

Enclosure: The National Park Service and the Eviction of Encampments in Washington DC
No Copyright 2022
Set in Garamond 24 pt, 12 pt

Introduction:

In late October of 2022, the National Park Service posted notices around the McPherson Square encampments, where 50+ unhoused people live. The notice state that unhoused people are breaking NPS's no camping law and the camps will be cleared by April 12, 2023. While they say unhoused residents will be offered housing and shelter services, we know these services are often inadequate, inhumane, and inaccessible. While housing and services should be at the front of discussions surrounding homelessness, they do not justify criminalization and eviction. Many of the people who now live in McPherson Square moved there after being evicted by the National Park Service from encampments at Union Station, Burke and Gompers, and others across the city, where no help, housing, or services were offered. In what follows we unpack the colonialist history of the National Parks Service and their role in the displacement and dispossession of unhoused people and their property in Washington DC.



National Parks Service (NPS):

Founded: August 25th 1916

Predecessor: Yellowstone Act of 1872

Parent organization: United States Department of the Interior (DOI)

The NPS employs approximately 20,000 people in 423 individual units covering over 85 million acres in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and US territories.

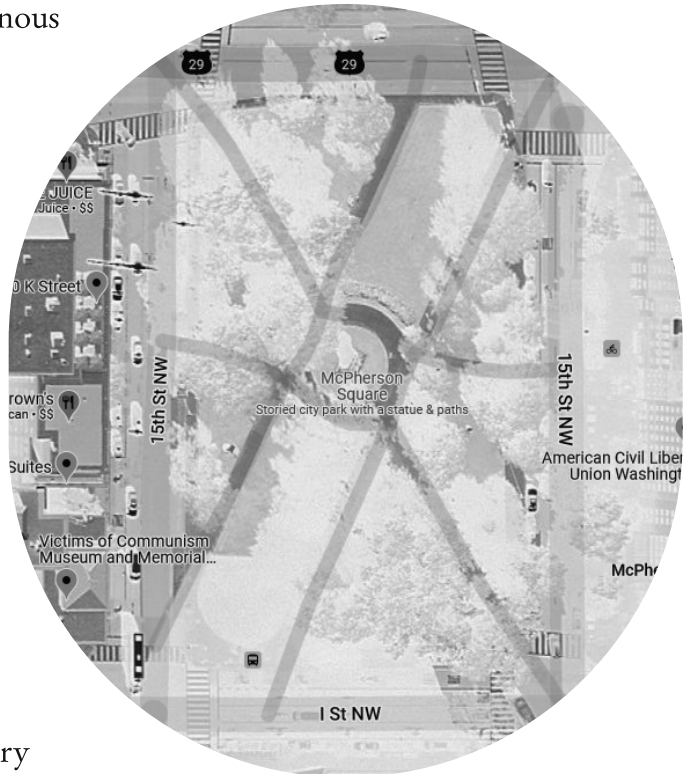
Stated Goal: preserving the ecological and historical integrity of the places entrusted to its management while also making them available and accessible for public use and enjoyment.

National Parks Service and (Neo)colonialism:

The idea of National Parks was imagined during a period of heavy urbanization, industrialization, and western expansion, which was used as a tactic of conquest and colonialism. As American nationalism grew, so did the notion of 'Manifest Destiny' that understood conquest of the America's as a divine right and duty. National Parks were constructed as an "empty wilderness" that needed to be conquered, covering up the truth about indigenous peoples who have been stewards of these lands for centuries. In 1872, the US government created the Yellowstone National Park to justify the removal of indigenous people to 'preserve nature.' Since

1872, the National Parks Service has continually dispossessed indigenous people's land, labor, and knowledges, paving the way for colonialism of western lands that provided natural resources that helped advance the US's political and economic position. Through the forced removal of indigenous people, National Parks became a place white settlers could visit and enjoy their nation in its so-called 'pristine, original state.'

Settler Colonialism refers to the process where colonizers create forts and homesteads on indigenous lands to gain control, which is not a single event, but rather a continual process of dispossession and violence. The National Parks Service, by settling indigenous lands and claiming them as federal property, were prime tools of settle colonialism in the Americas. NPS often alludes to their violent past in terms of historical tragedies, covering up their continued involvement in settler colonialism and silencing the experiences of contemporary indigenous peoples still impacted by NPS's control of parkland.



Federal Control of Land:

1933: title and control of park lands in DC was transferred to the National Parks Service
90% of all parkland in the DC (more than 6,700 acres or 20% of the city land area) is under National Park Service's jurisdiction.

Includes federally owned:

- Memorials
- Monuments
- Parks
- Interiors of traffic circles and squares
- Triangles formed by irregular intersections
- All other open spaces in DC

Administrative NPS Units in DC:

National Capital Parks-East – administers National Park properties in the District to the East of the Capitol Building, including several properties in Maryland

National Mall and Memorial Parks – formerly called National Capital Parks-Central, this unit administers all properties in and around the Mall.

White House and President's Park – administers The White House, a visitor center, Lafayette Square, and The Ellipse.

Rock Creek Park – administers properties in the north and the northwest of the District

George Washington Memorial Parkway – In addition to properties in Virginia, this unit administers properties in the District: Clara Barton Parkway; Theodore Roosevelt Island; Arlington Memorial Bridge; and the Columbia Island parks, including Lady Bird Johnson Park, Lyndon Baines Johnson Memorial Grove, Navy – Merchant Marine Memorial, and the Columbia Island Marina.

Chesapeake and Ohio Canal National Historical Park – administers the entire C&O Canal NHP, including the portion inside the District.



Park Police:

Formed: 1919

Predecessor: Park Watchmen
(1791)

Jurisdiction: National Park Service areas, primarily located in the Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and New York City areas and certain other government lands.

2022: 494 Parks Police officers

1990: Park police shot and killed a homeless man in Lafayette Park.

1994: Park Police shot and killed a homeless man on the sidewalk in front of the White House.

NO HOUSING?

A ten year waiting list for housing?

Park evictions don't help with that!

———

People sleeping in the cold?

Park evictions don't help with that!

———

Shelters are unsafe and there's not enough of
them?

Park evictions don't help with that!

———

The National Park Service (NPS) plans to clear
McPherson Square in the coming months. Park
residents will not be guaranteed housing. DC has
a major housing crisis and people cannot afford
to rent. The government shouldn't steal their
tent!

Call Jeffrey Reinbold, Superintendent of the
National Mall & Memorial Parks, and tell him to
stop this eviction: 202-426-6841

NO SWEEPS!

TELL NPS: "No More Evictions."



HANDS OFF MCPHERSON!

The National Park Service (NPS) plans to clear McPherson Square in the coming months. Park residents will not be guaranteed housing.

DC has a major housing crisis and people can't afford rent.
The government shouldn't steal their tent!

**CALL 202-426-6841 & Tell Jeffrey Reinbold,
Superintendent Of The National Mall & Memorial Parks,
To STOP This Eviction.**



2017: Park Police handcuffed teens who were selling water on the National Mall.

2017: Park Police shot and killed Bijan Ghaisar, an unarmed Virginia man.

June 1, 2020: Park Police officers used tear gas, flashbangs, and rubber bullets to clear the streets bordering Lafayette Park so Trump could do a photoshoot in front of St. John's Church.

Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV) and the federal anti-camping ordinance:

In November 1981, to bring attention to the city's lack of emergency shelter beds, CCNV staged a protest at Lafayette Park in front of the White House. After their permit was denied, CCNV established an encampment dubbed "Reaganville" on Thanksgiving Day where CCNV served a full Thanksgiving dinner to over 600 unhoused residents. The following day, Parks Police arrested CCNV protestors and unhoused people and dismantled the camp. Following a repeal of the denied permit, the Court of Appeals approved the Lafayette protest, stating "In this case sleeping itself may express the message that these persons are homeless and have nowhere else to go."

CCNV set up fourteen tents in Lafayette Park where dozens of unhoused people slept, washed cloths, prepared food, and lived together during the cold winter months. The Department of the Interior (DOI), who had jurisdiction over Lafayette Park and pressured CCNV's original permit be denied were furious and in 1982 introduced a anti-camping ordinance that prohibited sleeping in tents on federal parks. CCNV took the DOI to court, which eventually reached the Supreme Court. However, CCNV lost and to date the 1982 no-camping law designed by the DOI regulates federal parks in DC and continues to be used to evict encampments on federal property in DC today. This law was used to evict Occupy protestors in McPherson Square in 2012.

National Park Service Evicting Encampments in DC:

1993: NPS evicts at least 12 encampments in the Georgetown and Foggy Bottom Area

1993: NPS evicts encampment in Glover-Archbold Park

1993: NPS evicts encampment in Tenleytown

1996: NPS teams up with MPD and creates a Homeless Outreach Team (HOT). Soon after they evict a camp under the Whitehurst Freeway

November 2019: National Mall and Memorial Parks: New York and H Street area. NPS removes benches

September 10th, 2021: Rock Creek Park NPS. Pennsylvania and M Street NW “The National Park Service has determined that this park closure is necessary for the protection of human health and safety, protection of nearby private property, as well as the protection of natural and cultural resources.”

October 15th, 2021: National Capital Parks – East: 3rd Street and Massachusetts Avenue: “remedy hazardous conditions and provide needed maintenance to the park”

July 31, 2021: National Capital Parks – East: 2nd and D Street NE: “prune and possibly remove two hazardous trees”

July 2021: Burke and Gompers: National Mall and Memorial Parks: “address public safety concerns, removal of a hazardous tree, and to remove encampments and clean up the park”

June 1st, 2022: Union Station/ Columbus Circle: National Mall and Memorial Parks: “address public health and safety issues and unsanitary conditions”

June 1st, 2022: 11th Street and I Street NW: National Mall and Memorial Parks: “Turf Rehabilitation, cleaning and maintenance of the park area, and mitigation of rodent infestation”

August 24th, 2022: National Mall and Memorial Parks : Massachusetts Avenue and 9th Street NW: “Turf Rehabilitation, cleaning and maintenance of the park area, and mitigation of rodent infestation”

August 24th, 2022: National Mall and Memorial Parks NPS: K Street and 9th Street NW: “Turf Rehabilitation, cleaning and maintenance of the park area, and mitigation of rodent infestation”

Between June 1 and Aug. 24, 2022 city and federal government agencies conducted 17 encampment engagements, including one outside of the Church of the Epiphany, which houses the offices of Street Sense Media.

Franklin Park and BIDs:

Franklin Park, which is a large park a few blocks northeast of the White House, has long been a gathering place and hangout spot for unhoused people for decades. Mutual aid groups, such as Food not Bombs, have served weekly meals at Franklin Park for years, developing strong relationships with the unhoused people who frequented the park. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a large, unhoused community formed there. On July 1st, 2020 a fence was constructed around Franklin Park, displacing 20+ unhoused people who lived there, despite CDC guidelines that stated camps of unhoused people should not be forced to relocate and spread COVID. The fence was in anticipation for the long-awaited redevelopment of the park, which was first proposed in 2005. While under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (National Mall and Memorial Parks), Franklin Park is located within the boundaries of the DowntownDC Business Improvement District (BID).

BIDs are non-profit, private-public partnerships that are overseen by local developers and real estate companies that engage in beautification projects that respond to ‘quality of life’ measures, such as trash, graffiti, and landscaping. In 2012, the National Parks Service entered a partnership with the city of DC and DowntownDC BID, but it wasn’t until the summer of 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, that redevelopment began on the park. Costing \$18 million, which was paid for by DC government through grants funneled through the Downtown DC Foundation, a 501c3 established by the DowntownDC BID, the new park was to include a cafe, pavilion, fountain plaza, play areas for children, and wide sidewalks, as well as private security that enforced the new rules of the park. The new rules directly target unhoused people, such as no smoking, drinking, camping, cooking, or bathing in the fountain, as well as mutual aid groups by requiring a permit for all distribution of foods and goods. While the National Park Service still has legal jurisdiction over the park, the BID, a private group committed to real estate and business, has the authority to establish who uses the park and who is excluded. Following national trends, the privatization of Franklin Park was designed to exclude unhoused people and those that offered them free food and supplies.

Occupy D.C. 2011-2012:

Following the call from the original Occupy Wall Street encampments in NYC, Occupy DC started on October 1st, 2011 at McPherson Square Park. Occupy Wall Street was a popular worldwide movement that began in Fall 2011. It was originally a call by the magazine Adbusters to occupy Zuccotti Park in NYC as a protest against corporate control of the US government and the bailing out of the banks following the 2008 financial crisis. The encampment lasted until February 4th, 2012, the date of the violent raid and eviction. Perhaps there could be some lessons to be learned regarding strategy/tactics from this. Taken from wikipedia is a brief (and incomplete) timeline of events at Occupy DC:

October 16, 2011: Dr. Cornel West, activist and Princeton University professor, was arrested along with 18 other people while protesting on the Supreme Court steps.

October 18, 2011: Harvard professor Lawrence Lessig visited McPherson Square to speak about government corruption and propose ideas on how to unite people to address it as a growing problem in the U.S.

October 20, 2011: Occupy D.C. holds a protest at Union Station to protest against a Walmart event.

October 29, 2011: Students from Howard University joined the Occupy D.C. protesters with the goal of bringing more racial diversity to the protest.

November 4, 2011: Occupy D.C. held a protest at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center where political advocacy group Americans for Prosperity held their annual Defending the American Dream Summit, attended by conservative politicians and activists. Four protesters were struck by a vehicle while participating in the protest. According to protesters, the vehicle sped up before it deliberately hit the protesters in two separate incidents minutes apart. According to police, the protesters jumped in front of the vehicle. The driver of the vehicle was not cited by police because he had had a green light at the time. The police have opened an investigation into the incident.

November 19, 2011: Around 200 demonstrators entered or gathered around the city-owned Franklin School, a former homeless shelter and historical building on 13th and K streets. They were protesting plans by City officials to have the building privately developed, wanting it to remain public and possibly reopen as a homeless shelter. Louis P. Cannon, chief of D.C. Protective Services Police Department, stated that 13 people were arrested and charged with unlawful entry, a misdemeanor.

November 22, 2011: a group of protesters complete their march from Occupy Wall Street to Washington, D.C.

December 4, 2011: After a confrontation with the police, 31 protesters were arrested after refusing to take down and dismount from an unfinished wooden building they had built for the winter. Police claimed that the structure was dangerous, and it was ultimately dismantled despite claims by the protesters that the structure was safe. According to the Washington Post this event was the "testiest [one] since the encampment began some months ago."

December 7, 2011: A total of 74 Occupy D.C. and other protestors are arrested. Some sixty-two people were arrested (and many charged with obstruction of a public highway) after forming human chains on and around K Street, Washington's lobbying corridor. An additional 12 protesters were arrested that night for refusing to leave the steps of the Supreme Court.

December 27, 2011: The two original organizers of the Freedom Plaza occupation divorce themselves from the occupation, rejecting the general assembly's leaderless, consensus decision making process. They deny the general assembly control over the original website and of the donated funds.

January 17, 2012: A rally and occupation of the United States Capitol, Washington's D.C.'s legislative body and the meeting place of the United States Senate and House of Representatives. The House members were to be returning on their first session of the new year. Thousands of protesters from around the country planned on attending and taking their message to Congress. Occupy Congress started at 9:00 AM as a march of McPherson Square and Freedom Square. Occupy D.C. participants to the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol and then a march to the various Senate buildings for the participants to speak to their respective Senate staff over issues such as SOPA, NDAA, Citizens United. At around 8:30 PM, a group estimated to have included 1,000 to 1,500 people marched in Washington D.C. streets from the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol to the U.S. Supreme Court, where people filled up all the stairs leading up to the front doors of the building. The march then continued all the way to the front of the White House where at one point, someone threw a smoke bomb over the fence, causing a lock down to occur. The march then travelled all the way back to the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol.

January 30, 2012: Eviction notices distributed by police to Occupy DC issue a noon deadline. Unarmed man filmed being tasered by police was subsequently arrested.

January 31, 2012-deadline passes on eviction, however the police have not taken to action to remove the protesters. Occupy DC protesters erected a big tent, dubbed "The Tent of Dreams", over Gen. McPherson's statue at McPherson square.

Feb 4, 2012: Police raid and cordon off sections of the park in order to allow sanitation workers to remove hazardous materials and tents not in compliance with the ban on camping, arresting 11 and leaving around 15 tents.

Jun 10, 2012: Occupy DC protesters remove remaining tents from McPherson Square, stating that protests will continue.

