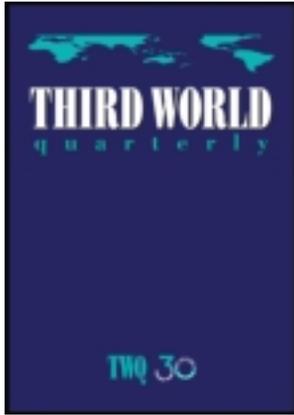


This article was downloaded by: [Eve Bratman]

On: 31 October 2011, At: 06:19

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office:  
Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Third World Quarterly

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ctwq20>

### Development's Paradox: is Washington DC a Third World city?

Eve Bratman <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of International Service (sis), American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC, 20016, USA

Available online: 31 Oct 2011

To cite this article: Eve Bratman (2011): Development's Paradox: is Washington DC a Third World city?, Third World Quarterly, 32:9, 1541-1556

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2011.620349>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Development's Paradox: is Washington DC a Third World city?

EVE BRATMAN

**ABSTRACT** *This article examines an urban centre in the heart of the First World through a critical development lens. It contends that traits of the Third World entail certain characteristics which remain consequential as axes of analysis for a variety of economic, political and geographic settings, including new applications in contexts that are typically excluded from the focus of international development practice and scholarship. The article discusses characteristics of 'third worldality' in relation to Washington DC. It posits that, despite being emblematic as a power centre, the city exhibits many of the characteristics of a Third World city. Highlighting disenfranchisement, socioeconomic inequality, and environmental health issues, the article reveals a paradox: underdevelopment in the heart of the 'developed' world. The article calls for greater recognition of the paradoxes of development theory and practice so as to confront persistent problems of orientalism and lack of self-reflexivity in the field of international development.*

Every autumn I teach a course for undergraduates called 'Third World Cities'. My students generally take the course just before or immediately after studying abroad in far-away places. They come into the course seeking to make sense of the troubling problems of under-development which they witnessed from an urban development perspective. The course offers students a chance to investigate problems of urban development around the world, but we use Washington DC as an empirical case to explore the topic. This proves jarring on a number of levels: the investigations do not conform to expectations of what constitute problems of the Third World and, moreover, it forces critical inquiry into places which are traditionally avoided by international development practitioners. This article aims to provoke development students, scholars and practitioners alike to critically examine the geographies of development, following calls for greater self-reflexivity from within the development field. In what ways might the field of development reconsider its focus, so that it might avoid falling into the pitfalls of 'othering' and misperceived problems of (and solutions to) poverty

*Eve Bratman is in the School of International Service (SIS), American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20016, USA. Email: ebratman@gmail.com.*

---

ISSN 0143-6597 print/ISSN 1360-2241 online/11/091541-16

© 2011 Southseries Inc., www.thirdworldquarterly.com

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2011.620349>

1541

and social exclusion which have so plagued it in the past? By examining several dimensions of 'third worldality', applied as a heuristic concept to Washington DC, the article hopes to offer insight and provoke discussion about how the international development field might begin to overcome problems of othering.

### **'Third Worldality' inside the First World**

The 'Third World' is an anachronistic term; however, the concept of the Third World holds continued analytic traction today.<sup>1</sup> Since the end of the Cold War the 'Third World' as a political construct has tended to obliterate the diversity between historical, cultural, political and social realities in the non-Western world. Moreover, it makes binary distinctions in relation to differences between the First and Third Worlds.<sup>2</sup> Discourses of 'third worldality' reproduce these structural boundaries while simultaneously seeking to transform them.<sup>3</sup> Changed relationships have led international development and postcolonial scholars to bridge the fields, to make development studies more receptive to a diversity of voices and issues.<sup>4</sup> In this article the conscious use of the term 'third worldality' highlights uncomfortable dimensions of social and political life which are often ignored in development practice. The lingering problems with the term 'Third World' have not dissipated and, indeed, through retention of the discourse, I suggest this category of the past is integral to current geographies of subalternity. In addition to retaining this discursive and symbolic importance of the 'Third World' analytically, the term 'third worldality' is also used as a heuristic device, representative of particular conditions. As such, it remains a valid means to approach the self-other distinctions which are too frequently left un-problematised in the mainstream practice of international development.<sup>5</sup>

This article sees links between international development and the work of urban geographers and sociologists by arguing that conditions of 'third worldality' notably persist in places that are outside the scope of traditional development geographies. It contributes reflections about institutional positioning and self-reflexivity by considering the ways in which manifestations of 'third worldality' exist within the urban geography of the capital of the US. I contend that Washington DC presents a paradox for the development field. That is, in the centre of the so called 'First World', a place that is not only the capital of the world's foremost economic and military power, but also home to the headquarters of the IMF, the World Bank and dozens of other organisations oriented towards improving conditions outside of the US, conditions of 'third worldality' persist. Ignoring this paradox, I argue, is symptomatic of the failures of both international development scholars and practitioners to engage in nuanced understandings of development problems and to engage in reflexive development practice.

In addition to contributing towards greater self-reflexivity in the field of international development, the argument made here begins to respond to the critique that the international development field too often neglects cities and their challenges.<sup>6</sup> The article draws on Edward Said's argument that 'human

societies ... have rarely offered the individual anything but imperialism, racism, and ethnocentrism for dealing with “other” cultures’.<sup>7</sup> It also builds off of the assertion by Gayatri Spivak and echoed by Ilan Kapoor that a heightened self-reflexivity is necessary for the field of international development if it is ever to recognise and embrace the ‘non-narrativisable’ and ‘irretrievably heterogeneous’ nature of the subaltern.<sup>8</sup> The article suggests that such an outward focus in the field of international development has led many practitioners to miss important development problems in their own front yard, and suggests a more self-reflexive approach for the field as a whole.

To make this case, several dimensions for analysis of ‘third worldality’ are applied to Washington. The conditions examined include a legacy of colonialism as understood through a lens of political exclusion, inequality and socioeconomic segregation, and unhealthy environmental conditions. Political and economic forces common to ‘Third World’ cities are at work in Washington, and these shed light on how global capitalism operates and shapes a diverse interaction of global, national and local processes.<sup>9</sup> The categories examined in this article are not exclusive traits, nor are they sufficient conditions of ‘third worldality’ as a heuristic category. Rapid urbanisation and demographic change, for example, are typical of many cities in the developing world, but are not prominent factors in this empirical instance. Instead, these basic analytic categories of ‘third worldality’ illustrate the ways in which shifting the geographic field of analysis to look within cities is a more useful means to analyse the complexity of urban areas and the diversity of development conditions at levels below that of the nation-state. The persistence of conditions of ‘third-worldality’ in the heart of the First World presents paradoxical phenomena: problems of political and social exclusion, poor public health, inequality and environmental mismanagement occur at significant levels. Instances of ‘third worldality’ inside the First World highlight the need for reflexive action in development scholarship and practice. By investigating the ways in which location and context inform what it is we are saying, we may begin to see commonalities and gain insights about how the field has so often misperceived and misrepresented the problems of ‘others’.<sup>10</sup>

#### *History of the paradox*

The earliest origins of the ‘Third World’ are commonly attributed to Abbé Sieyès (1748–1836), whose *Qu’est ce que le Tiers État?* described the emergence of the *bourgeoisie* as a political force in late 18th century France.<sup>11</sup> The ‘Third World’ term became widely adopted as an analytic category in the post-World War II era, as the field of international development was emerging. Self-described Third World countries first met in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955, during the Cold War, aspiring to build a non-aligned movement and establishing principles of neutral politics. Third World nations were newly independent nations, were neither a part of the Soviet bloc nor the capitalist West, shared a common heritage of colonialism, and also shared a phenomenon of poverty which was persistent as the legacy of

their colonial experiences. Embracing the term ‘Third World’ at first captured the aspirations of postcolonial nations to shed the yokes of colonialism. The term was notably made popular nearly a decade after the Bandung conference by anthropologist Peter Worsely in a book called *The Third World* (1964). From the 1960s and into the mid-1980s, the term was used by French sociologists and others to refer to ‘backward’ or ‘uncivilised’ or ‘under-developed’ places. Later, as the postcolonial realities highlighted differences between nations and the political dimensions of governance in the Third World, the term has been adapted to a more hierarchical use in current development discourse.

Categorisations of nations such as global North/global South, developed countries/less developed countries (LDCs)/highly indebted poor countries (HIPC), and other more politically oriented groupings tend to offer scholars and practitioners alike a conceptual field for understanding new political alignments, changing economic realities, and different levels of natural resource access and political stability.<sup>12</sup> Figure 1 shows the use of common terms of economic development from 1880 to 2008, highlighting both the rapid rise and decline in the use of the term ‘Third World’ in comparison to other commonly held terms for describing ‘underdevelopment’.<sup>13</sup> As the graph suggests, all these terms have continued to persist, although some have been more *en vogue* than others at different points in time. Although the ‘Third World’ term appears to be significantly declining in its use, it nevertheless remains common in the development lexicon, and consequential in public discourse. Christopher Clapham argues that there is value in the very meaninglessness of the term: ‘Its alternatives all carry conceptual overtones which are even more misleading, in that they imply positive elements of commonality rather than a simply negative residual category’.<sup>14</sup> The term is rarely applied to other geographies such as those in the First World, usually on the basis that the scope and persistence of the political, economic and social challenges in the Third World deserve greater attention.<sup>15</sup> This acknowledges the context of development discourse which,

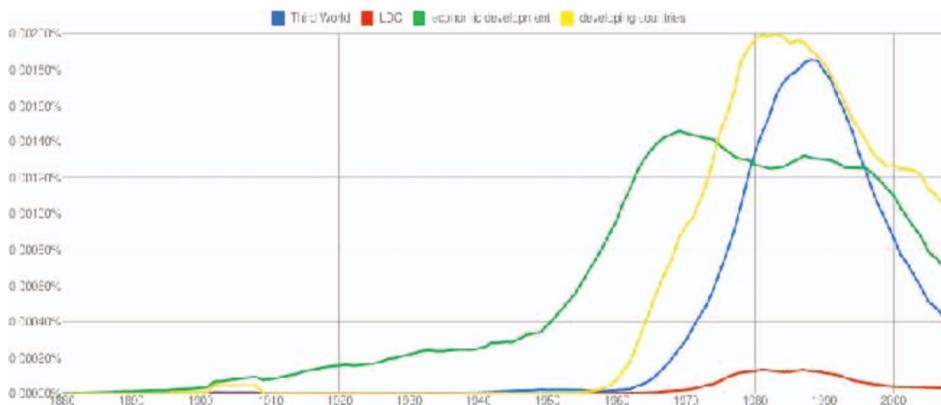


FIGURE 1. Key terms describing development, 1800–2008.

by the very geographic and empirical discursive constructs in the field, has blind spots to certain parts of the world, while others remain focused upon in high relief.<sup>16</sup> However, applying the term in different geographic locations and scales, such as the urban, district, or even neighbourhood level, presents a new level of granularity in development analysis and practice.

Two central issues are important considerations for why 'third worldality' should be studied in Washington DC. The first pertains to the subject-object positioning from the content of claims made about development in other places. There is a range of debates about and objections to such foreign aid allocations, including critiques that, too often, the monies are not well spent, and that aid itself can lead to distorted, or even wrong-headed development policies.<sup>17</sup> The US is among the world's largest development assistance donors, although there is a persistent shortfall between the percentages of assistance targets, pledged assistance, and the actual assistance delivered.<sup>18</sup> Many aid sceptics note that, instead of helping those at whom it is purportedly aimed, too hefty a portion of development assistance monies allocated by the US never leave the Washington metropolitan region.<sup>19</sup> This last critique makes Washington particularly interesting from a perspective of analysis in terms of its 'third worldality'. The examination which follows notes a number of ways in which such allocations of resources do not, ultimately, yield benefits in addressing problems of inequality, governance or environmental quality locally, and hence bring into high relief some shortcomings of development at local levels in addition to those shortcomings of the field internationally.

The second foundational issue concerns the ways in which development assistance has been biased towards or against certain geographies that are in most need. The polemical debates on urban bias in the international development field have largely faded in terms of their analytic import; scholars have since recognised that the categorical opposition of rural and urban areas is often a false dichotomy, and the ways in which people flow between settlements is often more complex than simple analytic categories of 'urban' and 'rural' allow.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, scholarship has begun to recognise intra-urban inequality, and suggested that simple urban versus rural class analysis lacks nuance.<sup>21</sup> As Mike Davis has observed: 'Rather than the classical stereotype of the labour-intensive countryside and the capital-intensive industrial metropolis, the Third World now contains many examples of capital-intensive countrysides and labour-intensive de-industrialized cities'.<sup>22</sup> While development largely turned towards alternately focusing on rural poverty and then on urban issues in response to the urban bias thesis, a continued imbalance persisted as urban poverty and the economic dynamism of cities was not fully appreciated.<sup>23</sup> More than half the world's population currently lives in urban areas, and the growth of urban populations is likely to account for 95 per cent of world population growth in the next 50 years.<sup>24</sup> Statistics such as these suggest that development assistance will need to be targeted towards different geographic scales as well as dynamic populations. The distinct isolation of the fortified enclaves of wealthy urbanites, coupled with the simultaneous and often geographically

proximate areas of poverty are characteristic of segregation patterns which can be found all over the world.<sup>25</sup> In today's globalised world, cities do not have a uniform spatial pattern. Nevertheless, common issues such as economic reconstruction, demographic shifts, racism, managing the built environment, and the declining welfare role of the state are present, and affect all cities directly or indirectly.<sup>26</sup> The field of international development has recently strived to address the needs of particularly vulnerable neighbourhoods and populations living within certain urban areas, such as slum upgrading efforts. Nevertheless, this is a recognised area for improvement by close urban observers as well as development practitioners.<sup>27</sup> By focusing on poverty, inequality and poor health conditions at levels more granular than that of municipal boundaries, these 21st century urban development challenges may address the complexities of poverty in more nuanced ways.

### **Third worldality in Washington DC**

The recent economic recession in the US has caused significant concern, particularly in light of housing foreclosures, the nation's debt-to-GDP ratio reaching 80 per cent, and unemployment rates of nearly 10 per cent.<sup>28</sup> It is pertinent to recognise the US's declining public infrastructure, compounded with the nation's severe economic decline and waning middle class, as the development field shifts towards addressing the country's slippage from the centre of global economic power.<sup>29</sup> Also crucial are the findings of UN-HABITAT, that 'major cities in the United States, such as Atlanta, New Orleans, Washington DC, Miami, and New York, have the highest levels of inequality in the country, similar to those of Abidjan, Nairobi, Buenos Aires, and Santiago'.<sup>30</sup>

The formal design of Washington expresses the ideals of democracy, equality and opportunity upon which the nation was founded, and yet the District of Columbia is a place where, over the course of its history (particularly in the past 50 years), some quite opposite outcomes are manifest. Urban sociologist Robert Park wrote that the city represents 'man's most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart's desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is henceforth condemned to live.'<sup>31</sup> Washington DC, a city at the heart of the power of the US, created by virtue of the designs of the nation's founders and the visions of Pierre L'Enfant, its chief planner, captures the ironies of such desires in poignant ways. It was created as a place for the American, and then global political leadership, and as a result, faces particular political realities and unique features in its built environment. At the same time, Washington is not atypical of other US cities in terms of its inequality, environmental quality problems, and its social segregation.

This discussion begins with the question of political representation, as would only be appropriate considering the origins of the concept of the 'Third World' as a product of colonial legacies.

*Political dimensions: Washington DC as a colonial city*

In most capital cities (Canberra, Caracas, Havana, Paris and Rome, for example) voting and political representation is not in question because these cities have representation within the national legislature. Washington is unique in the world because its residents do not have representation in the US Congress.<sup>32</sup> Following from this political reality, one of the foundational axes for analysing Washington for its 'third worldality' involves the ways in which the District of Columbia is a colony in relation to the rest of the nation. By this, I refer to the notion that the District is a territory whose residents are politically tied to the nation, with inadequate independence and with economic relations that are predominantly extractive.

In addition to a lack of federal representation, Washington's residents are also the only citizens of the US who effectively do not have a sovereign state legislative body, but rather are governed by the national Congress.<sup>33</sup> Although Congress granted Washington limited 'home rule' over 30 years ago, it simultaneously maintained its prerogatives to control and oversee all aspects of political affairs in the District.<sup>34</sup> Effectively, the city's more than 600 000 residents, who contribute more than \$2 billion annually in federal taxes, may have their voices democratically expressed through referenda, etc, but these may be overridden by Congress. Congress may also restrict the flow of locally generated revenues.<sup>35</sup> Granting voting rights to District of Columbia residents would require a Constitutional Amendment and, despite various attempts to legislate greater political enfranchisement to the District's population, such efforts have largely fallen short.<sup>36</sup> Given that more than 75 per cent of the District of Columbia's voters are registered with the Democratic Party, granting political enfranchisement to the District is politically unsavoury to most Republican Party congressional representatives. Granting voting rights in the District of Columbia is legislatively based upon legal argumentation over the nature of the federative system in the US. Additionally, significant civil rights questions arise about denying political representation to the District's population. Equal protection and due process rights for Washington residents are also at stake in confronting residents' lack of political representation. Further, there are legal arguments contending that the long-standing majority of African American population in the District of Columbia, which does not have voting rights on par with the rest of the nation, bears a resemblance to an apartheid-like political situation.<sup>37</sup>

A 'home rule' act passed by Congress in 1973 gave DC residents limited local self-governance, in the form of electing a mayor and city council representatives. However, the national Congress still has oversight and may overrule decisions made by Washington's citizens. Congress has effectively stopped legislation passed by the District Council, and overturned democratic votes on issues such as permission for clean needle exchanges to take place in the District. Most recently political tumult over balancing the federal budget and a potential federal government shut-down in 2011 threatened to cut rubbish pick-up and other basic services in the District. This prompted acts of civil disobedience by the Mayor of the District of

Columbia and all its council members. DC's residents are beholden to the will of the US Congress, which knows or cares little about its neighbourhoods and communities. It is notable that in most states car licence plates boast slogans of state pride, akin to Maine's 'Vacationland', Wisconsin's 'America's Dairyland,' 'The Evergreen State' of Washington, or North Carolina's 'First in Flight'. In Washington DC, however, car licence plates read 'Taxation without Representation,' not out of happiness, but as a rallying cry echoing the slogan of the American Revolutionary War, aiming to draw attention to the problems of political representation in the District.<sup>38</sup>

### *Socioeconomic inequality and segregation*

For most urban scholars it is no surprise that nearly all cities have enormous disparities, in terms of housing, poverty, sanitation, food security, transportation access, or financial flows. Despite a century of progress, disparities between whites and other racial or ethnic groups remain a persistent problem in the US. In 1903, WEB DuBois wrote: 'the problem of the color line [is] the problem of the twentieth century'.<sup>39</sup> The US has never been a nation where blacks and whites have fared equally, but now that gap is widening again. Trends in poverty suggest significant disparities between the numbers of whites versus much higher rates of blacks and Hispanics living in poverty; generally unemployment is twice as high among black populations as it is for whites in the US.<sup>40</sup>

As the US unemployment rate in 2011 hovers around nine per cent, racial disparities illuminate the economic problem. Non-Hispanic whites have less than 10 per cent unemployment, whereas unemployment among Latinos is around three percentage points higher than the national average. African Americans, meanwhile, have a more than 15 per cent unemployment rate. As civil rights leader Wade Henderson has pointed out, 'Make no mistake: this is not an equal opportunity recession'.<sup>41</sup> In the District of Columbia the discrepancies between the unemployment rates for whites and blacks is even more severe than the national average, with 18.9 per cent unemployment forecast for African Americans, but only 6.1 per cent for whites.<sup>42</sup>

The rioting in the Paris *banlieues* in 2005 certainly shook commonly held notions of the political and social stability in the First World; the three weeks of civil unrest highlighted the realities of social and economic inequality as well as decades of latent racial and ethnic tension present in France, largely because of the way which social and geographic boundaries had been imposed and enforced.<sup>43</sup> Such incidents might well be taken as warnings for urban America. In urban America only 20 per cent of whites live in areas of concentrated poverty, whereas 80 per cent of African Americans live in concentrated poverty conditions.<sup>44</sup> Race-related rioting has also occurred in severe incidents around the nation during the 1960s, as well as most recently in the early 1990s, in Los Angeles. Washington, which is colloquially known as the 'Chocolate City' for its large African American population, is not remarkably distinct from other US cities in terms of its inequality. Recent census figures point to growing gaps in education, income and home

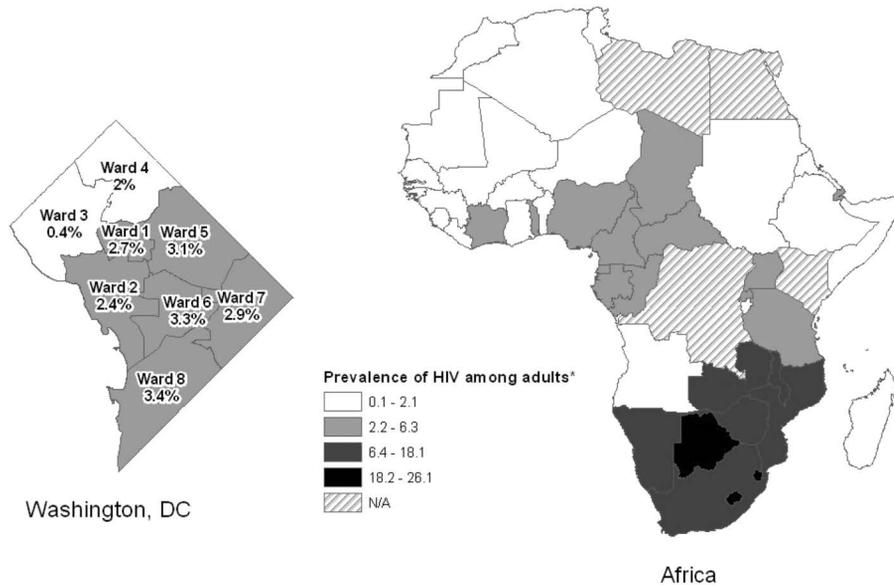
ownership. Moreover, these gaps are particularly noticeable as they intersect with racial disparities.

Another indicator of Washington's 'third worldality' is its HIV/AIDS epidemic. Leading the nation in HIV rates, Washington's HIV epidemic rate of three per cent is quite similar to the prevalence rates in Uganda and Kenya, and higher than in many West African nations (see Figure 2).

The Washington DC HIV rate is notably higher in the African American population, with an estimated 6.5 per cent of African American men infected with the virus.<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that access to health care to treat the disease is relatively strong, and the HIV infection rate in general has declined in Washington over the past 40 years.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that over 15 000 people in the nation's capital are infected with an entirely preventable disease is reason enough for substantial concern.

Cursory examination of Washington's human development indicators would suggest that the District is a global exemplar in development terms. Washington ranks first among US cities in terms of life expectancy, education and income. However, white residents live on average 12 years longer than African American residents.<sup>47</sup> Washington also has the highest infant mortality rate in the nation, at 10.9 deaths per 1000 children, which is well above the national average of 6.6.<sup>48</sup> Such inequalities are disproportionately manifest in certain populations and also in certain parts of the District, as much of the city is physically segregated along racial lines. Closer

HIV Rates in Washington DC and in African Countries



Source: WHO Indicator and Measurement Registry District of Columbia HIV/AIDS Epidemiology Update 2008

\* Defined as 15-49 years of age for African countries and over 13 years of age in D.C

FIGURE 2. HIV rates in Washington DC and in African countries.

examination thus reveals that some conditions of first- and third-worldality coexist in parallel but disparate realities in the city.

These disparities are not merely manifest in terms of public health indicators; they are spatially correlated as well. As Figure 3 shows, the dynamic of racial segregation in the city constitutes a reality in which the predominantly white population living in the northwestern quadrant of the city can easily avoid contact with the predominantly black populations of the southeastern quadrant, and vice versa. Beyond such racial segregation there exists an undercurrent of geographic immobility between the different sides of the city. Ward 3 residents typically do not have any contact with residents of Wards 5, 7 and 8 (and vice versa), often because of the physical barriers of highways, the Anacostia River, or poor public transportation access which make it difficult to link different parts of the city together efficiently. The city's residents may live in geographic proximity to one another, yet they frequently have little contact with the realities of life only a few miles away.

In addition to the stark contrast between racial groups within the District of Columbia, other striking disparities are present when one examines the economic realities of the urban centre in relation to its surroundings. The urban design begun by Pierre L'Enfant, and the federal laws mandating that the original ten-square-mile radius of the city remain intact, have prohibited a degree of urban density from forming within the District. This has been carried into today's Washington from the original plan, largely because of building height regulations, and also because of the design of the Metro system and the highways which ring the city. Federal laws have established

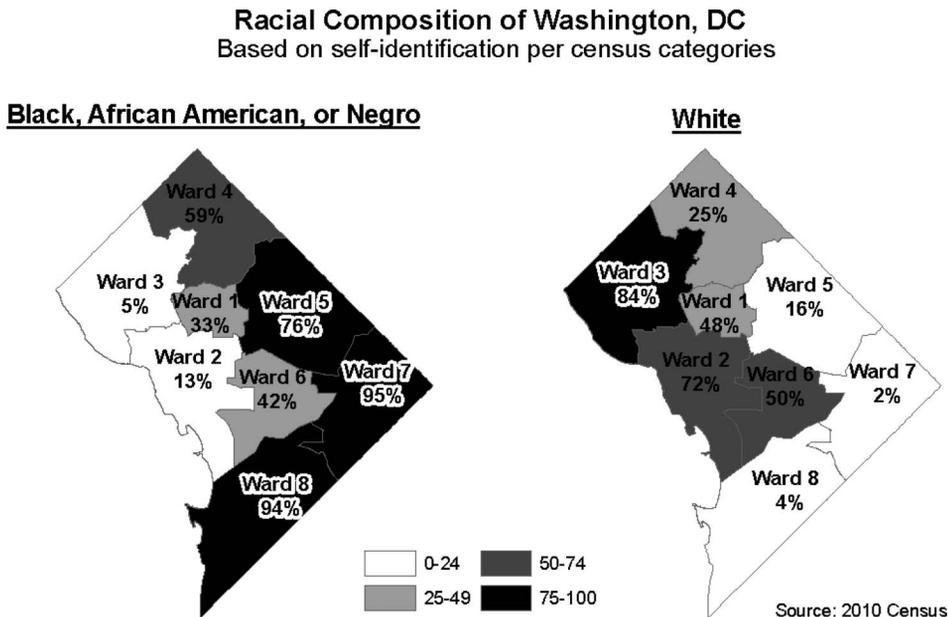


FIGURE 3. Racial composition of Washington DC.

stringent height restrictions on buildings in the District, and other federal laws prohibit leveraging commuter taxes. Such regulations do function in favour of preserving the city's European character, but they simultaneously prevent the city from garnering a greater local tax base and function to prevent a more active resident citizenry from forming in the District, instead encouraging urban sprawl and heightening downtown rent price pressures.<sup>49</sup>

*Environmental conditions and environmental health disparities*

The final dimension in which Washington DC may be understood through a 'third worldality' lens pertains to environmental quality and the environmental health of its population. City officials and residents alike have shown a remarkable commitment to environmental sustainability in Washington in recent years. Progress in terms of creating transportation alternatives, planting trees, installing green roofs, and constructing eco-friendly buildings are exciting developments for the city's residents. Yet some environmental problems persist in ways which are striking considering the macro-level affluence of the city, and the adherent paradoxes of under-development which its residents face as they cope with locally polluted and degraded natural resources. This discussion focuses primarily on poor air quality and excessive water pollution.

In spite of laudable improvements, the District still receives failing grades in terms of its air quality. One of the nation's worst places for traffic congestion, Washington ranked at #14 on the list of the US's worst cities for ozone levels and air pollution.<sup>50</sup> Such environmental effects lead to significantly higher rates of asthma, lung disease, and chronic bronchitis in the population, such that people who are in sensitive groups are cautioned not to be outside on slightly more than 50 per cent of the days in the summer season.<sup>51</sup> The worst air quality is in neighbourhoods that are predominantly poor and African American, leading to substantial concerns over environmental injustices. A study conducted in 2003 found that over 250 premature deaths per year were associated to fine particulate matter air pollution, stemming from five power plants in the Washington DC metropolitan region. The populations worst affected by these mortality rates were poor and black communities, particularly those populations who had not completed high-school level educations, living in the northeast and southeast quadrants of the city.<sup>52</sup>

The Washington region also suffers from some of the worst water pollution in the nation. The Potomac River, which runs through the city, and the watershed of the Chesapeake Bay are highly polluted as a result of nitrogen runoffs, and pesticide use, while urban storm-water and wastewater treatment facility runoffs are significant sources of pollution as well. Antiquated storm-water and sewage treatment systems annually dump two billion gallons of raw sewage and storm water directly into the watershed because of their inability to handle the volume of waste and rainfall received in the city each year.<sup>53</sup> The Chesapeake Bay has lost numerous mollusc species because of its extreme levels of pollution. Recent studies have noted that around 80 per cent of the largemouth bass in the Potomac River, which

runs along the margin of the District, are intersex (male fish showing female characteristics); the mutations stem from endocrine-disrupting compounds in the water, as pesticides, flame-retardants and personal care products find their ways into wastewater runoff.<sup>54</sup> The effects of such pollution are most serious at local levels. The Anacostia River, which runs through Washington's northeast and southeast neighbourhoods, draining into the Potomac River, has been noted for several years as a pollution 'hotspot'. The highest rates in the nation of tumours in catfish are found in fish in the Anacostia River, with up to 68 per cent of brown bullhead catfish having liver tumours and around 23 per cent having skin tumours.<sup>55</sup> While most of this water pollution is the result of urban runoff and particulate matter from poor air quality, the watershed as a whole has also been prejudiced by a severe dearth of environmental planning. Whereas the Anacostia River once ran through 2500 acres of tidal wetland ecosystems, today less than 150 acres of such wetland ecosystems are left in the region.<sup>56</sup> While the public health risks posed in these situations are certainly relatively minimal compared to water pollution or problems of water availability in many other Third World cities, the poor conditions in Washington are nevertheless reminders of the short-sightedness and lack of systems thinking which too often plagues development interventions. The phenomenon of unintended consequences which often troubles international development practice is indeed no stranger in the heart of the First World.

Home to the world's largest and best-funded environmental organisations, such as the Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature, the Washington DC region itself gets little attention in the programmes or orientation of such groups. These international environmental NGOs are some of the largest in the world, and often aim to bridge the global-local divide in their environmental activism. But, with a few exceptions, these and other national and internationally focused groups pay little attention to the needs of communities and ecosystems in proximity to their First World headquarters. Meanwhile, local organisations such as the Anacostia Watershed Society, the Earth Conservation Corps, and others are doing yeomen's work of environmental stewardship and environmental justice activism locally, but are typically severely underfunded, with minimal staff and resources at their disposal. Recognition of the realities of such poor environmental health conditions serve as an imperative to critically deconstruct conceptualisations of 'first worldality' as much as to highlight common characteristics of 'third worldality' in the age of global capitalism. As with the economic, health and social segregation dimensions of 'third worldality' which have been noted here, it is important to acknowledge that most of these environmental conditions are not experienced equally across the entire city. Rather, they are most adversely affecting the lives of the city's poorest residents, most of whom are racial or ethnic minorities. The stark contrasts between progress on sustainability issues that simultaneously coexist with retrograde environmental management and unhealthy conditions are further evidence of the unevenness and complexity of 'third worldality' at the urban level.

### Confronting 'third worldality' in First World contexts

While the realities of socioeconomic inequalities in the US are nothing new, what the evidence offered here indicates is a persistent set of outliers for international development scholars and practitioners based in the First World. Despite the differences in scope to that of Third World problems, the realities of Washington DC's political exclusion, socioeconomic inequality, and environmental degradation are a prescient empirical case for development practitioners. Why have development practitioners been so unable to adequately respond to such obvious disparities in the US's capital?

By acknowledging and taking seriously the paradox of Washington DC as a First World city with Third World characteristics, a disconcerting set of realities for international development practitioners is made apparent. Scholars outside the US have noted the small amount that is known about the culture, religious and political dynamics of that country, particularly in relation to its substantial world-wide influence.<sup>57</sup> In keeping with such observations, the argument for considering the notion of the Third World in relation to Washington DC ought to provoke recognition of the ways in which the field has so often misunderstood 'others' and their needs. While decentralisation and participatory approaches to development call for a 'bottom-up' action, scholars in the field have aimed at undoing the centrality of development practice as a top-down field, largely based upon helping 'Others'. Nevertheless, as Wolfgang Sachs has cautioned: 'All along, the efficacy of "development" remained impervious to any counter evidence, but showed remarkable staying power; the concept was repeatedly stretched until it included both the strategy which inflicted the injury and the strategy designed for therapy'.<sup>58</sup>

This article does not aim to rescue the field of development by stretching the concept and aims of the field. Instead, through this examination of evidence of Washington DC as a Third World city, it aims to provoke the development field to re-examine the fundamental dimensions of the human and geographic subjects of development focus. Acknowledging the paradox should encourage perspectives that focus on problems of representation, inequality, public health and environmental quality closer to home, as well as analysis that is more cognisant of the complex and granular levels at which such factors persist.

The application of certain analytic categories of 'third worldality', namely political exclusion, social segregation and inequality, and poor environmental health are not necessarily experienced on the scale of the entire city, but rather as realities of the subaltern, coexisting side-by-side with the First World realities of Washington as a central place of power. By bringing these realities to light using the lens of 'third worldality' the article has suggested that international development practice itself may need to shift focus. Confronting the paradox encourages a self-reflexive response to the conditions which persist just beyond the high-security confines of development agencies themselves. Moreover, it fosters a deconstruction of the problematic notion of the Third World into descriptive units which capture

geographic, social and political realities in terms of the often disparate, contradictory and uneven conditions which are present in the complex geographies of global capitalism.

An old Swahili proverb rings true: 'To arrive at your destination, you must know whence you start'. Development practitioners may argue that, because of questions of scale, continuing to help communities and geographies in most need remains essential. Undertaking such efforts is not fruitless, but I do contend that such efforts are indicative of the persistently unsatisfactory results which have plagued the field, particularly in light of the problems of understanding 'Others'. Understanding Washington DC for its 'third worldality', and attempting to address it in the heart of the field, might significantly humble those in the development field as they strive to respond to challenges of development. By looking towards areas of tension, ironies and complex layers of urban socioeconomic realities, development interventions may become more appropriately nuanced towards addressing local needs and the multiple, conflicting voices of the marginalised. In being conscious of our positioning as subjects and objects of development, we may be forced to reconsider the scale and the scope in which development is conducted.

## Notes

- 1 S-JA Cheng & LR Kurtz, 'Third World voices redefining peace', *Peace Review*, 10(1), 1998, pp 5–12; E Boulding, *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000; A Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998; and H Handelman, *The Challenge of Third World Development*, Boston, MA: Longman, 2011.
- 2 Cheng & Kurtz, 'Third World voices redefining peace'.
- 3 J Graaff, 'The seductions of determinism in development theory: Foucault's functionalism', *Third World Quarterly*, 27(8), 2006, pp 1387–1400.
- 4 C Sylvester, 'Development studies and postcolonial studies: disparate tales of the "Third World"', *Third World Quarterly*, 20(4), 1999, pp 703–721; and D Simon, 'Separated by common ground? Bringing (post)development and (post)colonialism together', *Geographical Journal*, 172(1), 2006, pp 10–21.
- 5 G Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in C Nelson & L Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and Interpretation of Culture*, Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp 271–313; I Kapoor, 'Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World "Other"', *Third World Quarterly*, 25(4), 2004, pp 627–647.
- 6 S Corbridge & G Jones, *The Continuing Debate about Urban Bias: The Thesis, its Critics, its Influence, and Implications for Poverty Reduction*, London: Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2006; and J Beall & S Fox, *Cities and Development*, New York: Routledge, 2009.
- 7 E Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1974.
- 8 Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?'; and Kapoor, 'Hyper-self-reflexive development?'.
- 9 D Drakakis-Smith, *Third World Cities*, New York: Routledge, 2000; and M Castells, 'Urban sociology in the twenty-first century', in I Susser (ed), *The Castells Reader on Cities and Social Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.
- 10 L Alcoff, 'The problem of speaking for others', *Cultural Critique*, Winter, 1991, pp 5–32.
- 11 S Mintz, 'Other: the Third World', *Anthrosource*, 65(5), 1966, pp 1320–1326.
- 12 Drakakis-Smith, *Third World Cities*.
- 13 Data acquired from Ngram, a Google labs programme which searches for text in a database of digital books.
- 14 C Clapham, *Third World Politics: An Introduction*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p 2.
- 15 Handelman, *The Challenge of Third World Development*.
- 16 Alcoff, 'The problem of speaking for others'.
- 17 Congressional Budget Office, 'The role of foreign aid in development', May 1997, at <http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/0xx/doc8/foraid.pdf>, accessed 5 June 2011.

- 18 OECD, 'International development statistics online databases on aid and other resource flows', 2009, at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/50/17/5037721.htm>, accessed 6 June 2011; and A Shah, 'Foreign aid for development assistance', *Global Issues*, 2011, at <http://www.globalissues.org/article/35/foreign-aid-development-assistance>, accessed 4 February 2011.
- 19 T Dichter, *Despite Good Intentions: Why Development Assistance to the Third World has Failed*, Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003; D Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How there is Another Way for Africa*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009; R Barrios, *Contracting for Development: The Role of For-profit Contractors in US Foreign Development Assistance*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000; and R Wolverson, 'Beltway bandits', *Newsweek*, 24 November 2007.
- 20 R Bates, 'Urban bias: a fresh look', *Journal of Development Studies*, 29, 1993, pp 219–228; R Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, Harlow: Pearson Education, 1983; and M Lipton, 'Urban bias and inequality', in MA Seligson and JT Passé-Smith (eds), *Development and Underdevelopment*, Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 2008, pp 345–350.
- 21 J Beall & S Fox, *Cities and Development*, New York: Routledge, 2009; M Todaro, *Economic Development*, Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000; and W Goldsmith & E Blakely, *Separate Societies: Poverty and Inequality in US Cities*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992.
- 22 M Davis, *Planet of Slums*, London: Verso, 2006, p 16.
- 23 Corbridge & Jones, *The Continuing Debate about Urban Bias*.
- 24 YM Yeung, 'Geography in an age of mega-cities', *International Social Sciences Journal*, 49(151), 1997, pp 91–104.
- 25 P Marcuse, 'The ghetto of exclusion and the fortified enclave', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 41(3), 1997, pp 311–326; T Caldeira, *City of Walls*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000; and S Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2006.
- 26 R VanKempen & P Marcuse, 'The new spatial order of cities', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 41(3), 1997, pp 285–298.
- 27 R Chambers, *Revolutions in Development Inquiry*, London: Earthscan, 2008; P Marcuse, "'Dual city': a muddy metaphor for a quartered city", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 13(4), 1989, pp 697–708; and Marcuse, 'What's so new about divided cities?', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 17(3), 1993, pp 355–365.
- 28 'Third World US debt', *The National Post*, 28 October 2010, at <http://www.nationalpost.com/todays-paper/Third+World+debt/3737944/story.html>, accessed 5 June 2011; and J Pethokoukis, 'Brzezinski: US recession could lead to riots', *US News and World Report* (Money section), 17 February 2009, at <http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/capital-commerce/2009/02/17/brzezinski-us-recession-could-lead-to-riots.html>, accessed 5 June 2011.
- 29 A Huffington, *Third World America*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2010; and L Savage, 'Third World America', *Macleans*, 14 September 2010, at <http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/09/14/third-world-america/2/>.
- 30 UN-HABITAT, *State of the World's Cities 2008/2009—Harmonious Cities*, Nairobi: UN-HABITAT, 2009.
- 31 R Park, *On Social Control and Collective Behavior*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967, p 3.
- 32 Congressional Research Service (CRS), 'Constitutional Amendment District of Columbia voting rights', background paper, August 1978, pp 79–103, at <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Publications/Bkground/BP79-03.pdf>. By the 23rd Amendment of the US Constitution Washington, DC residents may vote in presidential elections and are given three votes in the Electoral College. Brazil amended its constitution in 1985, giving residents of the Federal District of Brasilia more political representation. There is one delegate from the District to the House of Representatives, who is not allowed to vote on the floor of the House, but may vote on committees and on procedural issues. The District of Columbia does have two Shadow Senators, who are allowed to have a seat and an office in the Senate, but who have no actual voting rights.
- 33 J Raskin, 'Is this America? The District of Columbia and the right to vote', *Harvard Civil Rights—Civil Liberties Law Review*, 34(96/97), 1997, pp 1–53.
- 34 E Boyd, *CRS Issue Statement on District of Columbia Representation and Oversight*, Issue Paper 7-5700, Washington, DC: CRS, 11 January 2010; and R Bress & L Alvino McGill, 'Congressional authority to extend voting representation to citizens of the District of Columbia: the constitutionality of HR 1905', American Constitution Society, May 2007.
- 35 E Norton, *Congressional Record*, V 147, Pt 3, March 8 2001 to March 26 2001; and CRS, 'Constitutional Amendment District of Columbia voting rights'.
- 36 Raskin, 'Is this America?'.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 According to Washington, DC's Shadow Senator, Paul Strauss, who followed the process closely, 'No Taxation without Representation' is probably what the plates would have read, except for a federal law prohibiting political sloganeering on licence plates.
- 39 WEB DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, reprinted in *Writings*, New York: Library of America, 1986.

- 40 National Poverty Center, University of Michigan, 2009, at <http://www.npc.umich.edu/poverty/>, citing data from US Bureau of the Census, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2009*, Report P60, n 238, Table B-2, pp 62–67; and Eisenhower Foundation, ‘Forty year update of the Kerner Riot Commission Executive Summary’, February 2008, at [www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/kerner.php](http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/kerner.php), accessed 5 June 2011.
- 41 W Henderson, ‘Remarks at the 26th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr Memorial Breakfast’, 19 January 2010, at <http://www.civilrights.org/archives/2010/01/henderson-mlk-2010.html>.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 C Schneider, ‘Police power and race riots in Paris’, *Politics & Society*, 36(1), 2008, pp 133–159.
- 44 T Favro, ‘Black American men hardest hit by dysfunctional US inner cities’, speech to the City Mayors Society, 25 April 2006, at [http://www.citymayors.com/society/us\\_blackmen.html](http://www.citymayors.com/society/us_blackmen.html), accessed 25 January 2011.
- 45 Centers for Disease Control, *HIV Surveillance Report: Diagnoses of HIV infection and AIDS in the United States and Dependent Areas, 2008*, 2008, at <file:///hiv/surveillance/resources/reports/2008report/>; and BBC, ‘US capital blighted by HIV/AIDS’, 17 March 2009, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7947443.stm>, accessed 25 January 2011.
- 46 C Timberg, ‘AIDS in the District is serious, but not critical’, *Washington Post*, 22 March 2009, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/20/AR2009032001761.html>.
- 47 American Human Development Project, *Measure of America 2010–2011: Key Findings*, at <http://www.measureofamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/The-Measure-of-America-2010-2011-Key-Findings.pdf>.
- 48 K Alexander, ‘DC totals for infant mortality revised’, *Washington Post*, 14 March 2007, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/13/AR2007031301502.html>.
- 49 M Grunwald, ‘DC’s fear of heights’, *Washington Post*, 2 July 2006, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/30/AR2006063001316.html>.
- 50 American Lung Association, ‘State of the air 2010’, 2010, at <http://www.stateoftheair.org/2010/states/district-of-columbia/>.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 JI Levy, SL Greco & JD Spengler, ‘The importance of population susceptibility for air pollution risk assessment: a case study of power plants near Washington, DC’, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 110, 2002, pp 1253–1260.
- 53 Anacostia Watershed Society, ‘FAQs’, at <http://www.anacostiaws.org/explore/watershed-info/faqs>, accessed 25 January 2011.
- 54 D Chambers & T Leiker, ‘A reconnaissance for emerging contaminants in the South Branch Potomac River, Cacapon River, and Williams River Basins, West Virginia, April–October 2004’, *United States Geological Survey*, Open File Report 2006–1393, Reston, VA: USGS, 2006; and US Fish and Wildlife Service, ‘Intersex fish: endocrine disruption in smallmouth bass’, 2006, at <http://www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/pdf/endocrine.pdf>.
- 55 A Pinkney, J Harshbarger, E May & W Reichert, ‘Tumor prevalence and biomarkers of exposure and response in brown bullhead (*Ameiurus nebulosus*) from the Anacostia River, Washington, DC and Tuckahoe River, Maryland, US’, *Environmental Toxicology and Chemistry*, 23, 2003, pp 638–647; and US Fish and Wildlife Service, ‘Tumors in catfish from the South River, Anne Arundel County, MD’, 2005, at <http://www.fws.gov/chesapeakebay/pdf/SouthRiverFS.pdf>.
- 56 Anacostia Watershed Society, ‘FAQs’.
- 57 E Said, ‘The other America’, *Counterpunch*, 23 March 2003, at <http://www.counterpunch.org/said03222003.html>.
- 58 W Sachs, ‘No sustainability without development’ (originally published as ‘Critical reflections of the culture of the West’, Occasional Paper, Ecumenical Association for Church and Society, Brussels, 1995), at <http://www.aislingmagazine.com/aislingmagazine/articles/TAM21/Sustainability.html>, accessed 23 January 2011.

### Notes on contributor

**Eve Bratman** is an assistant professor in the School of International Service, American University. In addition to her urban development research interests, she is also interested in the politics of sustainable development in the Brazilian Amazon.