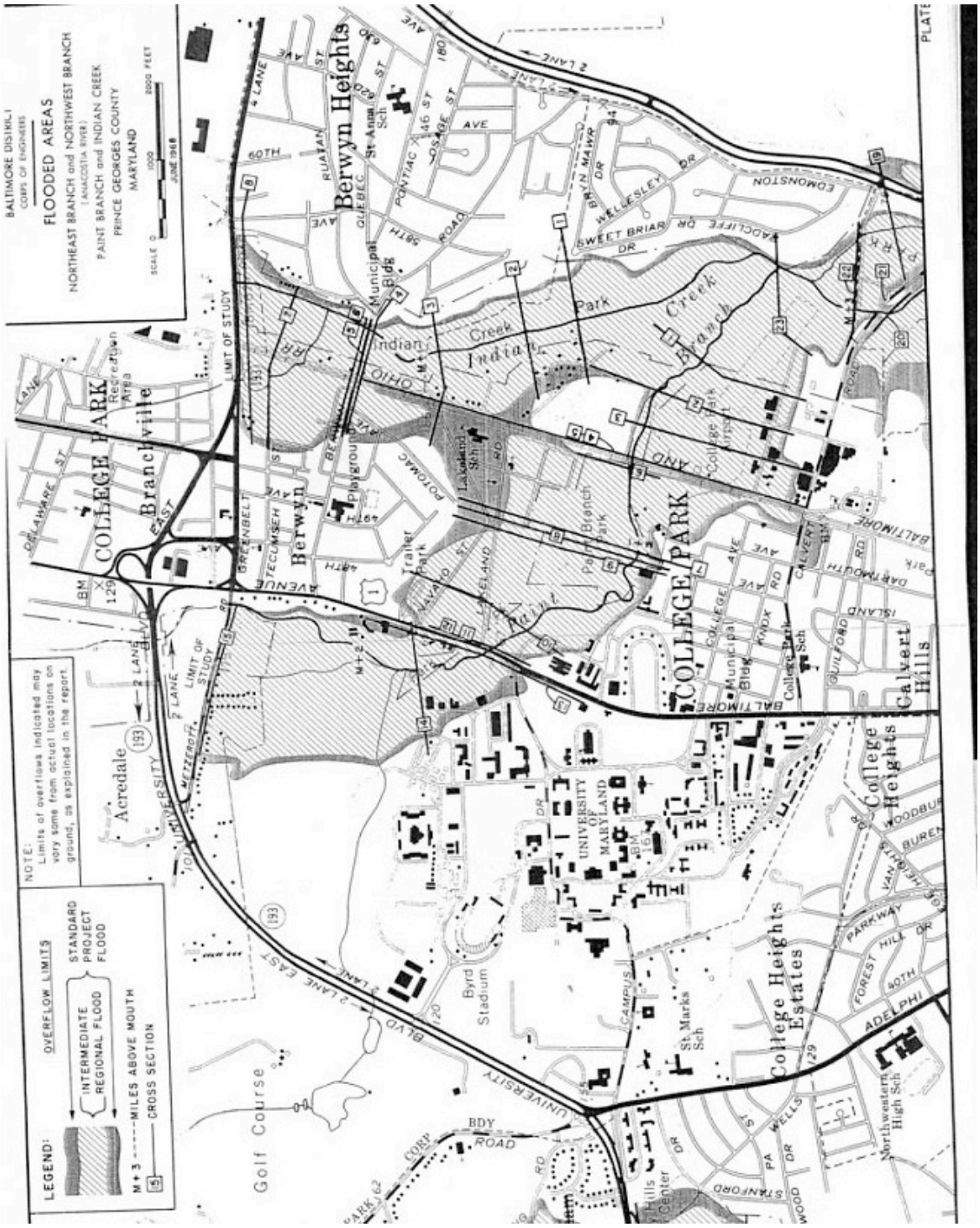

Figure 8: Diagram of Standard Project Flood and Intermediate Regional Flood for Lakeland and College Park. Intermediate Regional Floods are floods that occur with a frequency of approximately once in 100 years, while Standard Project Floods are floods that are larger than anything on record but for which the Corps determined it should plan. Courtesy of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, *Flood Plain Information, Northeast Branch, Northwest Branch (Anacostia River), Paint Branch, Indian Creek, Sligo Creek, Prince George's County, Maryland*.

Branch, and Indian Creek. On the Northwest Branch, the Corps would work on a total of 5,610 feet both upstream and downstream from the Queens Chapel Road Bridge. On the Northeast Branch and Paint Branch, the Corps would focus on 7,200 feet of stream beginning 540 feet upstream of the Calvert Road Bridge and running up Paint Branch to the Baltimore Avenue Bridge. In addition to the channel modifications, the Corps would clear a portion of the banks to create a 500-foot floodway that would accommodate water during heavy rains. The work on Indian Creek would involve the 7,600 feet between the stream's junction with Paint Branch and Greenbelt Road, but would not include overbank clearing.[27] Essentially, through the process called "channelization," the affected streams would become concrete-lined, straight channels to speed up water flow through the streambed. On Paint Branch, the additional floodway would allow water to spill over the banks in times of heavy rain while encountering minimal obstacles to facilitate its quick passage.

The Corps acknowledged that the project would cause detrimental environmental effects. The Corps' Final Environmental Impact Statement, required under the new National Environmental Policy Act, recognized that controlling the floods would disturb the current environment. "The gains in flood protection," it read, "will require the reduction of natural environmental values in the sections of the stream which are as yet natural in character." Areas of Paint Branch and Indian Creek flowed through wooded undeveloped low-lying areas. These portions of the streams provided a home for a variety of wildlife that relied on the "ecological niche" of a slowly flowing stream. Rabbits, opossum, raccoons, snakes, and a variety of birds and insects lived in the affected area.[28]

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[27] U.S. Army Engineer District, Baltimore, Maryland. *Final Environmental Impact Statement: Anacostia River and Tributaries, Prince George's County, Maryland. Local Flood Protection Project*. September 15, 1971, 1-2.
[28] *Ibid.,* 6-7.

Figure 9: Flood Height in Paint Branch Park, adjacent to Paint Branch, 1968. Courtesy of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, *Flood Plain Information, Northeast Branch, Northwest Branch (Anacostia River), Paint Branch, Indian Creek, Sligo Creek, Prince George's County, Maryland.*

Channelization would drastically change the character of the stream: "This procedure not only removes most of the cover and food available to the wildlife, but all of the natural fauna within the stream." Unaltered streams such as Paint Branch and Indian Creek were more biologically productive than a channelized stream with a bank stripped of vegetation. Aside from the purely ecological effects, the Environmental Impact Statement also noted the value of an undisturbed setting for humans, as it was "a source of diversity in an otherwise urban

Figure 10: A Channelized Tributary. Courtesy of the D.C. Public Library.

environment."[29] Although the National Capital Planning Commission, upon its approval of the project, recommended that the Corps keep as many existing trees in the floodway as possible, the channelization of the streams would still occur.[30] Despite these adverse effects, the Corps noted that residents of the flooded areas felt that the flooding threatened the health of the community and determined "that it is in the best interest of the area to prevent flood damage in the future."[31]

By proposing to channelize a relatively undeveloped area in the town, the Corps came into conflict with efforts to preserve open space in the continuously developing suburbs. In the postwar period, the rate of suburbanization in the United States skyrocketed. Developers

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[29] *Ibid.,* 6-7.
[30] "NCPC Committee on Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Official Proceedings, National Capital Planning Commission. In the matter of: Commission Meeting, Open Session, Friday, August 3, 1972" p. 37; Box 126: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Transcripts of Proceedings and Minutes of Meetings, compiled 01/1924-12/02/1999; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.
[31] U.S. Army Engineer District, Baltimore, Maryland. *Final Environmental Impact Statement: Anacostia River and Tributaries, Prince George's County, Maryland. Local Flood Protection Project*. September 15, 1971, 8.

constructed over 15 million homes during the 1950s. Many Americans noticed the rapid change in the country's landscape. By the late 1950s a campaign to preserve open space had emerged throughout the country. The campaign argued for open space on the basis of conservation, aesthetics, and recreation. The conservation argument used increasing scientific evidence that open space aided flood control. Aesthetically, the suburban developments were far less appealing than the former landscape. Increased parkland and other facilities were important recreationally as the population grew. Advocates also argued that children would benefit in their development from interactions with nature. Over the course of the 1960s, state and local programs bought up open space. By 1970, the ecological argument for the preservation of open space began to dominate discussions. Open space was essential to the overall wellbeing of natural systems.[32]

The campaign to preserve open space contributed significantly to the environmental movement. The open space movement increased the number of grassroots activists and caused traditional conservationists to widen their focus.[33] The movement especially focused on floodplains, which came under severe development pressure due to their inexpensive, flat land. As floodplain development increased, so too did flood damage. Land-use planning to avoid construction in floodplains gained scientific credibility as a means of flood control. In 1962, the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission endorsed floodplain zoning for both aesthetic and flood control reasons.[34] Thus, the opposition to the channelization project on Paint Branch drew on important precedents. Yet, it also differs from this history, since the neighborhood of Lakeland already existed. This difference would prove to be the crux of the debate, as residents in Lakeland tested ideals of open space preservation.

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[32] Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 120-36.
[33] *Ibid.,* 139-141.
[34] *Ibid.,* 173-180.

III. The Evils of Channelization: The Opponents

Environmentalists in the region vigorously opposed the project. The opposition consisted of both local citizens, led by a housewife named Judy Comparetto, and University of Maryland students, led by student John Cromwell. The respective tactics of these groups, though at times they overlapped, show the different strains of the environmental movement at the time. The College Park Ecological Association (CPEA) attempted to stop the flood control project through legal arguments utilizing new environmental legislation. The Environmental Conservation Organization (ECO) of the University of Maryland focused more on direct action protests. Both groups, though, displayed a suspicion of the Corps that showed the Corps' lackluster reputation with environmentalists at the time.[35] The distrust among environmentalists of governmental agencies extended past the Corps, growing out of both anti-dam movements in the west and the radical influence of the New Left in the 1960s.[36] The opponents of Paint Branch flood control simultaneously displayed this distrust while appealing to other governmental bodies in their quest to block the project.

Developments in environmentalism during the 1960s profoundly influenced the two groups. In his article "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," Adam Rome investigates the relationship of the environmental movement to other 1960s movements. Rome addresses three key trends of the 1960s to the growth of the environmental movement: the "revitalization of liberalism, the growing discontent of middle-class women, and the explosion of student radicalism and countercultural protest."[37] All of these trends were

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[35] Christopher Weathersbee, "The New Corps," *Science News* 95, no. 5 (Feb., 1969), 122; and Jeffery K. Stine, "Regulating Wetlands in the 1970s: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Organizations," *Journal of Forest History* 27, no. 2 (Apr., 1983), 63.
[36] Gottlieb, 78-82, 138-9.
[37] Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," 525-7.

visible in the ECO, CPEA, or both. Judy Comparetto, a College Park housewife, headed the CPEA. The ECO drew directly on precedents of student activism. The arguments of both groups reflected the redefined liberalism by advocating that the government protect the natural environment for the benefit of the overall community.

In the post World War II period, Democratic thinkers such as Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. and John Kenneth Galbraith rethought traditional liberalism. They pushed the movement to expand beyond material security to a new "qualitative liberalism" that thought to raise the caliber of citizens' lives. They focused on the idea of public goods in order to secure community services that were now in higher demand. Both Schlesinger and Galbraith used environmental problems as examples. Environmental quality influenced private lives, but one could not buy it like a consumer product. Thus, it was a public good.[38] These ideas led Democratic politicians, in particular, to increase their focus on the environment throughout the 1960s and especially during the Johnson administration. The President made the environment a key part of the Great Society and signed nearly three hundred pro-environmental statutes.[39] The influence of the new liberalism shows the importance of government to the environmental movement at the time. Land use regulations connected to the movement to preserve open space further demonstrate this significant relationship. The government had become an option to which many environmentalists felt they could turn by the early 1970s.

While one part of the environmental movement appealed to the government, its counterculture and radical portions frequently opposed the government and other powerful institutions. The influence of young activists, often college students, was also essential to the rise in the popularity of environmentalism. Though young activists of many different political views

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[38] *Ibid*., 528.
[39] *Ibid*., 530-4.

joined the environmental movement, "the new cause appealed especially to critics of the nation's cultural and political institutions," which included both members of the counterculture and the New Left. Student groups around the country made headlines with their actions on environmental issues. In 1969, students at the University of California, Berkeley, created a type of urban garden on a vacant University lot. The lot became important to those who wished to explore new types of property ownership. When the National Guard, at the request of the University, reclaimed it, violence erupted. One activist died. The event led many radicals to equate environmentalism with the peace and justice movements, for "all challenged the brute power of a repressive establishment." The movement became connected to anti-Vietnam protests, and at various campuses antiwar students turned to environmental issues as well. For example, the University of Wisconsin Ecology Students Association addressed the issues of defoliants in Vietnam and pollution and waste problems in Madison, Wisconsin.[40]

As the above events show, anti-establishment and anti-government sentiment and rhetoric was an important part of the student environmental movement. Other parts of the movement, though, stemmed from increased regulation and relied on the government to advance environmental causes. These contradictions and complexities were apparent in the debate over the Anacostia flood control project. The CPEA appealed to environmental legislation and court decisions to argue against the project, while the students of the ECO brought more radical aspects of the 1960s student movements to the debate.

The rise of women activism also influenced environmentalism in the postwar decades. More and more women joined the environmental movement during the era. Often, women formed community-based groups to prevent the destruction of open spaces and wildlife or fight

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[40] *Ibid.,* 541-8.

pollution. Most of the women activists were well-educated, middle class white housewives who lived in metropolitan areas or college towns. The environment, essential to family life in the suburbs, fell within the traditional women's sphere as the protector of domestic life. Yet environmental activism also allowed them to participate in the public arena.[41] Judy Comparetto, a self-described housewife, was the driving force behind the CPEA, showing these trends in the Lakeland debate.[42]

i. The College Park Ecological Association

Comparetto and the CPEA utilized the environmental strategy of appealing to the government and statutes to attempt to block the flood control project. The group presented a technical and detailed criticism of the Army Corps of Engineers' Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in its testimony against the project in front of the National Capital Planning Commission Committee on Parks, Recreation and Open Space. The group alleged that the Corps had given only "token attention" to environmental factors while planning the project and argued that the approval of the project would be by "default." Approval would thus represent a violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).[43]

The CPEA heavily relied on laws and subsequent interpretations by the courts. 1970, with the passage of NEPA and the Clean Air Act and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, was an especially important year for the development of a strong national array of environmental laws. Courts almost immediately moved to strengthen these statutes. Courts determined that the state held a right to monitor private action on private property if it

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[41] *Ibid.,* 535-41.
[42] Albert Giraldi (former member of the ECO), in discussion with the author, December 28, 2011.
[43] "Statement of the College Park Ecological Association in opposition to The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Channelization Project on the Tributaries of the Anacostia River," p.1; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

posed a threat to public health and welfare through its effect on the environment. According to Richard Lazarus, this idea constituted the "core regulatory premise" of the emerging body of environmental law.[44] The D.C. Circuit Court claimed that "environmental interests, by 'touching on a fundamental personal interest in life, health, and liberty,' have 'special claim to judicial protection.'"[45] NEPA provided further legal support for environmentalists. The law and its procedural requirements changed "the way the U.S. government did business." Environmental activists used NEPA to attempt to hold up federal projects with environmental impacts and caused a "barrage" of NEPA litigation.[46] Law Professor Joseph Sax, in his 1970 book *Defending the Environment*, encouraged this environmental litigation and lobbying from activists as a strategy to combat industry.[47]

The CPEA highlighted four violations of the standards of NEPA in the Corps' EIS: a failure to fully research and assess the environmental impact of the project, a failure to sufficiently investigate "environmental factors," a failure to satisfactorily develop and consider alternative approaches, and a failure to prepare an "adequate" EIS. The CPEA pointed to the Corps' discussion of the environmental effects of the channelization of Paint Branch as evidence of inadequate research into questions of the environmental impact of the project. The CPEA, as it did throughout its testimony, quoted the EIS: "This procedure not only removes most of the cover and food available to the wildlife, but all the natural fauna within the stream." The group contended that this passage, one of the Corps' primary admissions of the environmental impact of channelization, did not even come close to qualifying as sufficient research of environmental

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[44] Richard J. Lazarus, *The Making of Environmental Law* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 50, 66-67.
[45] *Ibid.,* 81.
[46] *Ibid.,* 68.
[47] *Ibid.,* 82.

effects under NEPA.[48] The group asked questions that reflected the increased role of expertise and science in environmental policy.[49] How, for instance, would this elimination of food and fauna affect the "environmental balance" of the area? What would be the potential new species that would take the place of the species living there before channelization? The lack of answers to these questions in the EIS, the group argued, represented a "complete failure" of the Corps to follow NEPA's requirements.[50]

Using the precedent set by the recent decision in the 1971 *Calvert Cliffs Coordinating Comm. v AEC*, the CPEA contended that the Corps did not adequately consider environmental factors when it planned the project. In *Calvert Cliffs*, the first key judicial decision regarding NEPA, nuclear power protestors challenged the Atomic Energy Commission. The AEC's refusal to consider the environmental impacts of its revised rules for the consideration of environmental issues, the nuclear power protestors claimed, violated NEPA. The D.C. Circuit Court found in favor of the protestors. The decision established NEPA as judicially enforceable. It also strengthened the procedural aspects of the law, ordering that a federal agency consider all environmental impacts of a project when preparing an EIS.[51]

The Corps, according to the CPEA, considered environmental issues to be "subordinate to economic and technical values." The CPEA maintained that the agency only discussed economic data in the planning process. *Calvert Cliffs,* though, ordered agencies to "consider

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[48] "Statement of the College Park Ecological Association in opposition to The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Channelization Project on the Tributaries of the Anacostia River," p.1-3; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.
[49] Gottlieb, 185-202.
[50] "Statement of the College Park Ecological Association in opposition to The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Channelization Project on the Tributaries of the Anacostia River," p.2-3; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.
[51] Steven Ferry, *Environmental Law*, 4th ed. (New York: Wolters Kluwer Law & Business, 2007), 81-2.

environmental issues just as they consider other matters within their mandates." Furthermore, the CPEA pointed out that the Corps never quantified environmental amenities as required by NEPA. The group contended that sufficient time had passed from the passage of NEPA for the Corps to take environmental factors into consideration even if it had previously not needed to do so. Again, the testimony relied on *Calvert Cliffs*, in which the Court had called a fourteen-month lag time in considering environmental factors "shocking." The group continued to cite *Calvert Cliffs* to allege that "NEPA requires more than concessions and frank admissions of the serious effects channelization has upon our environment." Since, according to the testimony, the Corps' decision had been influenced only by economic considerations, the Corps had failed to take environmental factors into account "to the fullest extent possible" as required by NEPA and upheld by *Calvert Cliffs*.[52]

The CPEA continued to rely on NEPA and court decisions to argue that the Corps had not sufficiently investigated alternatives to the proposed project. The testimony held that the lack of data in the EIS presented as evidence to reject the proposed alternatives and the absence of a "comparative evaluation of the environmental values involved" represented a violation of the law. The CPEA cited the United States District Court for the District of Columbia's decision in the 1971 case *Environmental Defense Fund v. Hardin*, sections of NEPA, *NRDC v. Morton* of January 1972, and *Calvert Cliffs* in order to make the argument.[53] The group used the same tactic to criticize the EIS as a whole, defining an EIS based on parameters set in *EDF v. Hardin*. The testimony called the EIS "largely descriptive and conclusionary," holding that "it is not the

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[52] "Statement of the College Park Ecological Association in opposition to The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Channelization Project on the Tributaries of the Anacostia River," p.3-5; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[53] *Ibid*., 7-9. The court cases and sections of NEPA are: *Environmental Defense Fund v. Hardin* (325 F. Supp. 1401, 1403), sections 102 (2)(C) and 102 (2)(D) of NEPA, *NRDC v. Morton* (D.C. Cir. No. 71-2031).

analytical document envisioned by NEPA." As a result, the Corps did not give the National Capital Planning Commission sufficient information to reach a "reliable decision." Since NEPA held that the agency in charge of the project must do so, this failure represented "sufficient basis in itself to support its rejection."[54]

Although the CPEA did not initiate formal litigation, it clearly attempted to capitalize on the movement of the courts and the federal government towards environmental protection. Its testimony, prepared by attorney John M. Gibbons, highlights the importance of governmental appeals to the environmental movement of the time and mirrors Rome's discussion of the new liberal agenda and the influence of the open space campaign. The organization's demands, though, were moderate. It submitted a petition, signed by hundreds of citizens of the area, which read, "We urge that this project be abandoned immediately and that an ecologically sound program be formulated which would provide flood control but would not disrupt the environmental and hydrologic equilibrium of the region."[55] The controversial call for the relocation of the citizens of Lakeland due to their location on a floodplain was importantly absent from both the petition and the testimony of the CPEA. The petition objected to the method, not the principle, of flood control. Likewise, in the appendix of the testimony, the CPEA argued that the project should not proceed because it would be ineffective. The project would fail to protect certain areas of Lakeland from even a two-and-a-half year flood. The organization

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[54] *Ibid*, 10-11.
[55] "Petition, Requesting an Alternative to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Channelization of Paint Branch River and Indian Creek."; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

claimed that "in many areas—but especially in Lakeland and Berwyn Heights—overland flows will continue to subject the citizens of these areas to flood damage."[56]

This argument was decidedly un-radical. The CPEA supported flood control in principle. It sought to work through preexisting structures to convince the government to modify its project and institute an alternative that sought to balance the safety of Lakeland residents with environmental concerns. The argument, if anything, reinforced traditional property ideas by advocating that the government work to establish an effective mode of protection. The argument was less radical than Lazarus's description of the central tenet of the emerging environmental law that re-envisioned regulation of private property for the sake of environmental protection. The CPEA sought to use NEPA and the new environmental court cases to block what it viewed as a misguided attempt to protect private property in Lakeland. The group did not wish to change general property rights in the neighborhood. And yet, given the racial complexities of Lakeland, College Park, and the history of flood control on the Anacostia, this relatively conservative argument was understanding and progressive on the issue of race. The testimony of the CPEA never explicitly mentioned race. But, because of the petition and testimony's acknowledgement of the necessity of flood control, the argument contained an implicit recognition of the right of Lakeland's resident to continue to live in the neighborhood.

ii. The Environmental Conservation Organization

Students at the University of Maryland also formed a key part of the environmental opposition to the flood control project and brought a slightly different set of arguments to the

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[56] "Appendix A to Statement of the College Park Ecological Association," p. 7; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

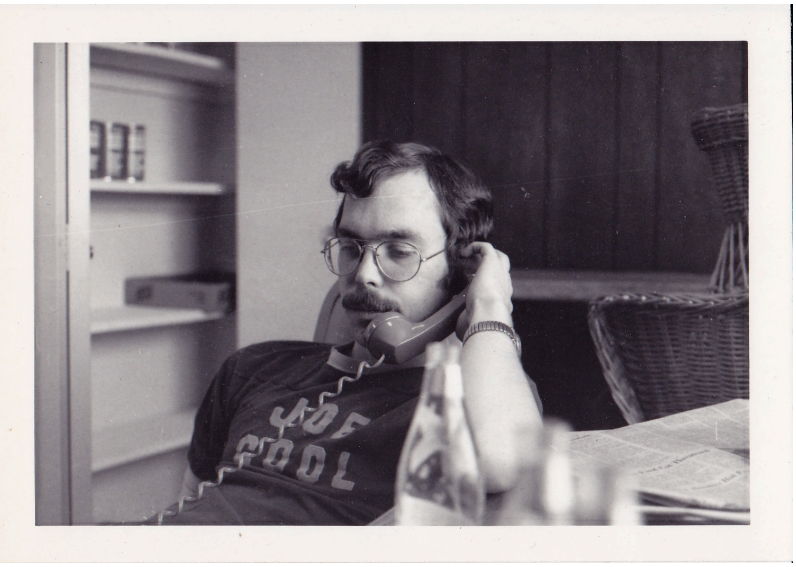

Figure 11: John Cromwell. Courtesy of Becky Gatwood Cromwell.

debate. The student activists were members of the Environmental Conservation Organization (ECO), a student group founded by John Cromwell. Cromwell, a Baltimore native, attended the University on a full scholarship, majored in biology, and minored in chemistry.[57] The group's objective, according to Cromwell's friend and fellow group member Fred Miller, was to influence University policy and raise awareness on campus about environmental issues. The students started the University's first recycling program. Phillips Foster, a professor of agricultural and resource economics, served as an advisor to the group. It had a core membership of around twelve students, though Miller remembers that about thirty were periodically involved. Some members, such as Cromwell, had environmental academic interests, while others had not yet chosen a career path. Though the membership was in this sense heterogeneous, all the members were white. At the time, the University was integrated, though Miller estimates that only five percent of the student body was African American. Despite its small membership, the

[57] "Faith, Courage, and Wisdom: The Life of John E. Cromwell III," correspondence of the author with Becky Gatwood Cromwell.

ECO formed what Miller calls a "mutually beneficial" relationship with student media and gained publicity on campus.[58]

The ECO was connected to some of the more radical movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Looking back on his experiences with the group, Fred Miller draws a connection between the anti-Vietnam protests at Maryland in 1971 and the ECO. In 1971, state police and the Maryland National Guard confronted "rioting" anti-war Maryland students. Many members of the ECO were in the crowd. Miller believes that there was a definite connection between the anti-war protests and the ECO's advocacy. Both realized that there was "one planet" and displayed a "larger awareness of what the effect of behavior collectively and individually" would be on the Earth. Miller further credits the 1970 Kent State shootings with politicizing many students who were not necessarily against the war or aligned with the radical movements of the 1960s. Thus, student activism was already common at the University of Maryland at the time of the Corps' project.[59]

The original poster advertising the first ECO meeting reflected both the effort to create a better Earth and an anti-government rhetoric that mirrored many of the radical, anti-war protests. The flyer instructed students to observe the mud on their shoes. It asserted that this likely came from one of the multiple construction sites on campus and claimed these construction activities were "a flagrant violation of existing Maryland state law." The flyer continued, stating the ECO's purpose: "ECO is to be a new campus organization dedicated to making the college park campus a model of sound environmental management exemplary to the community, the state, and the nation."[60] The group was certainly grassroots and local and aimed to solve problems on

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[58] Fred Miller (former member of the ECO), in discussion with the author, November 27, 2011.
[59] *Ibid*.
[60] Environmental Conservation Organization Flyer, correspondence of the author with Becky Gatwood Cromwell.

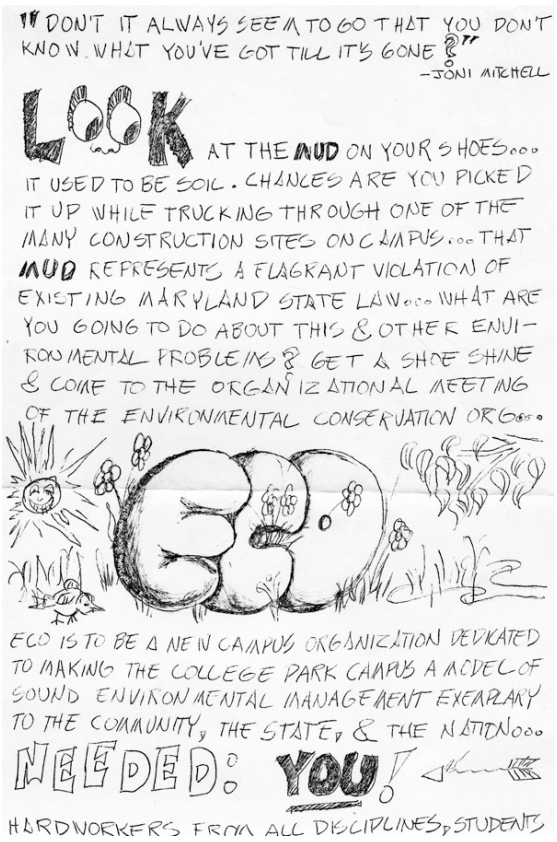

Figure 12: ECO Flyer. Courtesy of Becky Gatwood Cromwell.

campus. But its founders also had a larger vision with their hopes to provide a template for state and even national activities. Since the current administration and state government permitted what the students viewed as illegal construction, students would take control of the problem and attempt to fix it themselves.

Despite the ECO's radical student origins, some of the group's arguments against the project reflected those of the CPEA. On the effects of the project itself, the ECO's beliefs reflected the findings in the EIS. Cromwell, in an October 12, 1971 *Diamondback* article, said that channelization would damage wildlife in the stream and make Paint Branch "just a gutter

with no life."[61] Just five days earlier, an ECO editorial in the *Diamondback* described channelization as "gouging out" the bottom of the stream. Channelization was a process that led to "the destruction of all life in the stream bed."[62] Like CPEA, the group questioned the effectiveness of the project, though in a slightly different way. Throughout the articles in the *Diamondback*, the ECO repeatedly claimed that channelization would result in increased flooding downstream. Instead of being a fix to flood problems, it would simply place the burden of the flooding on another neighborhood. Furthermore, the group held that the planned floodway would heighten erosion and sedimentation due to the increased rate of water flow through the area. Since erosion, siltation and sedimentation were factors that contributed to flooding, the floodway had the potential to exacerbate the problem instead of fixing it.[63] As it did for the argument of the CPEA, the belief that the project was not the best alternative and even had the potential to worsen the situation formed the basis for the group's objections to the project.

The ECO's preferred alternatives partially reflected those of the CPEA but differed in approach to existing floodplain development. Both groups called for increased regulation of nearby industry that contributed to the flooding problem. Specifically, the groups targeted the Branchville sand and gravel industry and its pollution of the stream with concrete and other waste. Yet the ECO went further in its ideas for regulation and flood control. Cromwell suggested better enforcement of state water quality standards, which contained provisions requiring builders to protect against floods. He also believed that no future building should occur on the floodplain. More importantly, existing buildings should "slowly" be removed from the

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[61] Barbara Armstrong, "Paint Branch project. Councilman, ecologist differ on channelization," *The Diamondback*. October 12, 1971.
[62] Board of Directors, Environmental Conservation Organization, "backtalk: Channelization a College Park boondoggle," *The Diamondback*, October 7, 1971.
[63] Deby Dean, "Paint Branch Plan: Commission reviews Lakeland flood control program," *The Diamondback*, February 7, 1972

area.[64] Since some of the homes of Lakeland residents were on the floodplain, Cromwell's suggestion seemed to endorse the idea of relocation of a portion of Lakeland's residents. This alternative appears to have attracted more than just passing attention. The Lakeland Urban Renewal Environmental Impact Statement lists the removal of development from the floodplain, including the homes of Lakeland residents, as one of three alternatives to the flood control and landfill projects associated with the Lakeland Urban Renewal Project.[65]

Cromwell maintained that the ECO was not against flood control or urban renewal in principle, saying that the group only objected to "the way in which the Corps intend to handle Lakeland's flood problem." Yet, the rhetoric of the group, including that of its faculty advisor, seemed to question the right of the Lakelanders to remain on the floodplain. Professor Foster shared his views on the project with the *Diamondback*. He tracked the flooding, using old Army Corps reports, back to at least the 1890s, and "maintained that building should not be allowed on the flood plain." Instead, "flood plains should be left to flood." He added that channelization was only necessary because structures had been built in the area.[66] The distinction between opposing continued development on the floodplain and suggesting that residents move off the floodplain, a suggestion that the ECO directly made, is key for the distinction between the arguments of the CPEA and the ECO. By suggesting that the residents of Lakeland move off the floodplain, the ECO opposed flood control for Lakeland in principle, at least for portions of the neighborhood that fell within the floodplain.

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[64] Deby Dean, "Paint Branch Plan: Commission reviews Lakeland flood control program," *The Diamondback*, February 7, 1972; Leon Wagner, "Ecology group attempts to clean up Paint Branch," *The Diamondback*, October 6, 1971; and Barbara Armstrong, "Paint Branch project. Councilman, ecologist differ on channelization" *The Diamondback*. October 12, 1971.

[65] Department of Housing and Urban Development, Region III. *102(2)(c) Environmental Impact Statement, Final, Lakeland Urban Renewal Project, College Park, Maryland. Project No. MD. – R-44* (Washington, D.C., 1973), 4:1—4:4.

[66] Barbara Armstrong, "Tour Demonstrates flooding: Councilmen see flood damage, canoe protest along Indian Creek," *The Diamondback*, October 28, 1971.

The ECO argument was environmental. Race did not directly influence the argument. Both Miller and Albert Giraldi, another former member of the ECO, recalled that the threat of channelization primarily motivated the group. Miller described the racial aspect of the issue as not even "remotely important" to the ECO's argument. Giraldi remembers that many of the group members were not even aware of the racial dynamic of the project until late in the process.[67] When the ECO did discuss race, the *Diamondback* articles suggest that the group portrayed themselves as acting in the interest of the African Americans of Lakeland. In its editorial, the ECO questioned the true goal of the Lakeland Urban Renewal Project. The article noted that white landlords owned sixty percent of the land in Lakeland. Plans for urban renewal, of which one of the goals was to increase "incentive to developers," called for high-rise apartment buildings. The ECO cautioned that this would lead to a rise in land value, rezoning, and more calls for channelization. Thus, the ECO suggested that the urban renewal plan, which might appear as a plan to help the African American community, might end up hurting the community. This prediction, in the end, occurred.[68]

The ECO, when it did address the racial issue, presented itself as opposing a pro-development government that was not truly trying to help the African Americans of Lakeland. ECO members did not insinuate that environmental protection was more important than preserving a black community. The group did, however, make the claim that environmental protection was more important than preserving a mistakenly placed community. The exclusive focus of the group on environmental issues constitutes a different, though similarly indirect, address of race than that of the CPEA. By only briefly touching on race in its argument, the ECO

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[67] Giraldi, discussion; and Miller, discussion.
[68] Board of Directors, Environmental Conservation Organization, "backtalk: Channelization a College Park boondoggle," *The Diamondback*, October 7, 1971.

could appear racially progressive by treating black residents allegedly the same as if the residents had been white. Yet, because of white racism, Lakeland had long been the only area in which African Americans could settle in College Park.[69] Thus, the focus on solely environmental issues in this debate mirrors Whitney Young of the Urban League's criticism that a focus on the environment could lead to "copping out and ignoring the most dangerous and most pressing of our problems."[70] The ECO, with its sole consideration of the ecology of the situation, overlooked important socioeconomic factors central to the debate.

Despite the ECO's radical rhetoric, its members utilized new ideas of the role of government in the environmental arena. The group's argument, unlike that of the CPEA, claimed the government should protect the environment instead of poorly placed homes, even if the homes were private property. During the debate, Cromwell performed an economic analysis that demonstrated that Prince George's County would save money by buying the homes on the floodplain for a fair market price and relocating the residents instead of proceeding with the flood control project.[71] The ECO envisioned a large governmental role by advocating for relocation. The ECO relied less in general on new environmental regulations than the CPEA. However, its argument for government intervention to buy up private property mirrored the claim central to the new governmental regulation that the government could monitor private property for the protection of the environment for the public good.[72] Even for seemingly anti-government student groups, the government was an option for environmental protection.

The ECO's tactics were a combination of radical student strategies and more traditional methods. The group worked with the CPEA. The ECO did not, however, challenge the Corps'

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[69] Dean F. Tuthill, "backtalk: Opposing Channelization View," *The Diamondback*, October 18, 1971.
[70] Gottlieb, 328.
[71] Giraldi, discussion.
[72] Lazarus, 50.

EIS by attempting to invoke NEPA and subsequent court decisions. Members of the ECO testified at various hearings against the project. The group also relied on alternative tactics. Giraldi and another ECO member performed a study in 1972-73 of the fish of the Anacostia and Cromwell performed the economic analysis showing that relocating the residents would be more cost efficient.[73]

The group also staged demonstrations. A picture accompanying the *Diamondback* article "Tour Demonstrates Flooding" depicts Miller with his sister and her boyfriend paddling in Paint Branch in a canoe. Miller holds a sign that reads, "'there is no recreational navigation in northeast branch,'—The Corps."[74] This demonstration sought to disprove the Corps' claim that boating was not possible in the tributaries that it would channelize. It was a creative, though unsuccessful, attempt at countering the Corps' arguments and raising awareness of the debate, as the ECO staged the protest during a tour of the project area and flooding problem led by Prince Georges County councilmen.[75] Another ECO protest involved cleaning up Paint Branch. A "symbolic" gesture, according to the *Diamondback*, the cleanup "was to call attention to the fact that [a] beautiful creek exists in our midst and that it is very much endangered by the planning commission's proposed project."[76]

These tactics show that the ECO drew on precedents established by Earth Day. Earth Day 1970 had both "anti-establishment" and "consensus-seeking" influences and organizers. Participants used "guerilla theater-type actions" and "creative protests." For example, students of the University of Illinois threw soot on each other during a speech by a Commonwealth Edison

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[73] Giraldi, discussion; and Miller, discussion.
[74] Barbara Armstrong, "Tour Demonstrates flooding: Councilmen see flood damage, canoe protest along Indian Creek," *The Diamondback*, October 28, 1971; and Miller, discussion.
[75] Barbara Armstrong, "Tour Demonstrates flooding: Councilmen see flood damage, canoe protest along Indian Creek," *The Diamondback*, October 28, 1971.
[76] Leon Wagner, "Ecology group attempts to clean up Paint Branch," *The Diamondback*, October 6, 1971.

Figure 13: Cleanup of Paint Branch. Courtesy of the Maryland *Diamondback*, October 6, 1971.

Figure 14: ECO Protest on Paint Branch. Courtesy of the Maryland *Diamondback*, October 28, 1971.

employer.[77] These creative protests mirror the canoe demonstration of the ECO, though the ECO's canoeing was even less confrontational than some Earth Day protests. The symbolic cleanup of Paint Branch reflected the local, small-scale events that played such a key role in Earth Day.[78] The ECO, with its various forms of protest, radical anti-establishment rhetoric, appeals to the county government, and at most passing attention to the race issue, reflects the complexity of the influences and branches of environmentalism in the early 1970s.

iii. A National Agenda

The local groups involved in the debate appealed to national groups for help, bringing in a third type of environmental group. At a Prince George's County Council hearing on January 13, 1972, the records of which the Prince George's County Office of the Clerk of the Council could not locate, representatives of Friends of the Earth, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Sierra Club testified against the project. Brent Blackwelder, the later longtime president of Friends of the Earth, attended the meeting for the group. At the time, a number of the large national environmental groups, some of which, such as Friends of the Earth and the National Resources Defense Council, were only a few years old, were campaigning nationwide to stop stream channelization. When Friends of the Earth first testified before Congress, Blackwelder says it was "promptly dismissed." In response, the group publicized material on the detrimental effects of stream channelization and recruited a number of fiscally conservative politicians to support the campaign in conjunction with fish and wildlife interests. Throughout the national campaign, the groups would both identify local channelization projects to oppose and aid local

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[77] Gottlieb, 155.
[78] Edward W. Furia, "Earth Day: Another View," *EPA Journal* 16, issue 1 (January/February 1990): 28.

groups that approached them. In the case of the Anacostia, the local groups approached Friends of the Earth.[79]

The national groups pointed out that annual national flood damage should slowly have been declining if the national channelization strategy for flood control had been successful. The groups showed that the flood damage trend was rising "through the roof." This indicated, they argued, that the national strategy was not working. Instead, the groups advocated for non-structural flood control approaches, such as floodproofing buildings that needed to remain in the floodplain, relocating residents living in the flood prone area, or pursuing natural flood control such as saving wetlands. The groups presented a number of channelization projects to the National Water Commission as the Commission prepared its 1973 report.[80] By approaching the national groups to take part in the debate, the local College Park environmentalists aligned their campaign with a growing national effort against channelization.

The opponents of the flood control project were united in their goal to stop the channelization of Paint Branch. The tactics and details of the arguments of the two local groups had similarities. Both reflected developments in environmentalism from the previous decade. Both directly drew on precedents established by the open space campaign. They simultaneously remained suspicious of some branches of the government while appealing to others for help. However, they differed on the essential question of the future of Lakeland. The College Park Ecological Association acknowledged the right of the African American neighborhood to remain on the floodplain, while the ECO sought to relocate some of its residents. Though Lakeland's future was intimately connected to racial issues in College Park, the environmental groups barely

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[79] Brent Blackwelder (President Emeritus, Friends of the Earth), in discussion with the author, December 28, 2011.
[80] *Ibid*.

mentioned race at all. The lack of dialogue about race in the opponents' arguments itself shows the potential tension between race and the environmental movement at the time.

III. An Environmental Civil Right: The Supporters

The supporters of the flood control project were more united than the opponents in their arguments. They often opposed channelization in general and were environmentalists in principle, but they uniformly stressed the grave need for flood control in Lakeland. Using the rich neighborhood character and pride of Lakeland's residents as a foundation, they painted Lakeland as a community that deserved protection. They repeatedly highlighted the racial aspect of the debate. They portrayed flood control as a long overdue civil right for Lakeland, demanding that the government give Lakeland protection equal to that which white communities already had. Their arguments convinced the National Capital Planning Commission, the final hurdle that the project needed to overcome, to give its approval on August 3, 1972.[81]

Numerous references to Lakelanders' pride appeared during the debate over flood control and the accompanying urban renewal project. Mrs. Hazel Thomas, of 1902 Lakeland Road, told the National Capital Planning Commission on August 2, 1972 that "our community is safe; we have 'togetherness' with our neighbors. Our community is 80 years old. We are proud of it."[82] *Argus Magazine* writer George Fortmuller noted that "Lakelanders talk with pride about their neighbors," citing resident Charles Smith's attribution of the low crime rate in Lakeland to

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[81] "NCPC Committee on Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Official Proceedings, National Capital Planning Commission. In the matter of: Commission Meeting, Open Session, Friday, August 3, 1972" p. 39-40; Box 126: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Transcripts of Proceedings and Minutes of Meetings, compiled 01/1924-12/02/1999; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[82] Hazel Thomas, "Testimony Presented to the National Capital Planning Commission, August 2, 1972"; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

residents' understanding of each other.[83] *Washington Post* columnist Eugene L. Meyer called Lakeland "an oasis of familiarity" in "the often rootless, transient Washington area." The community was "a place to which people who have left wish to return."[84]

Lakeland retained this sense of pride despite its lack of wealth. The neighborhood mirrored other African American suburbs that developed outside of the South in the first half of the twentieth century. These communities, in which over half a million African Americans lived by 1940, were often on the outskirts of a town or were spatially separated from the rest of the town by a barrier such as railroad tracks. They often lacked infrastructure such as paved streets, creating an almost rural feel. In Lakeland, only Lakeland Road, the sole route into the neighborhood, was paved. The neighborhoods were often in less desirable areas that were near industry or susceptible to flooding. Families commonly owned their homes and many had built them. In 1974, seventy percent of Lakeland residents owned their homes, exceeding the 51.5% of residents throughout College Park. Yet, basic infrastructure in the area lagged behind the rest of town, as about 7.5% of homes did not have full plumbing while the overall average for College Park was only 1.2%. White housing discrimination often forced African Americans to continue to live in these neighborhoods, a pattern that occurred in College Park. Often, whites viewed the areas as little more than "rural slums."[85] Consistent with this trend, the Prince George's County Community Renewal Program described Lakeland in 1974 as "an enclave of lower quality

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[83] George Fortmuller, "Lakeland: People Removal in College Park," *Argus Magazine (University of Maryland)*, May 1978.
[84] Eugene L. Meyer, "Urban Renewal and Lakeland, Black Community Eyes Future with Hope, Fear," *Washington Post* July 31, 1972.
[85] Dean F. Tuthill, "backtalk: Opposing Channelization View" *The Diamondback*, October 18, 1971; Elmer Gross. "Oral history with Elmer Gross," in Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership, Item #50 http://otal.umd.edu/omeka/lakeland/items/show/50 (accessed December 7, 2011); and Wise, 15-33, 68-77.

housing."[86] Lakeland's pride, though, persevered through this relative poverty, enhancing the case for flood control.

Lakelanders created and defined a residential space for themselves outside of a city center. Thus, despite traditional depictions of suburbs as white middle and upper class areas, Lakeland was a suburb as well.[87] African Americans in suburbs like Lakeland emphasized their desire for rural living, open space, and single-family detached homes.[88] In Lakeland, though, flooding routinely plagued this created space. When the Corps moved in to try to alleviate these flood problems, the government was finally moving to, in the residents' view, protect and secure their space. The conflict between those in favor of flood control and the environmentalists who tried to block it was in part a debate over conflicting ideas of what the space in the floodplain and neighborhood should represent. For environmentalists, parts of Paint Branch were some of the last undeveloped spaces in the area. For residents of Lakeland, the neighborhood on the floodplain was their home, and they wanted it protected.

Throughout the debate, Lakelanders and their allies stressed the dire need for flood control to protect the proud community. They brought a rhetoric of civil rights into the debate and claimed that flood control was key to the neighborhood's continued existence. Hazel Thomas, who had lived in Lakeland for thirty-three years, described a foot and a half of mud in her house during Tropical Storm Agnes. This catastrophic flood seemed to be part of a trend; a similar flood had occurred within the previous three years. She did not remember another flood of these proportions during her time of residence in Lakeland.[89] Dean F. Tuthill, a professor of

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[86] Prince George's County Community Renewal Program, 63, 97.
[87] Wise, 32-3.
[88] *Ibid.*, 83-88.
[89] Hazel Thomas, "Testimony Presented to the National Capital Planning Commission, August 2, 1972"; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998;

economics at the University of Maryland, presented an argument commonly used by the project's supporters in a rebuttal to the ECO's editorial in the *Diamondback*. He juxtaposed the ECO's argument for protection of wildlife in the stream with protection of the residents of Lakeland: "'Destruction of all life in the stream bed,' it cries, but have you seen people in Lakeland being taken from their homes by row boat? I have." Tuthill described Lakelanders as "terrified whenever it starts to rain."[90] Dervey Lomax, the College Park councilman who spearheaded the Lakeland Urban Renewal Project, echoed Tuthill, claiming that ecology was "not to take precedence over human life."[91] Lomax and Tuthill framed the argument as a literal life-or-death situation for Lakelanders.

County and local officials also spoke of the urgent need for the protection of Lakeland. William W. Gullett, the county executive of Prince George's County and former mayor of College Park, told the National Capital Planning Commission that the project was "very badly needed." Describing a helicopter tour of the Anacostia basin that he took in the aftermath of Agnes, Gullett noted that only previously channelized areas had escaped massive damage. The unprotected areas, he described, were "subject to the most severe and unusual erosion I have ever witnessed."[92] Alvin J. Kushner, a member of the College Park City Council, spoke of the "immediate need" for the project and of the recent worsened flooding in the community due to continued development upstream.[93]

Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[90] Dean F. Tuthill, "backtalk: Opposing Channelization View" *The Diamondback*, October 18, 1971.

[91] Barbara Armstrong, "Paint Branch project. Councilman, ecologist differ on channelization," *The Maryland Diamondback*, October 12, 1971.

[92] "Statement of William W. Gullett, County Executive of Prince George's County Before the National capital Planning Commission on August 2, 1972," p. 2; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[93] Alvin J. Kushner, "Statement: To National Capital Planning Commission," August 2, 1972, p. 1; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of

Supporters framed the issue as one of civil rights. They argued that the residents deserved flood control and that the government also had an obligation to provide protection for the community given the racial history of housing, discrimination, and flood control in the area. Mrs. Thomas, the Lakeland resident who testified in front of the National Capital Planning Commission, noted that flood control had long reached the boundaries of Lakeland and questioned why a project had never protected the neighborhood.[94] Tuthill more explicitly drew the connection between the racial dynamics of College Park and the flooding in Lakeland. In his editorial, he claimed that Lakelanders lived in the floodplain precisely because it was a floodplain. The area was the only neighborhood in which black residents were allowed to live. "The people of College Park wouldn't let them buy houses in the more desirable parts, would they?" he wrote. "The black people could afford to buy and rent in Lakeland because nobody else wanted to." He acknowledged that floodplain development was not ideal, but he strongly supported the project due to the housing situation in College Park:

> No, parts of this community should not be there, but will you of the Environmental Conservation Organization guarantee housing, including some moderate to low income and public housing in College Park Woods, College Park Estates, or in Berwyn or Berwyn Heights? For black people? If you did, the majority in these areas would not, and in the meantime, people in Lakeland hope to make their community a better place to live.[95]

Tuthill suggested that efforts to block the flood control project actually added to the discrimination in the town by further limiting the residential options of African Americans. Though, according to Fred Miller and Albert Giraldi, the members of the ECO

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the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[94] Hazel Thomas, "Testimony Presented to the National Capital Planning Commission, August 2, 1972"; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[95] Dean F. Tuthill, "backtalk: Opposing Channelization View" *The Diamondback*, October 18, 1971.

did not focus on racial issues and thus were not purposefully discriminatory, Tuthill suggested that the flood control project was the least the town and other government agencies could do for the residents of Lakeland.

Proponents of flood control furthered their argument by claiming that Lakeland residents were not responsible for the continued development in the watershed that had increased the flood threat. Since Lakeland's residents could not even move off the floodplain if they wished, this increased flood threat posed a dangerous risk to the community and further obligated the government to fix the situation. Those who testified in front of the National Capital Planning Commission, as well as Lomax and Tuthill, claimed to support environmentalism in principle. Indeed, many believed that continued development on floodplains should not occur. The supporters, however, repeatedly argued that the residents in this case deserved flood control since the problems the Lakelanders faced were the result of development throughout the watershed. Gullett, the county executive of Prince George's County, embodied the pro-environment but pro-flood control stance that these officials attempted to embrace. He placed no blame whatsoever on anyone specifically for the flooding: "[The residents of Lakeland] are not responsible for, or is there any way of determining the large number of people and governmental agencies that have caused this flooding." He allied himself with environmentalists, stating, "I, along with many other people who are interested in the natural environment, feel that in the future there are a variety of means that we can take to prevent future Lakelands." Yet, in the present case, the needs of the Lakeland community were so great that the channelization project "must" proceed.[96]

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[96] "Statement of William W. Gullett, County Executive of Prince George's County Before the National Capital Planning Commission on August 2, 1972," p. 2; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records

Figure 15: Dervey Lomax. Courtesy of the Lakeland Community Heritage Project--UMCP Partnership.

Likewise, Arthur Dorman, the chairman of the Prince George's County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly, generally opposed floodplain development but supported Lakeland flood control. He had introduced a bill that eventually failed in the Maryland General Assembly that would have banned any construction on floodplains. But he too supported the channelization project, claiming, "we cannot undo mistakes that have occurred in the past. Permits should never have been given to build these homes in the flood plain, but we must face a reality and protect

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Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

these citizens of Prince George's County, for they are living there."[97] To Dorman, the previous existence of Lakeland was sufficient to justify its protection.

Those who testified in favor of the project even admitted that the plan was imperfect. Because of the flooding, though, they argued the project should still proceed. Prince George's County Councilman Francis W. White expressed his preference for the construction of water retention facilities upstream. White, though, realized that this ideal plan was "years away," and Lakeland needed help immediately. He testified that the destruction of a natural streambed "distresses me as much as anyone," but said he would be "more than distressed" at the thought of Lakeland continuing to be "up to its waist in water" during storms.[98] City Councilman Alvin Kushner similarly spoke of channelization as a temporary measure to immediately alleviate flooding but not a long-term solution.[99] For these officials, the Corps' project was a type of stopgap solution to the immediate problem.

Supporters tied ideas of civil rights into larger international debates about the environment and human rights. City Councilman Kushner drew on Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's speech at the recent United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in June 1972, to draw a connection between the plight of the Lakeland residents and underprivileged humans throughout the world. The mission of the conference was to "encourage" and "provide guidelines" for nations to increase

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[97] "Transcript of Testimony by: Delegate Arthur Dorman, O.D., Chairman Prince George's County Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly, August 2, 1972 Before the Special Committee to of the National Capitol Planning Commission," p. 2; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[98] "Statement: Councilman Francis W. White," p. 3; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[99] Alvin J. Kushner, "Statement: To National Capital Planning Commission," August 2, 1972, p. 2; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

environmental quality and protection. Developing countries would receive special attention to attempt to prevent problems from arising in these countries that had occurred in the developed world.[100] In her speech, Gandhi spoke of poverty as one of the "greatest polluters" in the world. She tried to reconcile environmental protection and development, simultaneously embracing environmentalism while cautioning against the temptation to view all development as environmentally degrading.[101] Kushner quoted Gandhi, asking her question in his testimony: "How can we speak to those who live in villages and in slums about keeping the oceans and rivers clean, when their own lives are contaminated at the source?" He referenced her appeal to raise the living standard for the world's poor while retaining their heritage as a means of improving the environment. This appeal, he argued, resonated with the Lakeland situation. The community faced literal contamination from the floodwaters, and thus the residents were less concerned with preserving the pristine nature of Paint Branch than with protecting their own living environment.[102]

By referencing Gandhi's speech, Kushner showed an awareness of the larger, rapidly developing environmental debate of the early 1970s. Both the opponents and the supporters of the flood control project thus viewed the small project on the Anacostia as part of larger trends in environmentalism, and actors on both sides argued that their views corresponded with broader goals of the environmental movement. The ECO and the College Park Ecological Association, in their appeal to the nationwide campaign to end all

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[100] Maria Ivanova, "Designing the United Nations Environment Programme: a story of compromise and confrontation," *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 4, No. 4 (2007): 340-3.
[101] Indira Gandhi, "Address to the plenary session of the U.N. Conference on Human Environment Stockholm, June 14, 1972," in *The Years of Endeavor: Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi, August 1969-August 1972* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1975), 447-453.
[102] Alvin J. Kushner, "Statement: To National Capital Planning Commission," August 2, 1972, p. 3; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

stream channelization, tapped into an American national environmental campaign. Kushner instead stressed the human rights oriented views of Gandhi and likened Lakeland to the debates between the developing and developed world leading up to Stockholm. His use of Gandhi's speech suggests that he, like she, supported environmentalism, but believed that true environmental progress would best be achieved through cooperation with disadvantaged citizens.

IV. The Second Fight: Urban Renewal

As the battle over channelization raged, those involved knew that more than simply flood control was at stake. All sides in the debate recognized the deeper implications of the fight, implications that went beyond the simple protection of the existing homes of the neighborhood. Channelization was a prerequisite for the Lakeland Urban Renewal Project. The flood control project was thus more than an attempt to preserve the status quo of the neighborhood. With its passage, channelization would pave the way for drastic changes in the community. What the exact changes were, though, remained unclear until the latter part of the 1970s.

Despite the pride with which Lakelanders viewed their neighborhood, others considered the area blighted. In 1974, before urban renewal construction had begun, the Prince George's County Community Renewal Program described the neighborhood as "an enclave of lower quality housing, still sheltering black families, but in need of more positive and wide-based community interest in solving the problems of housing and

related conditions."[103] The University of Maryland magazine *Argus* described the lack of public facilities and empty lots filled with junk in a January 1969 article. The article blamed "minimal" compliance with College Park housing codes for the blight.[104]

The urban renewal plan sought to address these substandard conditions by dividing Lakeland into three areas. Urban renewal would completely rebuild two areas, Clearance Area West and Clearance Area East, with multifamily and single family units. The middle portion, the conservation area, would retain all except five buildings, and many vacant areas would be sold for development. The project would increase the potential population of Lakeland from 650 to 1400. However, the majority of the urban renewal area fell within the fifty-year floodplain of Paint Branch and Indian Creek. As a result, the realization of urban renewal was contingent on two flood protection projects: the Corps' channelization project and a landfill project.[105]

Supporters of flood control cited the need for channelization as a prerequisite for urban renewal and, by extension, a prerequisite for Lakeland's future security. Some urban renewal advocates argued that urban renewal was a way to ensure continued black homeownership in Lakeland. Absentee whites owned a sizeable portion of the land in Lakeland. Flood control supporter Professor Tuthill identified this problem as one that clearly demonstrated the need for urban renewal. Urban renewal, he argued, was the sole

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[103] Prince George's County Community Renewal Program, 97.
[104] Lynn Petzold, "Urban Renewal at Lakeland," *Argus Magazine (University of Maryland)* 4, no. 2 (January 1969), 7.
[105] Department of Housing and Urban Development, Region III. *102(2)(c) Environmental Impact Statement, Preliminary, Lakeland Urban Renewal Project, College Park, Maryland. Project No. MD. – R-44* (Washington, D.C., 1973), 1-2, 1-6, 1-14-15.

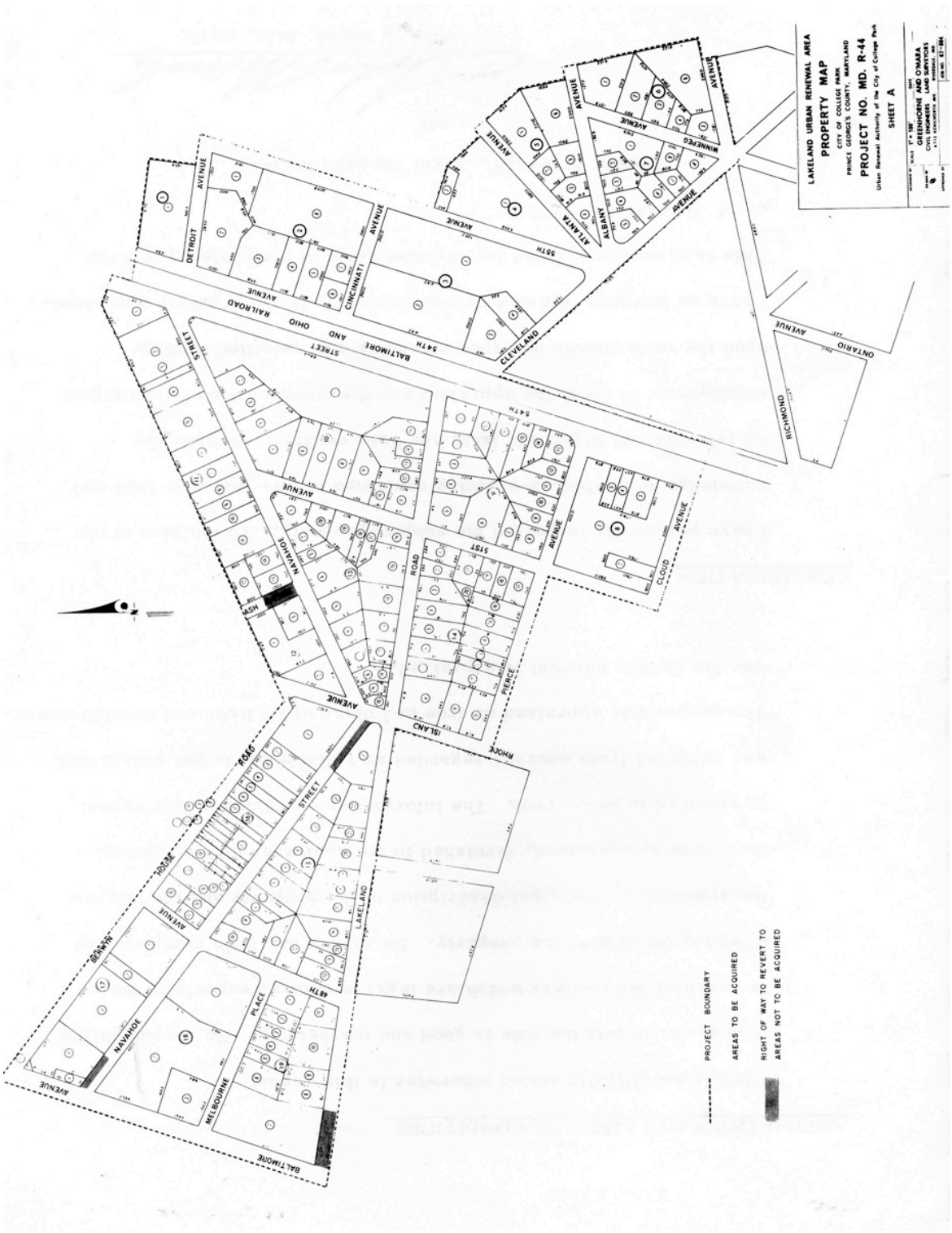

Figure 16: Plan for Lakeland Urban Renewal. The western and eastern portions would be demolished. Courtesy of the Lakeland Community Heritage Project--UMCP Partnership.

strategy by which the government could take the land through eminent domain and turn it over to black residents of Lakeland.[106]

William F. Kirchner, the director of the urban renewal project, expressed a similar view of the threats facing Lakeland. "Lakeland is indeed in danger of being wiped away," he told *Argus*. "Not by us (urban renewal agency) but by private interests." White landowners might have petitioned for rezoning of their land for industrial use, a threat that especially existed for the portion of Lakeland on the east side of the railroad. Once industry moved into the area, the residents of that portion of Lakeland would likely have had to relocate due to "the dust and trucks and the lowered land values."[107] Dervey Lomax likewise stressed the connection between the Corps' project and urban renewal. Channelization would allow Lakeland homeowners to obtain full insurance. In addition, the Federal Housing Administration would not approve loans necessary for urban renewal for an area in a flood zone, further necessitating the project.[108]

Urban renewal, the supporters claimed, was itself a form of civil rights. Since blacks faced housing discrimination elsewhere in the town, improving their traditional neighborhood was essential. Professor Tuthill forcefully made this point in his *Diamondback* editorial.[109] Lomax also expressed this belief, though in slightly less direct terms: "We want to get the area up to the standards of other areas. We've had to fight hard every step of the way. We're always last on the totem pole."[110] Similarly to Mrs. Thomas

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[106] Dean F. Tuthill, "backtalk: Opposing Channelization View," *The Diamondback*, October 18, 1971.
[107] Lynn Petzold, "Urban Renewal at Lakeland," *Argus Magazine (University of Maryland)* 4, no. 2 (January 1969), 8.
[108] Barbara Armstrong, "Paint Branch project. Councilman, ecologist differ on channelization," *The Maryland Diamondback*, October 12, 1971.
[109] Dean F. Tuthill, "backtalk: Opposing Channelization View" *The Diamondback*, October 18, 1971.
[110] Joanie Jacobson, "Problems plague lowly Lakeland. Flooding, poor housing in College Park area," *The Maryland Diamondback*, date unknown.

in front of the National Capital Planning Commission, Lomax used past neglect of Lakeland to appeal for equal treatment. Mrs. Thomas, though she never brought up urban renewal in her testimony, expressed her desire for paved streets, streetlights, and new homes. These wishes matched many of the planned urban renewal improvements, and thus Mrs. Thomas seems to have, at least theoretically, supported urban renewal. She expressed her frustration at the neglect of Lakeland though a simple question: "Why not us?"[111] By comparing Lakeland to predominantly white areas that had received protection and improvements, she implicitly invoked civil rights. Urban renewal represented a way to finally begin to correct the previous injustices the community had endured.

For Lomax and other supporters of the flood control project, urban renewal represented a life-or-death crossroads for Lakeland. Lomax told *Argus* that urban renewal was "the last hope for this community."[112] Prince George's County Councilman White echoed Lomax's comment in front of the National Capital Planning Commission. "The urban renewal grant that is contingent upon an expeditious completion of a flood control project would greatly improve the quality of life in Lakeland," he testified. "In short, Lakeland must be saved."[113] White here equated improving Lakeland through urban renewal with saving it. Without urban renewal, the community would, White and Lomax argued, fail to persevere and survive.

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[111] Hazel Thomas, "Testimony Presented to the National Capital Planning Commission, August 2, 1972"; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

[112] Lynn Petzold, "Urban Renewal at Lakeland," *Argus Magazine (University of Maryland)* 4, no. 2 (January 1969), 7.

[113] "Statement: Councilman Francis W. White," p. 2; Box 34, Folder 4: Commission Meeting August 3, 1972; Records Relating to Meetings, compiled 7/13.1961-12/03/1998; Records of the National Capital Planning Commission, 1900-2000, Record Group 328. National Archives Building, Washington, DC.

Many of the residents of Lakeland, though, viewed urban renewal with suspicion. Their doubts paralleled those of environmentalists to the Corps, showing a general current of distrust towards governmental actions. Both channelization and urban renewal would, by one standard, upgrade the area. However, both would do so at the expense of environmental quality and neighborhood fabric, respectively, and these players in the debate held these values above improvements. Though the Lakelanders and the College Park Ecological Association and the ECO opposed each other on flood control, this shared resistance shows the extent to which large government projects were falling out of favor.

During urban renewal, a general lack of communication between those planning the project and the residents prevailed. The absence of communication was especially present during the planning stages. Of the four Lakeland residents quoted in the *Argus* magazine, three expressed doubts about the project while one did not understand it. Delarce Dory, a resident on the Community Development Subcommittee, was "not too much in favor of urban renewal." He believed that many residents were misinformed at the beginning and that those in charge did not share the potentially unpopular details of the project, such as removal of residents' homes. James V. Clemons voiced his misgivings about removing peoples' homes because they defined residents' entire lives. Bill Williams, questioned urban renewal's necessity for the continued survival of Lakeland. He contended that instead of saving the neighborhood, urban renewal would alter it to such a degree that it would no longer be Lakeland: "Man, let's cut this jive about improving Lakeland. See, once you change it, it's no longer Lakeland."[114] Williams' statement raises important questions about neighborhood identity, which, as Lakelanders consistently

[114] *Ibid.*, 10.

testified, was a central reason to approve the Corps' flood control project. Williams' comment could be viewed as defeatist and cynical. Part of what made Lakeland Lakeland, Williams suggested, was the very blight that Lomax and others sought to eliminate. Others who spoke of Lakeland's identity focused on the close-knit community and numerous civic organizations that existed despite its substandard infrastructure. Yet, Williams touched upon a key caveat of urban renewal, one that Lakelanders were well aware of due to recent projects in Washington, D.C.[115]

Delarce Dory knew what could happen to residents whose neighborhoods became the target for urban renewal on a personal level. His cousin had lived just off of M Street in the District of Columbia. Forced to move by urban renewal, the cousin could not afford to pay rent where she was originally relocated and had to move a second time.[116] Indeed, Lakelanders could have interpreted some of Kirchner and Lomax's comments as ominous. Kirchner insisted that the primary goal of urban renewal was improvement of the living

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[115] Federal urban renewal projects, stemming from the Housing Act of 1949, had existed by the early 1970s for approximately two decades. Numerous examples of urban renewal had already taken place by the time of the Lakeland project. In New Haven, CT, for instance, urban renewal decimated the Oak Street neighborhood through the construction of the Oak Street Connector highway. High-rise "luxury apartments" replaced the old homes. Many residents were unable to continue to live in the area and relocated to other areas of the city, most notably the high-rise public housing complex Elm Haven Extension. Land that the government had acquired through eminent domain often remained undeveloped. In total, close to 20% of New Haven residents were forced to move during urban renewal. (Douglas W. Rae, *City: Urbanism and its End* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003), 318-339). In Cincinnati, Chicago, Atlanta, San Francisco and Boston, among others, urban renewal was also contentious. Neighborhood activists in these cities alleged that urban renewal was a method of clearing inner-city neighborhoods close to the central city in order to strengthen the central business districts instead of an attempt to improve actual living conditions in the inner city. Some residents of the Harrison-Halsted area of Chicago were forced to move into public housing, while others were "terribly unhappy" due to the loss of the old neighborhood stability they had enjoyed. (Larry Bennett, *The Third City: Chicago and American Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 128-9). In the District of Columbia, Southwest Washington was the largest renewal project. Planning on the project commenced in 1951. The project spanned almost twenty years, and by 1970 23,000 residents and 1500 businesses were displaced. New residents were more affluent, and many small businesses gave way to larger entities that catered to a wider market. High-rise apartment complexes were part of the rebuilding. The neighborhood, 70% black in 1950, was 70% white by 1970. (Francesca Russello Ammon, "Commemoration Amid Criticism: The Mixed Legacy of Urban Renewal in Southwest Washington, D.C.," *Journal of Planning History* 8, no. 3 (August 2009), 185-7, 196).

[116] Lynn Petzold, "Urban Renewal at Lakeland," *Argus Magazine (University of Maryland)* 4, no. 2 (January 1969), 10.

environment for the residents. He admitted, though, that, due to the city's desire to increase its tax revenue through the improved property, taxes in Lakeland would likely go up. Some current black landowners in Lakeland might be unable to continue to meet tax requirements and would be better suited by renting. For a community with so many members proudly living in homes that they or their families constructed, this would likely be an unwelcome change. Lomax recognized that the example of Washington could give residents misgivings about the plan, but insisted that "the residents here will come out in favor of urban renewal." However, he admitted, "the people you really want to help are not in favor of the plan." Argus accurately labeled the comment odd.[117] Lomax, a city councilmember from Lakeland, seemed to suggest that he and others involved in planning urban renewal better understood what other residents of Lakeland needed than they themselves did. Lomax likely was in a position to more fully understand the issues and broader needs of Lakeland as a member of the city government, but his comment nonetheless shows that urban renewal faced opposition from the start.

Urban renewal eventually occurred in Lakeland, but only after years of delays. The result, in longtime resident Elmer Gross's view, was the end of Lakeland as "a separate part, a black community in College Park, for good or bad."[118] The completion of the channelization project in 1975 was a necessary part of urban renewal, yet the project did not rapidly move to completion after the Corps channelized Paint Branch and Indian Creek. As the 1970s wore on, the project faced cost increases and delays and became increasingly unpopular with Lakeland residents. Inflation caused the project to run into

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[117] *Ibid.,* 10.
[118] Elmer Gross. "Oral history with Elmer Gross," in Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership, Item #50, http://otal.umd.edu/omeka/lakeland/items/show/50 (accessed December 7, 2011).

serious financial problems. Even the plans for flood control came under renewed study, as the cost of the landfill project, which complemented channelization, rose to two million dollars in March 1976. To attempt to combat these rising costs, the city initiated a study for a new flood control strategy. Actual urban renewal improvements, such as upgraded streets, sidewalks and curbs, had still not begun by 1976.[119]

The plan for urban renewal changed due to these cost increases. Instead of single-family detached homes, which had dominated the neighborhood traditionally, planners now proposed higher-density, high-rise apartments with low to moderate-income units.[120] According to a *Diamondback* article, land sales for high-rise development would yield approximately $500,000 for the city. The city had to fight against a recently imposed Prince George's County moratorium on high-rise construction. College Park, though, obtained the right to build the apartments through a loophole. A small part of the western area of the project was zoned for townhouses, which was the same zoning designation needed for high-rises. The city had the right to "stretch" the zoning to include all of the land it wished in the project.[121]

Lakeland residents vociferously opposed these developments in urban renewal—developments that took place after some residents had been forced to move. The residents clashed with urban renewal authorities in the selection of a developer. Residents had backed a local company that they hoped would be more receptive to their wishes, but the city chose Leon Weiner, a developer from Wilmington, Delaware. Community leaders, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, had privately

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[119] Eugene L. Meyer, "Urban Renewal and Lakeland, Black Community Eyes Future with Hope, Fear," *Washington Post* July 31, 1972; and Mark Hass, "Inflation delays renewal project," *The Maryland Diamondback*, April 20, 1978.
[120] Eugene L. Meyer, "Urban Renewal and Lakeland, Black Community Eyes Future with Hope, Fear," *Washington Post* July 31, 1972.
[121] Mark Hass, "Inflation delays renewal project," *The Maryland Diamondback*, April 20, 1978.

Figure 17: Construction of Townhouses in Urban Renewal, 1982. Courtesy of the Lakeland Community Heritage Project--UMCP Partnership.

alleged that collusion had occurred. The accusation involved Edwin Finder, the community development director of Lakeland. Finder was a member of the National Housing Conference, of which Weiner was president.[122] Though the charges never developed, they indicated the level of anger that Lakeland residents felt about the changes in the project. The University of Maryland also entered the debate, as the University appears to have worked with the city to plan some student housing in the renewed Lakeland. In 1974, the chancellor stated that the University wished to plan a student

[122] Mark Haas, "Residents, developers clash over Lakeland renewal project," *Maryland Diamondback,* April 21, 1978.

development with the Lakeland project. Though federal urban renewal funds could not contribute to student housing, and though College Park publically turned down the University, city officials "assumed" that the planned apartment buildings would house students.[123]

The relationship between Lakelanders and city officials had drastically changed from the flood control debates of 1971-2. Then, city officials and Lakelanders shared the common interest of flood control for the neighborhood. Later, residents opposed student housing and high-rise apartments on the grounds that displaced residents would not be able to move back into single-family homes. The opposition, though, ran deeper. Lakelanders felt that the construction of the apartment buildings would change the "spirit and identity" of the community. Some also worried about higher crime rates due to the increased number of public housing units that would be in the neighborhood.[124] For a community that prided itself on its identity and safety, these changes meant the end of Lakeland as Lakelanders knew it. The residents themselves also changed. Urban renewal displaced over half of the 137 families that lived in the area. Leonard Smith, a longtime resident, called urban renewal "the worst thing that could ever happen to a community." Another resident, Ed Douglas, told *Argus*, "the community will never be the same as before. It's slowly dying."[125]

The urban renewal process in Lakeland reveals the central, tragic irony of the channelization project. Hailed as key for saving the unique, proud and close-knit neighborhood, the project paved the way for urban renewal and a drastically changed

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[123] *Ibid*.
[124] *Ibid*.
[125] George Fortmuller, "Lakeland: People Removal in College Park," *Argus Magazine (University of Maryland)* (May 1978), 9, 17.

Lakeland. The home of Dervey Lomax, who had so forcefully supported the channelization project in the debates, fell victim to urban renewal. Urban renewal necessitated "a complete taking of the subject property," which Lomax had acquired from Charles Lomax, his father, in 1957. The city paid him $35,000 for his home.[126] Lomax stayed in Lakeland, but other residents did not.[127]

Drawing conclusions about the definitive motives of the members of local government who testified in front of the National Capital Planning Commission in favor of the flood control project is impossible. Their rhetoric suggested that they saw the flood control debate as an issue of civil rights. Lakeland, the black community of College Park, had a right to similar flood control measures that other areas of Prince George's County on the Anacostia had long enjoyed. White environmentalists who wanted to preserve the open space of Paint Branch in its current state might have had an admirable concern for the environment, one that these officials supported in principle, but the safety of Lakelanders had to come first.

The urban renewal project, though, casts doubt on this rhetoric. The eventual outcome of urban renewal was likely hard to foresee in the early 1970s. Unexpected inflation vastly complicated its finances.[128] Residents, though, repeatedly insisted that the city did not seriously take their views into account throughout the process. Though the city

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[126] City of College Park Urban Renewal Authority, "D Lomax Payment," January 12, 1976; Dervey Lomax and Charles Lomax, "Housing Deed," March 25, 1957; and John J. Shank, Inc. "Appraisal Report of Project Parcel 5-Block 19, 8115 54th Avenue, College Park, Maryland, Lot 5—Block 44, Dervey A. Lomax, Owner," August 6, 1975. These documents are from the Public Services Department, City of College Park, Maryland; and "Oral history with Dervey Lomax," in Lakeland Community Heritage Project/UMCP Partnership, Item #31, http://otal.umd.edu/omeka/lakeland/items/show/31 (accessed February 22, 2012).

[127] George Fortmuller, "Lakeland: People Removal in College Park," *Argus Magazine (University of Maryland)* (May 1978), 17.

[128] Mark Hass, "Inflation delays renewal project," *The Maryland Diamondback*, April 20, 1978; and George Fortmuller, "Lakeland: People Removal in College Park," *Argus Magazine (University of Maryland)* (May 1978), 8-9.

denied these claims, the final plan for urban renewal differed from both the initial plan and the residents' wishes.[129] Furthermore, the displacement of residents and destruction of neighborhood fabric in favor of high-rise apartment complexes mirrors so many other instances of urban renewal throughout the country. Whether or not city and other officials foresaw the eventual outcome of urban renewal for Lakeland, the results of the project, and thus the flood control project, strayed far from the original professed motive of aiding Lakeland residents. The Corps' flood control project was thus no more than a failed attempt at environmental civil rights in the best scenario, and, in the worst scenario, a use of civil rights rhetoric to bring about financial gain for the city of College Park. Given the results, Brent Blackwelder and the ECO's warnings that channelization projects constructed ostensibly to help the poor often truly aimed to help developers gains plausibility in Lakeland.[130]

V. Conclusion

The debate over the flood control project largely confirms the tension in the general rhetoric between civil rights activists and the environmental movement. During this debate over open space preservation, the ECO, and, to a lesser degree the College Park Ecological Association, seemed to largely overlook the intricacies of the racial situation in College Park that led to the development on the floodplain. The debate thus foreshadowed the environmental

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[129] George Fortmuller, "Lakeland: People Removal in College Park," *Argus Magazine (University of Maryland)* (May 1978), 8-9.
[130] Blackwelder, discussion; and Board of Directors, Environmental Conservation Organization, "backtalk: Channelization a College Park boondoggle," *The Diamondback*, October 7, 1971.

justice debate of the 1980s and 1990s.[131] The arguments of Lomax and others in support of the flood control project mirror the Southwest Organizing Project's grievances in its letter to the "Group of Ten" environmental organizations of March 16, 1990. The letter, along with another letter by the Gulf Coast Tenant Leadership Development Program, argued that the Group of Ten did not adequately consider the effects of its environmental goals on people of color.[132] The Southwest Organizing Project's letter proclaimed, "your organizations continue to support and promote policies which emphasize the clean-up and preservation of the environment on the backs of working people in general and people of color in particular."[133] The letter specifically referenced closing industrial plants that provided jobs for the working class and people of color. The channelization project is also consistent with this argument. Lakeland residents, plagued by flooding, would bear the burden of the environmental protection of Paint Branch by either living with continued flooding or being relocated out of the floodplain. Lakeland thus clearly serves as an example of the type of actions from environmental groups to which the environmental justice movement would explicitly object.

Perhaps more significantly, though, the argument in Lakeland foreshadowed the rhetoric of the environmental justice movement by portraying the issue as one of civil rights. In their introduction to the book *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards*, Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai proclaim that, in 1992, "communities of color across the land are beginning to feel

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[131] The Environmental Justice movement grew out of a belief that the mainstream environmental movement was too focused on protecting spaces for upper and middle class white Americans. By the 1980s and early 1990s, activists began demanding a more "inclusive environmental movement." They noted that environmentally degraded areas often "suspiciously" corresponded with neighborhoods where poor people of color lived and demanded that this situation be addressed. (Louis S. Warren, ed. *American Environmental History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 298).

[132] Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, eds., *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 3-4.

[133] SWOP Letter to the Group of 10 Environmental Organizations, 16 March 1990, accessed February 23, 2012, http://www.swop.net/node/26.

they have the same right to clean air, water, and an unpolluted land base as are more affluent suburbanites."[134] Lakelanders differed in the specifics of their claim, calling for protection from flooding. Yet, protection from flooding is similar to protection from pollution in that the residents claimed the right to a healthy, safe environment. Their rhetoric connects environmental and social justice, a link that Dorceta Taylor attributes to the environmental justice movement.[135] The language of the Lakeland debate mirrors this rhetoric, but predates it by about ten years. Hazel Thomas, Dervey Lomax, and the government officials framed the debate in terms of civil rights, establishing a link between the civil rights movement and actions surrounding the environment.

The Lakeland debate also partially mirrors an older narrative of conflict between those interested in preserving the environment and those utilizing the land for their livelihood. Conservationists, including upper class hunters, have often sought to protect the environment in ways that impose restrictions on residents of the area. From the Adirondacks to western national parks, environmental regulations have forced local residents to alter the way they have lived off the land or restricted access to resources on which they had long depended.[136] This tension continues between native people and conservationists in many regions of the world today.[137] The environmentalists seeking to block the channelization project were potentially similar to the conservationists in these conflicts. Like the conservationists, they sought to restrict the way in which preexisting residents could use the land. In Lakeland's case, this use was continuing to

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[134] Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai, "Introduction," in *Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards*, ed. Bunyan Bryant and Paul Mohai (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 6.
[135] Dorceta E. Taylor, "The Rise of the Environmental Justice Paradigm: Injustice Framing and the Social Construction of Environmental Discourses," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 43, No. 4 (Jan., 2000): 508-580.
[136] Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); and Louis S. Warren, *The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).
[137] Mark Dowie, *Conservation Refugees: The Hundred-Year Conflict between Global Conservation and Native Peoples*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009).

live on the floodplain. Yet the government, in many cases a major ally of conservationists, at least at the rhetorical level supported local Lakelanders.

The eventual outcome of urban renewal, though, discredits Lakeland as a definite counterexample to the narrative of American conservation. The government limited the permitted use of the land, as many Lakelanders could not continue to live in the neighborhood. Lakeland, as a result, partially serves as a suburban open space counterpart to issues with conservation, though the differences from the more traditional narrative suggest a government potentially more sensitive to local wishes than it had been in other cases. The parallel suspicion of the environmentalists and Lakelanders to flood control and urban renewal, respectively, displays a growing disenchantment with government sponsored improvements, one that the outcome largely proved was justified.

Despite increased rates of African American suburbanization by the 1970s, African Americans made up only five percent of suburban residents in 1970. They constituted eleven percent of the total American population.[138] This small percentage may help explain the lack of documented instances of racial tensions in the open space movement, as most debates occurred in all white communities. Nevertheless, the debate potentially positions the open-space movement as a precursor to the toxic waste debates over environmental justice. It further positions this movement as a partial stepping-stone from the long history of conservation at the expense of local inhabitants to environmental justice.

The debate also helps illuminate the different views of proper environmentalism in debates surrounding the movement in the early 1970s. The opposition relied largely on

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[138] John M. Stahura, "Suburban Development, Black Suburbanization and the Civil Rights Movement since World War II," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 1 (February 1986), 132.

older, more established ideas of conservation and open space preservation. However, the ECO reflected newer trends in student environmentalism, and the College Park Ecological Association relied on new tactics such as appealing to environmental law. The supporters incorporated the international discussion about the environment and the developing world in their argument, using the newer idea that access to a safe environment was a human right. The debate thus should not be viewed in the common frame of pro-development or pro-environment dualism. Instead, both supporters and opponents of flood control tried to use arguments made in different areas of the broader environmental discussion to justify their claims about the appropriate future of Lakeland. On one extreme, the ECO suggested that Lakelanders should move out of the area because they lived in a floodplain. On the other side, supporters argued for protection of Lakelanders but voiced their theoretical support for environmental issues.

The story of Lakeland and flood control is a tragedy. Neither Lakelanders nor environmentalists achieved their goals. The Corps channelized Paint Branch, and the local government bought out nearly half of Lakeland's residents. The vigorous environmental debate ended without environmental protection for an undisturbed Paint Branch or security for Lakeland. Though parts of the old Lakeland continue to exist, a huge portion of the proud neighborhood was demolished. A channelized Paint Branch today largely keeps water from flooding the apartments by which it flows. The vibrant community and undisturbed stream, however, are a thing of the past, buried under the concrete of both channelization and urban renewal.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all who helped make this essay possible. My advisor, Paul Sabin, provided indispensible guidance and feedback throughout the entire project. Thank you to my other colloquium leaders, Garry Brewer and John Wargo, who helped me hone my topic throughout the fall, and to the Environmental Studies Department for providing funds for my summer internship at the Anacostia Community Museum and for continued research in D.C. during the fall. I would like to thank all of those from outside of Yale who were incredibly willing to help me. Specifically, thank you to Becky Gatwood Cromwell, the widow of the late John Cromwell, who enthusiastically helped me throughout the research process. Fred Miller, Cromwell's college friend and founding member of the ECO, allowed me to interview him and provided information throughout the year. I would also like to thank Albert Giraldi, also of a former ECO member, and Brent Blackwelder, the president emeritus of Friends of the Earth, for taking the time to talk with me. Thank you to the staff at the University of Maryland Library, especially Anne Hudak and Allyson Raines, Professor Mary Corbin Sies of the University of Maryland, and Elisa Vitale and Sharon Fletcher of the town of College Park for helping me access materials. Finally, I would like to thank Gail Lowe, Anthony Gualtieri, and the entire staff at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, which, through my summer internship, gave me the opportunity to originally discover the story of flood control in Lakeland.

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