The Design Politics of Space, Race, and Resistance in the United States

Stephen F. Gray (1), Anne Lin (2)

Abstract

This essay provides an overview of how space has been linked to racialized systems of oppression in the United States as well as how design and planning present possibilities for action. It outlines historic and relational contexts of culture, geography, and physical infrastructure through which racialized systems, actors, and inherited practices of politicization impart both physical imprints on the landscape as well as impacts on hegemonic or shared identity. It then introduces a conceptual framework for liberatory futuring, considering how architects and planners intersect with systems of race, identity, and place and how they might become advocates and active co-conspirators for liberation.

Buildings and other physical sites of privilege and power are perceived as incidental to, rather than drivers of, political and cultural values. Yet architects and planners clearly hold agency and decision-making power over the physical form of spaces.

Introduction

The design of cities concentrates resources in some places and marginalizes communities in others. And while the particular histories, policies, practices, and projects producing these socio-spatial divisions may vary by territory, the lines of separation invariably demarcate differences in race, ethnicity, caste, or class (Cox, 1948; Lake and Reynolds, 2008). This relationship between space and politically constructed forms of identity informs where people live or don't live, determines their relative access to resources and opportunities, defines the power dynamics involved with how spaces are used and governed, and over time produces material consequences and new collective identities rooted in physical and cultural geographies. As such, space, manifesting as both public and private infrastructures, becomes a key tool for bringing architects, planners, political actors, and social movements into direct dialogue with prevailing social, economic, political, and ideological discourses and practices. Designers and designed spaces have generally been framed as apolitical actors which merely respond to the policy and civic environments created by actions of explicitly political processes. Buildings and other physical sites of privilege and power are perceived as incidental to, rather than drivers of, political and cultural values. Yet architects and planners clearly hold agency and decision-making power over the physical form of spaces – development and design processes are means of realizing underlying political agendas, even if they aren't explicitly referred to in such terms. As such, obvious yet regularly overlooked questions arise: How do politically constructed meanings of race and identity shape our built environments? How do built environments in turn politicize individuals within them? What are the practical mechanisms for establishing and controlling these supremacies of space? And what role does collective identity, particularly when defined along spatial lines, play in resistance and liberation?

While racial violence is not new in the United States ("SAY THEIR NAMES LIST 2021 #SayTheirNames", n.d.), the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in 2020 prompted a massive global reckoning – including within design disciplines – to understand, grapple with, and ultimately to subvert systems and practices of oppression. Socially-embedded design – not merely socially-

conscious, nor designing for "social impact" – moves beyond a focus on diversity and representation in the professional sphere, into larger-scale sites of collaboration and alignment by way of political movements. Yet to fully understand the role that architects, planners, and others in the design disciplines can play in shifting longstanding power dynamics, it is critical to first acknowledge the ways in which they have maintained or even exacerbated inequities over space and time. Also important are disciplinary concessions that the damages caused by supremacies of space can be, and have been, perpetuated by architects and planners, even those with the best of intentions.

We, the authors, focus on the cultural and historic landscapes of the United States to provide a specific grounding to the interplay of racial politics and design. We look at the US for three main reasons. Firstly, we presume that to understand the positionality of the design disciplines within broader supremacies of space, we must first acknowledge our own. The authors write as racialized Americans, albeit politicized across different generations, urban geographies, pedagogical backgrounds, race and gender lines, and myriad other forms of identity that do not necessarily align with legible markers of difference. The second reason follows directly from the first: that to contextualize the self is to contextualize the same interactions and layers of social and cultural meaning that have shaped physical landscapes across the US. Finally, we assert that any and all considerations of US infrastructural supremacies are fundamentally entangled with racism – and more specifically, with anti-Blackness (Thomas, 1994). By examining spaces of supremacy in the US context, we explicitly define antiracism and Black liberation as our foundational motivating goals. At the most fundamental level, liberation is about safety and sovereignty, as exemplified by maroon communities of the Southern Black Belt and Black agricultural co-op communities during and post-slavery. Liberation is also about celebration – about the legacy of Black people cultivating spaces that literally and symbolically provide community and freedom, such as churches, barbershops, roller rinks, and queer ballroom. And of course, liberation is about political protest and power-building, as realized through memorials, street murals, direct actions, rallies, and virtual platforms for engagement.

The damages caused by supremacies of space can be, and have been, perpetuated by architects and planners, even those with the best of intentions.

By reviewing history through the lens of white supremacy and anti-Black actions, we aim to reorient planning and design away from a do-no-harm approach, with a neutrality that only serves to perpetuate legacies of racism, and towards one of explicit anti-subordination.

This essay is written in three parts: *Cultures of Racism* discusses the reciprocity of ideology and materiality in the racialization of space; *Geographies of Racism* discusses how racialized spaces are fortified by oppressive policies, practices, and projects; and *Resistance and Liberation* discusses how the spatialization of race produces collective political identities, thus catalyzing the potential for new forms of collective resistance and acts of liberatory futuring. In so doing, this essay moves from the perspective of "explaining" racialized landscapes and systems of oppression (i.e., writing for the white gaze) in parts 1 and 2, to considering new design practices rooted in reparative healing and care.

Much of traditional planning and design pedagogy and practice employ narratives of harm and exploitation in analyses of society and space. Contemporary discourse around "equity" in planning often begins by framing history as a series of events which were perpetrated *on* the oppressed rather than perpetrated *by* the privileged. In a similar way, "the substitution of 'race' for 'racism'… transforms the act of the subject into an attribute of the object," whereby "disguised as race, racism becomes something Afro-Americans are, rather than something racists do" (Fields and Fields, 2012). Admittedly, parts 1 and 2 of this essay perpetuate the common framing device of "damage" in its pursuit of explaining the formation of racialized systems and spaces. This is only necessary because while white supremacy as the ideological frame is not new to social activism, it has remained largely absent from planning and design discourse (Goetz, 2020; Williams, 2020). Less common still is discussion on planning and design mechanisms to actually build and concentrate power at the margins; this, despite liberatory actions having been largely enacted through physical space. This essay addresses both issues, positioning race in urban planning and design history as the endemic cornerstone of society and space that it is and then arguing for planning and design to take on a larger role in liberatory futuring. By reviewing history through the lens of white supremacy and anti-Black actions, we aim to reorient planning and design away from a do-no-harm approach, with a neutrality that only serves to perpetuate legacies of racism, and towards one of explicit anti-subordination (Steil, 2018).

Cultures of Racism

Colonization, capitalism, and racism are processes of separating, ordering, and "othering" to shape perceptions of difference, organize physical space, and bolster political hierarchies. Whether by pseudoscientific ideas like polygenism, the imposition of non-indigenous gods and languages on subordinated populations, or drawing boundaries on a map, politically constructed and geographically inscribed ideologies of identity operate by "claiming, naming, numbering, and bounding spaces for the purpose of their control" (Alderman et al., 2021), creating narratives of superiority and inferiority which validate cultural erasure and racial violence.

While processes of racialization (Omi and Winant, 2014) predate western colonization (Gossett, 1997; Nightingale, 2012), the European imperialist expansion into Africa and the Americas (Cox, 1948; Williams, 2021) and concomitant classifications of non-European "others" such as "Indians" and "Negros" (Allen, 1994; Berkhofer, 1979; Jordan, 2013) produced racialized social hierarchies which were used to justify land theft (as well as the theft of identities), resource extraction, and human exploitation with material consequences that persist today (Coates, 2015). As a key outpost of the "British-led globalization of the world's urban real estate market" (Nightingale, 2012: 235), the United States sits at a unique point of imperialist intersectionality where racialized social hierarchies imposed on Africa and America converged by way of the transatlantic slave trade, took root with laws that advantaged "white" people of European descent while disadvantaging "Black" people of African descent (Coates, 2015; Fields, 1990), and which have adapted continuously to constrain African-Americans as a perpetual social, economic, political, ideological, and *spatialized* underclass (Fields, 1990; Glasgow, 1980; Massey and Denton, 1993).

Race is a quintessentially ideological construct. It is politically motivated, identity based, and spatially situated. It has no inherent physical or biological meaning, yet it somehow manages to organize resources, opportunities, and people solely based on differences in their physical appearance. While beliefs based in presumptions of difference are considered prejudices, when enough people share those prejudices, they

Race is a quintessentially ideological construct. It is politically motivated, identity based, and spatially situated.

become normalized, acculturated, and eventually descriptive of daily life. So, prejudice and ideology are just two sides of the same coin. Both are matters of public opinion, distinguishable only by scale (whether cult or culture) and the extent to which they are accepted or imposed by a dominant majority. Sociologist, cultural theorist and political activist Stuart Hall (2017) succinctly described this so-called "power-knowledge-difference" operation as one where those with power produce knowledge, informing how we assess and assign value, positionality, and power and determining how we order society and space. In this way, "racial discourses constitute one of the great, persistent classificatory systems of human culture," whereas challenging ideology thus involves disputing otherwise ostensible "truths" (Hall, 2017).

Famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass did just that. In his now-iconic speech "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?", Douglass (1852) discussed fundamental contradictions between the principles of democratic idealism (liberty and justice) and those of slavery (white supremacy and Black subordination). He questioned how white Americans, as penned by Thomas Jefferson in the US Declaration of Independence, could "hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness", yet none of those rights were extended to Black Americans:

What, am I to argue that it is wrong to make men brutes, to rob them of their liberty, to work them without wages, to keep them ignorant of their relations to their fellow men, to beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them with dogs, to sell them at auction, to sunder their families, to knock out their teeth, to burn their flesh, to starve them into obedience and submission to their master.

Here in his "Fourth of July" speech, Douglass was calling not only for the abolition of slavery but also for the abolition of the ideological inconsistencies that promoted it. While slavery was eventually abolished, racism was not, instead remaining to produce a deeply entrenched and enduring racialized spatial hierarchy in US cities. After the resulting, and prolonged,

After the resulting, and prolonged, spatial separation, subordination, and resource deprivation, the otherwise immaterial idea of race itself produces material consequences.

spatial separation, subordination, and resource deprivation, the otherwise immaterial *idea* of race itself produces material consequences (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). For Black Americans, these include disparities in health, wealth, access to resources and opportunities, and life expectancy – the damages of racism are quite literally visible from the cradle to the grave. Identity spatialized has the capacity to both conceive of difference while also producing it (Hall, 2017). For racialized groups, the consequences of racial ideology eventually became muddled with their causes, making racial determinism seem less like fiction and more like a presumptive matter of fact.

Sixteen years after slavery was abolished, Douglass (1881) published an essay entitled "The Color Line", illustrating this ideological sleight of hand in action. Describing racism's ultimate bodily consequence, he wrote:

In the presence of this spirit, if a crime is committed, and the criminal is not positively known, a suspicious-looking colored man is sure to have been seen in the neighborhood. If an unarmed colored man is shot down and dies in his tracks, a jury, under the influence of this spirit, does not hesitate to find the murdered man the real criminal, and the murderer innocent (Douglass, 1881: 569).

Though penned more than century and a half ago, Douglass's words read more like reporting on the public discourse after the murders of Trayvon Martin in 2012, George Floyd in 2020, and those of countless other unarmed Black people in the United States (notwithstanding period variations in racial rhetoric). While Douglass discussed racial ideology in cultural terms, he also illustrated the relationship of racial hierarchies and hierarchies of space, describing how some people are permitted to move freely, fluidly, and without fear, while others are held suspect, surveilled, and, if necessary, taken down or taken out. Today, cell phone videos capture the brutality that Douglass described in words, revealing how enduring, deeply imprinted, and heavily weighted racial ideology is on the backs and necks of racialized minorities, and also revealing its material, even lethal, consequences. In the United States, a resilient and highly adaptive imperialist white supremacist capitalist racial ideology has been developed, perfected, and etched into the national DNA (Beckert, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2015;

For racialized groups, the consequences of racial ideology eventually became muddled with their causes, making racial determinism seem less like fiction and more like a presumptive matter of fact.

hooks, 1984; Johnson, 2013; Olmsted, 1862; Williams, 2021), simultaneously laying the economic foundation for a new democracy and establishing an injurious legacy for the racialized minorities – both of which were central to the nation's making.

Geographies of Racism

In planning and design disciplines, race is still treated more as an area of specialization than as an endemic cornerstone of society and space (Thomas, 1994). The spatial manifestations of racial ideology in fact result directly from the overlapping impacts of urban projects, policies, and practices, which are rooted in white supremacy and have together produced racially segregated built environments. Renowned sociologist, historian, and geographer W.E.B. Du Bois not only understood the cultural implications of racial ideology but also anticipated their influence on the spatial organization of cities. Five years after Frederick Douglass's death, Du Bois curated a display of maps, diagrams, and images for the Paris Exhibition of 1900 where he sought to visually depict the "development of the American Negro." Perhaps the most prophetic image in the collection was the study's cover, which juxtaposed an illustration of the "Routes of the African Slave Trade" with a woefully clairvoyant prognostication inscribed at the bottom: "The problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line." By adding hyphenation, a literal stroke of his pen, Du Bois transformed Douglass's conceptualization of the "color line" as a cultural phenomenon into the "color-line" as a racialized delineation of physical space. In a single image, Du Bois reflected on the country's original sin while also forecasting the urban racial apartheid which was still early in the making, but would soon come to define the socio-spatial logic of US cities in terms which persist today.

Racial hierarchies have impacted the development of physical landscapes across scales of time and space, and historic design actions continue to produce tangible, embodied disparities in the present day. Geographer Richard H. Schein focuses on how the economic logics of slavery have shaped contemporary US landscapes. In *Landscape and Race in the United States*, Schein (2012) unpacks how contemporary spatial orders are both derived from and inherited by racialized groups,

In planning and design disciplines, race is still treated more as an area of specialization than as an endemic cornerstone of society and space.

Racial hierarchies have impacted the development of physical landscapes across scales of time and space, and historic design actions continue to produce tangible, embodied disparities in the present day.

particularly with regards to the spatial circumstances of white dependence on Black servitude. Slave quarters were built next to main houses but comfortably out of sight for white slavers, and, after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 ended slavery, many formerly enslaved people living in cities settled along back alleys of white residential neighborhoods, near the white families they continued to serve, but again comfortably out of sight. Others established settlements called Freedmen's Towns or "freedom colonies", creating safe spaces for Black life outside of city limits and outside of the white gaze, in much the same way that so-called "hush harbors" had been spaces of Black solidarity and communion during slavery times.

While racialized campaigns discussed later occurred at a national scale throughout the 20th century, they were hardly limited to national projects – in fact, some of the most inconspicuous sites of white supremacy operate on the smallest of scales. According to a study conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center (Gunter et al., 2016), between 1860 and 2015 more than 1,500 Confederate monuments and memorials were erected in public spaces or buildings, including trails, parks, schools, and courthouses. White Southerners embarked on a centuries-long campaign to rewrite history. Instead of slavery, their newfound cause was one of state sovereignty and national heritage; ownership of Black bodies had been legally constrained, robbing whiteness of one of its most fundamental claims to identity. As if some perverse form of recourse, physical icons of white supremacy and spatial control were constructed across the US, most prominently in states with the largest Black populations. There were two notable spikes in this mythmaking campaign. The first was between 1900 and 1920, accompanying and supporting racial space-controls connected to newly enacted Jim Crow laws. The second was between 1954 and 1968 as an apparent backlash to the Civil Rights Movement and rapid succession of legislative victories against racist policies and practices in housing, education, and employment.

Despite the obvious ways in which monument-making campaigns have been coincident with national identity-building efforts, their ideological roots and cultural inspirations often transcend geopolitical boundaries. US state houses and federal capital buildings – the

Between 1860 and 2015 more than 1,500 Confederate monuments and memorials were erected in public spaces or buildings, including trails, parks, schools, and courthouses.

Policies and programs designed under the auspices of nation-building, city-building, and the building of homes for an emerging American middle class successfully increased homeownership in suburban communities outside of cities and with easy highway access back in.

ideological and practical seats of power – emulate Euro-centric morphologies; the same aesthetics have also been deployed in prominent national and international cultural venues (Wilson, 2021). The Chicago World's Fair Columbia Exposition of 1893, for example, – fittingly dubbed "White City", albeit to describe the color of the buildings more so than their ideological significance – featured neoclassical designs explicitly based on Western European architectural orders, ushering in the City Beautiful and Beaux-Arts Movements of city and architectural design which came to define urban planning and design at a time when prominent US cities and their civic architecture were being imagined (Foglesong, 2014). Although the fair was designed to present the progress of nations, organizers denied Black Americans any acknowledgement for their role in national progress. As chronicled in meticulous detail by Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, I. Garland Penn, and F. L. Barnett in *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*, the presentation of American progress not only excluded Black Americans, this despite their own odds-defying progress following Emancipation, but in-doing-so also omitted recognition of the nation's greatest and most significant demonstration of ideological progress to date: Emancipation through enactment of the 13th Amendment (Douglass et al., 1893).

The spatialization of race intensified in the middle of the twentieth century with the collision of two post-World War II migratory patterns. First, a mid-20th-century peak of the Great Migration saw Black Americans moving north and west to escape Jim Crow laws of the Deep South and pursue economic opportunity. This was quickly followed by "white flight" of white Americans moving to the suburbs, motivated by the promise of a better life and fueled by federally insured mortgage lending that chiefly benefited white veterans and steered them away from "redlined" inner-city neighborhoods which were becoming increasingly Black. Publicly funded highways and urban renewal projects swept through US cities, promising to connect and rebuild crumbling urban cores, but instead systematically dismantling them. Policies and programs designed under the auspices of nation-building (the Federal Highway Act of 1956), city-building (the American Housing Act of 1949),

and the building of homes for an emerging American middle class (National Housing Act of 1934 the GI Bill of 1944) successfully increased homeownership in suburban communities outside of cities and with easy highway access back in. But they did so by separating, or clearing, the same Black neighborhoods that white Americans were fleeing, disproportionately harming racialized minorities which had already been spatially constrained by decades of racial zoning and restrictive deeds. The results were sprawling suburban utopias for white Americans, and hyperdense low-income ghettos for Black Americans.

All the while, the dominant narrative supporting urban renewal projects from the 1950s through the 1980s was a myth of economic and infrastructural necessity (Caves, 2004) – the claim that "everyone" was leaving cities, and something had to be done to save them was firmly grounded in logics centering whiteness. Black populations were in fact increasing in many US cities, peaking at precisely the same time that federally funded urban renewal plans and highway projects were being drawn up. As Black families moved in to improve their economic circumstances, white families left for the suburbs, taking with them the local tax base that had previously supported and maintained inner-city infrastructures. Propaganda campaigns fueled a further expansion of metropolitan suburbs, especially in cities experiencing the largest influx of Black migrants. White families were furnished with low-cost, government-backed pathways into the middle class while Black families were trapped in the least desirable corners of the city, further concretizing the spatialization of race, resources, and power.

While racialized spaces in cities today are unavoidable, they were not inevitable. They were socially engineered by racial zoning and restrictive deeds, urban renewal and highway construction, as well as suburban exclusion and low-income housing consolidation, all pushing racialized communities into smaller and smaller areas of the city and farther and farther away from resources and opportunities. But whether expressed as ideas or movements, a Black spatial imaginary has been one of collective power and resistance (Lipsitz, 2011).

US state houses and federal capital buildings – the ideological and practical seats of power – emulate Euro-centric morphologies; the same aesthetics have also been deployed in prominent national and international cultural venues.

The concept of Blackness has in many ways become one of collectivity – not only because of the cross-class spatial circumstances of neighborhoods organized by race rather than class, but also because of its function as "an extraordinary coping system built upon mutual exchange and reciprocity".

Resistance and Liberation

Black identity emerged out of a "radical solidarity" of "cross-class affinities" (Lipsitz, 2011), an assertion which can at first seem overly reductive. There are indeed an "extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences, and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounding in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature" (Hall, 2017). But, because of the largely shared history by Black Americans discussed in the first two sections – an experience which DuBois (1940) calls the "social heritage of slavery" – the concept of Blackness has in many ways become one of collectivity – not only because of the cross-class spatial circumstances of neighborhoods organized by race rather than class, but also because of its function as "an extraordinary coping system built upon mutual exchange and reciprocity" (Logan and Molotch, 2007). Spatially distinct practices of investment, surveillance, and incarceration produced patterns of segregation and disenfranchisement that continue to maintain cultures and geographies of racism. However, those spaces simultaneously generate collectively rooted and allied forms of identity, which in turn allow for broad-based coalition and movement-building. The catalytic potential latent in politicizing the politicized has long been recognized by prominent Black activists and thinkers. For example, Martin Luther King Jr.'s seminal 1967 text *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* – which includes the famous, evocative likening of "suburbs [as] white nooses around the Black necks of the cities" – underscores spatial development and design as a fundamental pillar of racism in the United States. At the same time, King saw that those racialized spaces were giving rise to spatialized solutions – that bus boycotts, youth-led sit-ins, mass rallies, and other forms of mobilization and political transformation were made possible not only through shared struggle, but shared space. Throughout history, it has been critical for collective actions to be grounded in physical sites – to move from symbolic expressions of solidarity to embodied exercises of it – because, as author, feminist, and

social activist bell hooks (2008) asserts, people "cannot have a spiritual center without having a geographic one." The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement taps into longstanding traditions of Black activism and liberation and has gained momentum through local and global demonstrations centered on both racial justice (chanting "No justice, no peace!") and spatial sovereignty ("Whose streets? Our streets!"). The cross-racial, cross-class, and other cross-political alliances in BLM highlight the intersectionality of contemporary discourses around racial justice. Yet, there remains little clarity on the role of the design disciplines in larger-scale movements. There is significant promise in the many local, diffuse efforts to align architects, planners, and designers with struggles for racial equity ("Blackspace," n.d.; "Dark Matter University," n.d.; "Design As Protest," n.d.) – but as a whole, the relational infrastructures between the design field and Black liberatory movements are tenuous at best. Yet public space – a primary vehicle for wielding collective action – exists squarely under the purview of the design disciplines. Theories of racial justice, solidarity economy-building, and other grounding ideals of people-powered movements are, and will continue to be, translated, negotiated, and reified through physical landscapes (e.g. Hood, 2020; Gooden, 2016). The historic and cultural terrains of the US continue to serve as sites of racialization and politicization – as well as the wellspring from which the politicized build power and resistance. In *Chaos or Community?* MLK Jr. (1969, posthumously) calls attention to and excoriates the racialized spatial dynamics of US policymaking:

Problems of education, transportation to jobs and decent living conditions are all made difficult because housing is so rigidly segregated… Housing deteriorates in central cities; urban renewal has been Negro removal and has benefited big merchants and real estate interests; and suburbs expand with little regard for what happens to the rest of America (King, 1969: 200).

Recognizing that many, if not all, of these structural dynamics have carried through to present day - it is now beyond time to understand: How can the design disciplines resituate themselves in resistance and

There is significant promise in the many local, diffuse efforts to align architects, planners, and designers with struggles for racial equity.

liberation-based frameworks of pedagogy and practice? While designers have often been proximal to political movements, political proximity is not enough – an explicit understanding of and embeddedness in antiracist, reparative design is what's needed to combat the multivalent legacies of racism in the US. In fact, ostensibly "neutral" political alignments of the past have meant aligning with systems of oppression – the creation and execution of slum clearance and urban renewal programs that King writes so forcefully against were only made possible through the active participation and leadership of designers.

Resituating the design disciplines toward antiracist work begins with the analytical process itself – with the very process of "seeing" space that bleeds into representation and physical development. Critical race theorist and indigenous scholar Eve Tuck (2009) has powerfully critiqued the overuse of negative data and imagery, and points to the pervasiveness of such framing, even within purportedly socially mindful projects. Communities continuously portrayed as victims are left with overwhelmingly negative images of themselves, rather than with assets on which they can build. Tuck advocates for moving beyond damage towards representations of desire - for "documenting not only the painful elements of social realities, but also the wisdom and hope".

Moving to desire-based frameworks will require designers to stop exclusively focusing on historic harms, and instead work in direct conversation with those affected to realize the latent opportunities within specific geographic and cultural contexts. While redlining and other federal policies and practices created chronically underinvested communities across the US, many of these areas have been the locus of organizing and protest calling for alternative models of public safety and public health. Furthermore, designers and planners often work on the local scale, which allows practitioners to more fully map out the landscape of local expertise and communal memory – and to build public spaces that honor and reflect the needs and desires of the historically marginalized.

Drawing on desires rather than damage will allow designers and planners to circumvent models of practice rooted in white supremacy. The racialized generally do not need help in seeing racism.

> Drawing on desires rather than damage will allow designers and planners to circumvent models of practice rooted in white supremacy.

The task of "explaining" or "proving" racism is one that coddles perspectives of whiteness. And yet, it is understandable that when it comes to urban space, the initial impulse is to focus on damage and on sites of violence – on riots, lynchings, mobs, and physical monuments to white supremacy. These historic threads of trauma are both literally passed down through oral memories and physical objects as well as spiritually absorbed through historic and lived experiences. But Black radical and Afro-futurist traditions also point to a new mode of practice, and of being, based in projecting forward – in moving beyond the limitations of present-day economic and political realities, and instead within political movements to change what realities become possible (Anderson, 2021).

In fact, the design disciplines are actually quite well-suited to support the work of radical futuring. In many ways, the fields are based in imaginative and speculative representation. The question is how to embed planning and design with frontline coalitions, and how to channel design imagination towards reparative, just futures. Activist-academic and urban planner Lily Song (2021) has defined reparative planning and design through a synergistic, multi-scalar framework: as "acts of repair, healing, and making"; as centering the margins as "spaces of radical insight, openness, and possibility"; as the decommodification of space and relational networks, and parallel investment in regenerative publics and practices; and as a future-facing planning and design pedagogy and culture that "[upholds] intergenerational knowledge, situated insight, and creative practices of frontline communities". Under this lens, design and planning are not about curing, but about healing. Reparative practices are just as much about the process as the outcome, and radical design futuring becomes a means to directly support place-based movements agitating for intersectional justice.

Radical design futuring also provides a vehicle for imagining and co-designing what George Lipsitz (2011) has referred to as the "Black spatial imaginary" – physical spaces and governing processes that embrace democratic, equitable ideals, rather than the hegemonic "white spatial imaginary" that values "hostile privatism and defensive localism". Symbols of the white spatial imaginary persist across the nation.

Design and planning are not about curing, but about healing.

The ever-growing compendium of Black artistry and community-building is an extension of radical design futuring, actively reshaping and expanding the sociocultural and physical boundaries of the Black spatial imaginary.

The act of imagining what *could be,* in place of *what is,* fundamentally relies on the ability to understand, synthesize, and represent collective visions. Representation constructs and disseminates textual and visual narratives of place, which imparts real effects on cultural and physical landscapes. In other words, representation is a privilege, and representation is power.

Visual representation has long been about shifting cultural narratives. In addition to unapologetically abolitionist orations and essays, Frederick Douglass also wielded his own image in activating representation as a form of resistance. As the most photographed person of his time – even more so than President Lincoln! (Gates Jr., 2016) – Douglass presented 160 pictographic counter-narratives to the cultural slander branding Black men as less than human, much less as dignified gentlemen. Similarly, Du Bois's Paris exhibit strategically deployed portraits of Black excellence and data visualizations illustrating incremental – but collective – economic growth; depicting Black Americans as scientists at Howard University, hoteliers, businessmen, and smartly dressed families, defined by their aspirations and achievements rather than structural limitations. Of the 553 photographs and graphics presented, less than a dozen portrayed Black Americans as impoverished or ineffectual. Rather, the predominant image and cultural message that Du Bois presented was defiantly one of progress.

The ever-growing compendium of Black artistry and community-building is an extension of radical design futuring, actively reshaping and expanding the sociocultural and physical boundaries of the Black spatial imaginary. If, as Cornel West (2017) says, "justice is what love looks like in public, just like tenderness is what love feels like in private", then bearing witness and contributing to this living archive of resistance and liberation – of representational imprints spanning the individual to the collective – can reach across space and time to inform what antiracism and Black liberation look like for social movements and built environments in the present and future.

And what of antiracist and liberatory design? Damian White (2020), writing about Just Climate Transitions, has argued for moving away from capital-D Design – something seen as the exclusive domain of

professionals – and towards design as a "generalizable human practice". Liberatory, antiracist, reparative design is about foundationally changing how we think about architecture and urban space – about building relational networks in support of intersectional political alliances; about wielding physical space as a means of building the political will and capacity of those at the margins; and about deploying radical design futuring to motivate new economic systems, cultural values, and processes of spatialization. "If you design for people at the margins, you automatically get the people in the middle. People at the margins are living with the failures of society" (McDowell, 2019). Reflecting on this country's long history of intentional racist planning and policymaking, today's planners, designers, and policymakers have an ethical obligation to realign our priorities and adopt intentional antiracist agendas that address the legacy pockets of inequality in Black and brown communities – advancing a racial equity agenda both outside, and inside, the organizations and institutions with which we work. What we need to dismantle the always-targeted impacts of racial ideology on racialized minorities is to have an equally targeted approach that redistributes resources, redistributes opportunities, and redistributes power.

Equity toolkits and resilience frameworks have become important resources for cities grappling with their own legacies of inequality and uneven exposure to risk. Yet with few exceptions, the subject of race remains largely absent from resilience discourse, and even more so from planning and design practice. The triple threat of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and continually increasing economic inequality – all of which disproportionately impact communities of color – alongside trending public conversations around resilience, racial equity, and twenty-first century infrastructures present opportunities to finally address racial injustices head on.

Developed by the High Line Network, in collaboration with Harvard University Graduate School of Design, and Urban Institute, the *Community First Toolkit* has a single aim: "embedding equity in public spaces". It is designed to help cities and civil society organizations contextualize their projects within legacies of racialized policy and practice-illuminating the complicated

Equity toolkits and resilience frameworks have become important resources for cities grappling with their own legacies of inequality and uneven exposure to risk. Yet with few exceptions, the subject of race remains largely absent.

No single strategy nor scale of action can account for the vast array of local contexts and relational networks that exist across the US. However, the design disciplines can serve as a potentially catalytic force in terms of building and visualizing shared languages, shared spaces, and shared visions of radically inclusive futures.

relationship between systemic racism and the production of space – and equip them to tackle impediments to racial equality and community resilience. It asks planners, designers, civil society organizations, and city officials to engage more honestly with the social and spatial manifestations of racism such that they can begin to more naturally center community aspirations, anticipate community impacts, and create inclusive processes aimed at mitigating the harms caused by systemic racism, social inequality, and uneven power dynamics. In very practical ways, it invites spatial actors to consider how their internal operations and external partnerships can impact a project's outcomes (equitable or not) and can either support or impede community resilience.

The *Community First Toolkit* is one example of how planning and design can begin to reframe development efforts and ground future planning efforts around a robust understanding of local narratives and histories. However, truly liberatory design will need to be deployed by many publics, across many different scales of operation. When white supremacy and colonialism function as a great breaking apart – of communities, of lineages, of bodies – the impacts on people and space manifest in heterogenous ways. No single strategy nor scale of action can account for the vast array of local contexts and relational networks that exist across the US. However, the design disciplines can serve as a potentially catalytic force in terms of building and visualizing shared languages, shared spaces, and shared visions of radically inclusive futures.

References

Alderman, D. H., Inwood, J. F., Bottone, E. (2021), *The Mapping behind the Movement: On Recovering the Critical Cartographies of the African American Freedom Struggle*, "Geoforum", vol. 120, pp. 67-78.

Anderson, S., Wilson, M., Museum of Modern Art (2021), *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*. New York, The Museum of Modern Art.

Beckert, S. (2015), *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, New York City, Vintage.

Blackspace [Online]. Available at: http://theblackspace.org/ [Accessed 23 October 2021].

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015), *The Structure of Racism in Color-blind,"Post-racial" America*, Los Angeles, Sage Publications.

Caves, R. W. (2004), *Encyclopedia of the City*, London, Routledge.

Coates, T.-N. (2015) *The Case for Reparations*, New York City, Columbia University Press.

Cox, O. C. (1948), *Caste, Class, & Race: A Study in Social Dynamics*, New York, Monthly Review.

Dark Matter University [Online]. Available at: https://darkmatteruniversity.org/ [Accessed 23 October 2021].

Design As Protest [Online]. Available at: https://www.dapcollective.com [Accessed 23 October 2021].

Douglass, F. (1881), *The Color Line*, "The North American Review", n. 132, pp. 567-577.

Douglass, F. (1852), *The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro*, in F. Douglass, *Selected Speeches and Writings*, pp. 188-206.

Douglass, F. (1893), *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* [Online]. Available at: <https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C4389843?account_id=11311&usage_group_id=103838> [Accessed 02 February 2022].

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1899), *African American Photographs Assembled for 1900 Paris Exposition - Du Bois Materials US Library of Congress* [Online]. Available at: www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/anedub/dubois.html [Accessed 23 October 2021].

Du Bois, W. E. B. (1940), *Dusk of Dawn, an Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, New York, Harcourt, Brace & Company.

Ewen, E., Ewen, S. (2006), *Typecasting : On the Arts & Sciences of Human Inequality*, New York, Seven Stories Press.

Fields, B. J. (1990), *Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America*, "New Left Review", n. 181, pp. 95-118.

Fields, K. E., Fields, B. J. (2012), *Of Rogues and Geldings*, in *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, London, Verso, pp. 95-111.

Foglesong, R. E. (2014), *Five. Planning The City Beautiful,* in *Planning the Capitalist City*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, pp. 124-166.

Gates Jr., H.L. (2016), *Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura*, "Aperture", n. 223, pp. 27-29.

Glasgow, D. G. (1980), *The Black Underclass: Poverty, Unemployment, and Entrapment of Ghetto Youth*, Hoboken, Jossey-Bass.

Goetz, E. G., Williams, R. A., Damiano, A. (2020), *Whiteness and Urban Planning*, "Journal of the American Planning Association", n. 86, pp. 142-156.

Gooden, M. (2016), *Dark Space: Architecture, Representation, Black Identity*, New York, Columbia University Press.

Gossett, T. F. (1997), *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Gunter, B., Kizzire, J., Kent, C. (2016), *Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy*, Montgomery, Southern Poverty Law Center.

Hall, S. (2017). *Race-The Sliding Signifier,* in N. Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, pp. 31-79.

Hood, W., Tada, G. M. (2020), *Black Landscapes Matter*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press.

hooks, b. (1984), *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, Boston, South End Press.

hooks, b. (2008), *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, New York, Routledge.

Johnson, W. (2013), *River of Dark Dreams*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press.

King, M. L. (1969), *Chaos or community?,* London, Penguin Books.

Lake, M., Reynolds, H. (2008), *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the Question of Racial Equality,* Melbourne, Melbourne University Publishing.

Lipsitz, G. (2011), *How Racism Takes Place*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press.

Logan, J. R., Molotch, H. (2007), *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place, with a New Preface,* Berkeley, University of California Press.

Massey, D., Denton, N. A. (1993), *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass,* Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press.

McDowell, C. (2019), *Dialogue in Demographic Complexity: Overcoming Our Discriminatory Consciousness. Ikeda Lecture. DePaul University Institute for Daisaku Ikeda Studies in Education* [Online]. Available at: https://ikedainstitute.com/2020/07/08/2019-ikeda-lecture/[Accessed 23 October 2021].

Nightingale, C. H. (2012), *Segregation: A Global History of Divided Cities*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Olmsted, F. L. (1862), *Journeys and Explorations in the Cotton Kingdom: A Traveller's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States. Based Upon Three Former Volumes of Journeys and Investigations,* vol. 2, San Francisco, Son & Company.

Omi, M., Winant, H. (2014), *Racial Formation in the United States*, New York, Routledge.

SAY THEIR NAMES LIST 2021, *#SayTheirNames* [Online]. Available at: https://sayevery.name/ [Accessed 23 October 2021].

Schein, R. H. (2012), *Urban Form and Racial Order,* "Urban Geography", n. 33, pp. 942-960.

Song, L. (2021), *Advancing Transit-oriented Communities and Planning for Equity in Los Angeles,* recorded speech, Cambridge (MA), 26 March 2021 [Online]. Available at: https://

www.jchs.harvard.edu/calendar/advancing-transit-oriented-communities-and-planning-equity-los-angeles [Accessed 23 October 2021].

Steil, J. (2018), *Antisubordination Planning*, "Journal of Planning Education and Research", vol. 38, pp. 1-10.

Thomas, J. M. (1994), *Planning History and the Black Urban Experience: Linkages and Contemporary Implications*, "Journal of Planning Education and Research", n. 14, pp. 1-11.

Tuck, E. (2009), *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*, "Harvard Educational Review", n. 79, pp. 409-428.

West, C. (2017), *Spiritual Blackout, Imperial Meltdown, Prophetic Fightback* [Recorded speech], Cambridge (MA), 4 October 2017, AskWith Forum. Available at: https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/17/09/askwith-essentials-who-cornel-west

White, D. (2020), *Just Transitions/Design for Transitions: Preliminary Notes on a Design Politics for a Green New Deal*, "Capitalism nature socialism", n. 31, pp. 20-39.

Williams, E. (2021), *Capitalism and Slavery*, Chapel Hill, UNC Press Books.

Williams, R. A. (2020), *From Racial to Reparative Planning: Confronting the 'White' Side of Planning*, "Journal of Planning Education and Research", n. 0, pp. 1-11.

Wilson, M. O. (2021) *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums*, Berkeley, University of California Press.