

# The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race

## Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape

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**ABSTRACT** A primary goal of landscape architects and other citizens concerned with the built environment should be to disassemble the fatal links that connect race, place, and power. This article shows that the national spatial imaginary is racially marked, and that segregation serves as a crucible for creating the emphasis on exclusion and augmented exchange value that has guided the contemporary ideal of the properly-ordered, prosperous private home. For aggrieved communities of color and other non-normative populations, on the other hand, a different spatial imaginary exists. This perspective on space revolves around solidarities within, between, and across spaces. It views space as valuable and finite, as a public responsibility for which all must take stewardship. Privileging the public good over private interests, this spatial imaginary envisions the costs of environmental protection, efficient transportation, affordable housing, public education, and universal medical care as common responsibilities to be shared rather than as onerous burdens to be avoided. This paper argues for a two-part strategy that entails first, a frontal attack on all the mechanisms that prevent people of color from equal opportunities to accumulate assets that appreciate in value and that can be passed down across generations, and second, the embrace of a spatial imaginary based on privileging use value over exchange value, sociality over selfishness, and inclusion over exclusion.

**KEYWORDS** Defensive localism, hostile privatism, racialization, black spatial imaginary

Late in June 2005, eighty-two-year-old Allison “Tootie” Montana stood before the New Orleans City Council and spoke his mind. Montana complained to the council about the brutal force used by police officers in dispersing a gathering at the corner of LaSalle Street and Washington Avenue earlier that year. The crowd consisted of Mardi Gras Indian tribes—social clubs of black men who masquerade as Plains Indians and parade through their neighborhoods in flamboyant costumes twice a year, on Mardi Gras Day and St. Joseph’s Day. The officers contended that the group was rowdy, boisterous, and loud, that the participants had no permit to assemble at the intersection, and that some members of the group appeared inebriated and potentially violent. Montana saw things differently.

Speaking from his perspective as a resident of the Seventh Ward, the oldest continuous free black neighborhood in the United States, as a black worker whose labor as a lather had helped build houses throughout

the city of New Orleans, and as a respected elder—Chief of the Yellow Pocahontas Tribe and reigning “Chief of Chiefs” of all the Mardi Gras Indian tribes—Montana contended that those assembled posed no threat to civic order and that the Indians had never needed a permit before though their organizations have been parading every St. Joseph’s Day for more than a century.

Montana identified the incident as only the latest insult in a long history of struggles, going back to the 1940s, over space in New Orleans. He described incident after incident of police surveillance, harassment, and provocation. He pointed to the importance of the corner of LaSalle and Washington in the context of the constant destruction of key neighborhood sites by urban renewal projects, freeway construction, and displacement of local residents. He affirmed the right of the Indians to assemble and complained about official suppression of that right over five decades. Montana told the council members solemnly, “I want this to stop.” He then paused, collapsed, and fell to the floor (Reckdahl 2005, 1).

As city officials called for an ambulance, police officers surrounded the fallen chief and administered CPR. City Council President Oliver Thomas adjourned the meeting and asked those present to pray. The Indians in the room began to sing “Indian Red,” a song that serves as a prayer traditionally voiced to honor the tribal chief. Montana died later that night at Charity Hospital.

Tootie Montana passed away while championing the right of black people in New Orleans to occupy and traverse urban space. His final words—“I want this to stop”—speak volumes about the seriousness that lies beneath the surface spectacle of the Indians’ colorful hand-made costumes, intricate language and lore, festive dances, and celebratory songs (Lipsitz 1990, 233–253; 1994, 71–77). In New Orleans, where decades of housing discrimination, environmental racism, urban renewal, and police harassment have relegated different races to different spaces, the ferocious theatricality and aggressive festivity of the Mardi Gras Indians holds

great significance for the politics of place. Indian imagery evokes a history of heroic self-defense by non-white people against the theft of their lands. Montana's Yellow Pocahontas tribe, like all Mardi Gras Indian groups, comes from a specific neighborhood and speaks for it. The corner of Lasalle and Washington is not just any corner. It is a place where Indians have congregated for more than a century, and it is the location of the Dew Drop Inn, a venerable hotel, rhythm and blues nightclub, and performance venue famous for its flamboyant transvestite entertainers.

The Mardi Gras Indians and the New Orleans Police Department clashed on March 19 because they proceeded from diametrically opposed understandings of space, from distinct spatial imaginaries rooted in the links between space and race. From the perspective of the police department, dispersing the Indians was fully justified. The officers felt their obligations to protect property values, to keep local thoroughfares open for commerce, and to assure that tourists would have unimpeded and untroubled access to places where they might wish to spend their money in and near the scenic French Quarter, justified the dispersal of the crowd assembled without a permit at the corner of Washington and Lasalle. These same officers, however, would never act in the same way toward the crowds of revelers that routinely congregate near the Louisiana Superdome on days when the local professional football team plays its games. The football crowds do not have permits to assemble; are loud, boisterous, often drunk; and pose a greater threat to public order than the gatherings of Mardi Gras Indians. However, they congregate to spend a large amount of money in a state-authorized (and subsidized) facility. Their revelry produces profits for private businesses. Their rituals and traditions are important to wealthy whites.

The Indian tribes, on the other hand, function all year round in their neighborhoods as mutual aid societies. They help members meet unexpected emergencies, pay medical bills and funeral expenses, finance urgent home repairs, and make up for lost wages caused by layoffs, illness, and injuries. These forms of self-help serve

especially important functions because of the price that black people in New Orleans pay for the racialization of space and the spatialization of race. Systematic segregation and discrimination prevent them from freely acquiring assets that appreciate in value, from moving to desirable neighborhoods with better services and amenities, and from reaping the rewards of home ownership built into the American tax code. Urban renewal projects, like the local football stadium and the Convention Center, have dispersed neighbors to far flung destinations, undermined collective and individual equity in homes and businesses, reduced the political power of black voters, and disrupted the routines of neighborhood social and support groups.

Like the members of suburban homeowners' associations and stakeholders in Common Interest Developments, the inner-city residents who mask as Mardi Gras Indians express a defensive localism. Unlike their counterparts in the suburbs, who establish private governments that benefit from exclusionary zoning and tax subsidized privatism, inner-city residents do not and cannot control the uses to which their neighborhoods are put by the rest of the city, nor can they secure increases in the *exchange value* of their homes. Their only recourse under these circumstances is to increase the *use value* of their neighborhoods by turning "segregation into congregation" and fashioning ferocious attachments to place as a means of producing useful mechanisms of solidarity (Lewis 1991, 91–2).

Musician Cyril Neville learned about Indian masking from his uncle George Landry, who served as Big Chief Jolly of the Wild Tchoupitoulas. "We don't need your fancy floats," Neville imagines the Indians saying to the downtown Mardi Gras. "We don't need floats at all. We have our own stories, our own music, our own drama. We'll make our own costumes according to our designs and we'll design our own parades." Neville recalls his uncle's moral authority as being rooted in their family's uptown Thirteenth Ward neighborhood, taking the name of his tribe from the name of a local street, and masking as an Indian to tell the world, "This is who I am, this is where I'm from" (Neville et al. 2000, 245).

On the day when the official Mardi Gras parade enshrines Canal Street as the center of the city, the Indians parade proudly through their neighborhoods, calling communities into being through performance. As Cyril Neville explains, “The mythology of the tribes is based on territorial integrity—this is our plot of ground where we rule.” He believes Chief Jolly’s sense of self-affirmation also came from his uptown Thirteenth Ward neighborhood (Neville et al. 2000, 245).

### THE RACIALIZATION OF SPACE AND THE SPATIALIZATION OF RACE

The different spatial imaginaries of the New Orleans Police Department and the Mardi Gras Indian tribes have local causes and consequences, but they are part and parcel of a larger process: the racialization of space and the spatialization of race. The lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension. People of different races in the United States are relegated to different physical locations by housing and lending discrimination, by school district boundaries, by policing practices, by zoning regulations, and by the design of transit systems. The racial demography of the places where people live, work, play, shop, and travel exposes them to a socially-shared system of exclusion and inclusion. Race serves as a key variable in determining who has the ability to own homes that appreciate in value and can be passed down to subsequent generations; in deciding which children have access to education by experienced and credentialed teachers in safe buildings with adequate equipment; and in shaping differential exposure to polluted air, water, food, and land (Allen 1995; Feagin and McKinney 2003; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Lipsitz 1998).

Opportunities in this society are both spatialized and racialized. Inheritance based on home ownership enables white families to pass on the benefits of past and present discrimination to succeeding generations. Putatively race-neutral tax policies subsidize those forms of income most likely to be secured, in part, from

discriminatory practices. The home mortgage interest deduction, the local property tax deduction, and the favored treatment of income derived from inheritance and capital gains provide enhanced rewards for racism and subsidies for segregation. Segregated schools and neighborhoods provide whites with privileged access to insider information and personal networks, giving them advantages in securing the 80 to 90 percent of jobs in American society that are never openly advertised.

These interconnections among race, place, and power in the United States have a long history. They stem from concrete policies and practices: Indian removal in the age of westward expansion; restrictive covenants during the industrial era; and urban renewal and urban restructuring in the late industrial and early post-industrial periods (Rogin 1987; Hirsch 1983; Sugrue 1996). Yet these policies also emanate from shared cultural ideals and moral geographies based on a romance with pure spaces. This romance fuels allegiances to defensive localism and hostile privatism. It encourages well-off communities to hoard amenities and resources, exclude allegedly undesirable populations, and maximize property values in competition with other communities.

Having a better understanding of differential space, of the roles played by exclusion, exchange value, and use value in determining the racial meanings of places, can help landscape architects and other professionals whose work shapes the built environment to ameliorate the racialization of space and the spatialization of race. It is not yet possible, however, to formulate a valid general theory about race and space across different kinds of societies and historical eras. Land-use regulations, racial categories, and culturally-based investments in landscape vary widely across centuries, countries, and continents.<sup>1</sup> The relationship of race to the Enlightenment—as its always disavowed yet universally produced product—makes it necessary to struggle in separate sites to unearth and identify the occluded and disavowed historical genealogies and ideologies of racialized space particular to specific locations.

Understanding the links between race and place in the United States starts with an examination of concrete racial and spatial practices. Theoretical writings of Antonio Gramsci show that great value can be secured from thinking about large concepts in relation to specific and concrete historical and sociological situations (Hall 1986, 5–27). Louis Althusser (1971) demonstrates how this kind of thinking can bring new insights to general theory. Althusser depicts the general Marxist theory of social totality through a spatial metaphor that likens society to a house with a material “foundation” and an ideological “superstructure.” Conceding that the metaphor is descriptive rather than analytic, it enables us to see how social structure is both material and ideological. Althusser’s argument forms a kind of descriptive theory because it enables us to view reproduction of the social order simultaneously as a political, ideological, and economic imperative. The metaphor may become theory if and when it activates a perspective that enables new relationships to come into view (Althusser 1971, 90–92). Similarly, the idea of racially specific spatial imaginaries is not a theory, but a metaphorical construct that reveals actual social relations.

Donna Haraway builds on Althusser’s emphases on both metaphor and description to argue for the superiority of “situated” specific theory over universal grand theory. Using the metaphor of human and animal vision to show that knowledge is “partial, perspectival, and interested,” Haraway insists on the particularity and embodiment of all vision. She argues for the value of partial perspective, for seeing from a situated standpoint. Instead of aspiring to an all-encompassing “eye of God,” she urges us to accept the inevitable partiality of all perspectives, to build on local and situated knowledges, and to construct “an earthwide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different—and power differentiated—communities” (Haraway 1988, 580). Haraway’s aim is not to present knowledge as the private property of incommensurable communities, but neither is it to subsume the experiences of aggrieved groups

into sweeping generalizations for which no one is accountable. She argues that theories that claim universal applicability will in practice merely elevate one historically-specific dominant particular over others, assuming universality rather than proving it. Rather than proclaiming one more dominant particular as a universal, Haraway seeks to build a better-theorized understanding of the world by promoting conversations, debates, and conflicts capable of registering clashes of experiences, interests, and perspectives, while compelling us to make choices about knowledge based on the broadest possible range of points of view. To follow Haraway’s recommendations, we should stage a confrontation between the moral geography of pure space and the moral geography of differentiated space as it has developed among aggrieved communities of color.

## **THE SPATIAL IMAGINARY OF WHITENESS AND BLACKNESS**

A white spatial imaginary, based on exclusivity and augmented exchange value, functions as a central mechanism for skewing opportunities and life chances in the United States along racial lines. Whiteness, as used here, is an analytic category that refers to the structured advantages that accrue to whites because of past and present discrimination. Not all people who are white consciously embrace the white spatial imaginary, and not all whites profit equally from their whiteness, but all whites benefit from the association of whiteness with privilege and the neighborhood effects of spaces defined by their racial demography. Grounded in the long history of housing discrimination, but augmented by the rise of planned-unit developments, condominiums, cooperative apartment houses, planned-unit developments of single family houses, and other forms of mass-produced and corporate-sponsored common interest developments, the white spatial imaginary establishes contract law and deed restrictions as supreme authorities. It makes the augmentation of private property values the central purpose of public associations, and pur-

sues the ideal of pure and homogenous space through exclusiveness, exclusivity, and homogeneity (McKenzie 1994, 7, 177).

Residents of these developments exercise the powers of government through private homeowner associations, pay fees for amenities and services that only they (and other members of the associations) can use, and resist the provision of general services by local government as a form of double taxation. At the same time, communities of color, especially black communities, have developed a counter-spatial imaginary based on sociability and augmented use value.

Blackness here, like whiteness, is not reducible to an embodied identity. Not all blacks consciously embrace the black spatial imaginary, even though all blacks are subjected to it. Systematic discrimination limits blacks and other aggrieved minority homeseekers to an artificially constrained housing market where homes cost more and appreciate less than housing available to whites with similar incomes. Relegated to neighborhoods where zoning, policing, and investment practices make it impossible for them to control the exchange value of their property, and unable to move away from other members of their group because of discrimination, ghetto and barrio residents turn segregation into congregation. They augment the use value of their neighborhoods by relying on each other for bartered services and goods; by mobilizing collectively for better city services; by establishing businesses geared to a local ethnic clientele; and by using the commonalities of race and class as a basis for building pan-neighborhood alliances with residents of similar neighborhoods to increase the responsibility, power, and accountability of local government. Black neighborhoods generate a spatial imaginary that favors public expenditures for public needs. As suburban property owners mobilize politically to cut property taxes, impose limits on government regulation, and resist school desegregation and equal spending on education across district lines, residents of the differentiated spaces of cities and inner-ring suburbs have emerged as the most fervent advocates for fair and affordable housing, for measures

to combat childhood lead poisoning, for the creation and maintenance of efficient and safe transportation systems, and for equitable educational opportunities (Logan and Molotch 1987, 195). Journalists, politicians, scholars, and land-use professionals have long been cognizant that these views represent the experiences and opinions of different *races*, but they have been less discerning about the degree to which these differences in views stem from the experiences and opinions of different *spaces*.

Changing the racialized nature of opportunities and life chances in the United States requires policies, practices, and institutions that reject the white spatial imaginary and constitute a new social charter along the lines embodied in the black spatial imaginary. My argument is that the primary goal of landscape architects, and other citizens concerned with the built environment, should be to disassemble the fatal links that connect race, place, and power. This requires a two-part strategy that entails, first, a frontal attack on the mechanisms that prevent people of color from equal opportunities to accumulate assets that appreciate in value and can be passed down across generations, and second, the embrace of a spatial imaginary based on privileging use value over exchange value, sociality over selfishness, and inclusion over exclusion.

### **The Ideal of the Pure American Space**

For dominant groups in the United States, socially shared moral geographies have long imbued places with implicit ethical assertions about the proper forms of social connection and separation (McAlister 2001, 4). Historian David W. Noble identifies a spatial imaginary at the heart of European conquest and settlement of North America in the seventeenth century. Republican theorists in the Renaissance juxtaposed virtuous and timeless nature with corrupt and time-bound human society. They believed that free nations had to be composed of homogenous populations with ties to the national landscape, “timeless spaces” where citizens lived in complete harmony with one another. Starting in the seventeenth century, European colonialists imagined

that American space might offer a refuge from the corruptions of European time. Coalescing around what Noble calls “the metaphor of two worlds”—the idea of America as an island of virtue in a global sea of corruption—these ideals became institutionalized within the national culture of the United States through the writings of transcendentalists, the visual art of the Hudson River School, evocations by historians of the frontier as a unique source of regeneration, and ultimately, in the ideal of the private, properly-ordered suburban home (Noble 2002).

Yet in order to have pure and homogenous spaces, impure populations had to be removed. The putatively empty and timeless North American space designated to serve as the refuge from the corruptions of European time was actually occupied by indigenous people with histories of their own. Rather than sharing North American space with Indians as common ground, the moral geography of the colonists required conquest, genocide, and Indian removal to produce the sacred ground that the Europeans felt would recreate the biblical idea of a city on a hill. The creation of homogenous polities living in free spaces required the exclusion of others deemed different, deficient, and non-normative. Noble shows that this belief in a redemptive American landscape, as a refuge from the corruptions of European time, performed important cultural work necessary for the construction of the United States as an imagined community. As civilization penetrated the west, however, and it became more difficult for Americans to believe that they inhabited such a landscape, the properly-ordered and prosperous domestic dwelling became the nation's key symbol of freedom, harmony, and virtue, eclipsing the frontier as the privileged moral geography of American society.

The association of freedom with pure spaces outlived the frontier. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this ideal coalesced around racial zoning, restrictive covenants, mortgage redlining, blockbusting, steering, and a host of attendant practices responsible for racially segregating residential areas in the United States.

## THE PRICE OF PRIVILEGED GEOGRAPHY

Today, racially exclusive neighborhoods, segregated suburbs, and guarded and gated communities comprise the privileged moral geographies of the contemporary national landscape. These sites draw their privileged relationship to freedom, less from harmony with the natural landscape, and more from their exclusion of non-normative others and the maximization of the exchange value of their houses as registered in the concept of property values. The privileged moral geography of the properly-ordered, prosperous private dwelling depends upon systematic exclusion. It produces a racially-marked form of consumer citizenship that seeks to secure services for itself at the cheapest possible price, while passing on the costs of remedying complex social problems onto less powerful and less wealthy populations. This stance places every sub-unit of government in competition with every other unit, strengthening the hand of wealthy individuals and corporations while defunding the institutions established to regulate them. These practices serve the interests of owners and investors twice over: increasing public spending in well-off districts increases their property values, while reducing spending in poorer communities makes residences in them worth even less to their inhabitants. The effect of this social warrant is to add to white competitive and comparative advantage in accumulating assets that appreciate in value and that can be passed down across generations.

The white spatial imaginary views space primarily as a locus for the generation of exchange value. Houses are investments that appreciate in value over time. Assets accumulated or increased through real estate transactions receive favored treatment from the tax code, making them worth more than other kinds of income. Perhaps most importantly, the effects of segregated housing give white homeowners advantages and amenities unavailable to most minority home seekers: access to superior schools, protection from environmental hazards, proximity to sources of employment, inclusion in word-of-mouth networks about employ-

ment and business opportunities, and the use of better services and amenities that can be secured from the underfunded public sphere after three decades of suburban tax rebellions. These insurgencies do not so much lower taxes as shift them—away from income taxes, property taxes, inheritance, and capital gains taxes, and toward payroll taxes and user fees. For residents of these spaces, dwellings are fungible assets that can increase in value the more their owners trade up or flip their properties because of the tax breaks given for capital gains and the propensity for upscale neighborhoods to insulate themselves from the social costs incurred by high-risk populations.

### **Discrimination in Housing Markets**

Enabled largely because of support and subsidies from municipal, state, and federal government agencies, the inequalities at the heart of racialized space in the United States violate laws that have been on the books for almost thirty years. The 1968 federal Fair Housing Act outlawed racial discrimination by realtors, mortgage lenders, insurance agents, and home owners, but contained no “cease and desist” provisions, allowed for only minimal financial penalties, and placed the burden of investigation, exposure, and adjudication of the law on private citizens rather than the departments of Justice or Housing and Urban Development. Decades of tireless activism by fair housing advocates have made the most of what the law allows, but housing experts agree that minority home seekers are almost powerless to stop the more than two million incidents of housing discrimination that take place every year (Massey and Denton 1993).

John Yinger estimates that direct discrimination in housing imposes a racial tax of \$3 billion per year on African Americans and \$2 billion per year on Latinos in lost assets, wealth, and income (Torres, Bullard, and Johnson 2000, 90). A federally funded audit found that landlords in 24 major cities discriminated against black applicants for rental housing 53 percent of the time, and that real estate sales personnel discriminated against black home seekers 59 percent of the

time (Feagin 2000, 155). Another study of the practices of 3 major insurance companies in 9 cities revealed that black and Latino insurance seekers frequently experienced discrimination, from a low of 32 percent in Memphis to a high of 83 percent in Chicago. Overall, minorities received detrimental discriminatory treatment 53 percent of the time, while whites routinely secured options that left them with greater insurance coverage at lower rates (Feagin 2000, 15). Black apartment seekers in Houston in 2001 encountered discrimination 80 percent of the time, through openly discriminatory policies, unfair treatment in contracts, appointments, and applications, and the deliberate communication of inaccurate information (Feagin and McKinney 2003, 27). In 2004 and 2005, the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Council (GNOFHAC) received 50 to 100 complaints a week about housing discrimination. In a survey conducted in 1996 and 1997, the organization found that African Americans seeking apartments in New Orleans encountered discrimination 77 percent of the time. GNOFHAC attorneys have secured more than \$1 million in damages for victims of discrimination in the past 10 years alone (Wilson 2005, 1A, 18A). African Americans in New Orleans, like their counterparts in other American cities, know that spatial discrimination leaves them with racialized relationships to many of the key institutions and practices of society, from the school system to the criminal justice system, from education to medical care, from entrepreneurial opportunities to intergenerational transfers of wealth.

### **SPATIAL HISTORY OF COMMUNITIES OF COLOR**

Current conditions have a long history. The racialization of space and the spatialization of race have long posed collective, continuing, and cumulative problems for communities of color in the United States. Spatial displacement, dispossession, exclusion, and control shape the contours of racial subordination and exploitation in decisive ways. From the theft of Native American and Mexican lands in the nineteenth century; to the confis-

cation of black and Latino property for urban renewal projects in the twentieth century; from the Trail of Tears to the Japanese internment; from the creation of ghettos, barrios, reservations, and Chinatowns; to the disproportionate placement of toxic hazards in minority neighborhoods, the racial projects of American society have always been spatial projects as well.

Communities of color have experienced social subordination in the form of spatial regulation, but the particular contours of slavery, sharecropping, and segregation in the United States have inflected the African-American encounter with the racialization of space and the spatialization of race in unique ways. The plantation, the prison, the sharecropper's cabin, and the ghetto have been visible and obvious manifestations of white supremacist uses of space. Perhaps less visible and obvious, but no less racist, have been the spaces that have produced unfair gains and unjust enrichments for whites: the segregated neighborhood and the segregated school. For black people in the United States, struggles against the oppressions of race have by necessity also been struggles over space. African-American battles for resources, rights, and recognition have not only *taken place*, in the figurative term that historians use to describe how events happen, but they have also required blacks literally to *take places*. The famous battles of the mid-twentieth-century civil rights movement to desegregate stores, lunch counters, trains, buses, and schools emerged from centuries of struggle over spaces, from a long history of struggle to secure freedom of movement in public, and from campaigns to enter, inhabit, use, control, and own physical places. This long legacy has produced a powerful black spatial imaginary, a socially-shared understanding of the importance of public space and its power to shape opportunities and life chances.

African-American artists and intellectuals have drawn fully on this spatial imaginary in a broad range of cultural expressions, from migration narratives that Farah Jasmine Griffin identifies as the core trope within black literature, music, and art; to the celebration of the city street in the imagery and iconography of hip hop;

and in the sites appropriated for graffiti writing, mural art, and break dancing. The Chicago tenement apartment of Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, the New York thoroughfares that serve as central "characters" in the novels of Chester Himes and Ann Petry, and the Houston walls reclaimed as sites for mural art by John Biggers and his students, testify to a pervasive preoccupation with place in black culture (Griffin 1995). Geographer Clyde Woods argues that the expressive culture of blues music grew directly out of the politics of place in the Mississippi Delta, and that the blues constitute a key component of a distinct African-American ethno-racial epistemology. His evidence and argument brilliantly demonstrate that this *ethno-racial* epistemology is also an *ethno-spatial* epistemology (Woods 1998).

During the Jim Crow Era, racial control rested openly upon spatial control. State laws and municipal ordinances in the sections of the country where most blacks resided drew approval from federal courts. These statutes mandated segregation in stores, restaurants, and public transportation. Direct de jure and indirect de facto segregation relegated African Americans to separate and distinctly unequal schools. After 1877, the economically inefficient sharecropping system became dominant in the South, largely as a way of dispersing the black population and diluting the political power African Americans had secured through their collective political participation in the Loyalty and Union Leagues in the era of Abolition Democracy.<sup>2</sup> Because the plantation system alone could not suppress black activity, white supremacy relied on the prison system as well. Blacks who refused to work under conditions specified by employers could be arrested for having no visible means of support. Those who fled from these unjust conditions could be incarcerated for vagrancy. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues with pithy precision, most blacks in southern prisons had committed only one of two crimes—moving or standing still (Gilmore 2007).

The contours of racial inequality today flow directly from the racial and spatial heritage bequeathed to us from the past. Throughout the nation, from the 1880s

through the 1960s, racial zoning ordinances, restrictive covenants, and other private deed restrictions confined African Americans to an artificially constricted housing market. Between the 1930s and the 1970s, urban renewal demolished some sixteen hundred black neighborhoods in cities in the North and South. This systematic destruction of individual and collective ecosystems exacted an enormous financial and emotional cost on black communities. Clinical psychiatrist and public health specialist Mindy Thompson Fullilove argues that urban renewal in the mid-twentieth century was of sufficient scale and scope that it destroyed the emotional ecosystems of black communities, inducing a profound alienation and collective traumatic stress reaction that she describes as “root shock” (Fullilove 2004, 11, 20). Federally assisted urban renewal projects demolished 20 percent of the central city housing units occupied by African Americans during the 1950s and 1960s. People of color made up more than 60 percent of the population displaced by urban renewal. Ninety percent of the low-income housing units that were destroyed by urban renewal were never replaced (Zarembka 1990, 104; Quadagno 1994, 91–2; Logan and Molotch 1987, 168–9).

Mass mobilizations for black freedom in the mid-twentieth century concerned space as well as race through efforts to desegregate public accommodations, schools, and neighborhoods. Their success in putting an end to de jure segregation did not end the racialized nature of public space. Just as racial control of space through segregation and sharecropping emerged in the nineteenth century as counter-revolutionary practices to black freedom, new mechanisms to racialize space served a central role in frustrating the aims and undermining the achievements of the Second Reconstruction as well. Northern investment in southern industry concentrated new plants and high paying jobs in white areas, subsidizing the economic well-being of the declining white population, while discriminatory employment practices and punitive welfare policies drove hundreds of thousands of blacks from the region (Woods 1998, 162). Federal tax laws encouraged shutdowns of viable industrial facilities and promoted investment in

new ones. These laws subsidized capital and job flight from inner cities toward mostly white suburbs (Squires 1984, 152–162). Failure to enforce fair housing laws gave realtors, developers, mortgage lenders, and insurance companies full license to profit from segregated housing by engaging in steering, block busting, home equity scams, and predatory lending (Shapiro 2004; Feagin and McKinney 2003; Squires and O’Connor 2001).

### **Environment and Inheritance**

The collective, cumulative, and continuing legacy of the racialization of space in the United States today makes itself felt most powerfully within black communities in the form of structured disadvantages revolving around environmental politics of place. The spatial confinement and containment that accompanies racialization in the United States damages both individuals and communities. Successful white resistance to school desegregation programs at the city, state, and federal levels relegated minority children to concentration in underfunded and poorly equipped schools with inexperienced teachers, while residential segregation, poverty, and political powerlessness left communities of color with disproportionate exposure to polluted air, water, and land. (Orfield, Eaton, and the Harvard Project on School Desegregation 1996; Cole and Foster 2001). Aggrieved racialized groups are more likely than whites to live in communities with toxic hazards, but less likely to have access to medical treatment. Sixty percent of African Americans and Latinos live in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites. In Los Angeles, 34 percent of whites inhabit areas with the highest levels of air pollution, compared to 50 percent of Latinos and 71 percent of African Americans. (Bullard 1994, 13; Lee 1993, 49). Navajo teenagers experience organ cancer at a rate seventeen times the national average. In the lowest income families (those making less than \$6,000 per year), 36 percent of white children versus 68 percent of black children suffer from lead poisoning. Among families making more than \$15,000 per year, 12 percent of white children versus 38 percent of black children have toxic levels of lead in their bloodstreams. Some seventy-

five thousand African Americans die every year because of unequal access to nutrition, health care, and environmental protection (Bullard 1994, 9–10, 13, 21; Wray 1992, 357–361; Lipsitz 1998, 8–10).

Important new work by Thomas Shapiro in his book, *The Hidden Cost of Being African American* (2004), underscores the links between housing discrimination, inheritance, and life chances. Shapiro shows that between 1990 and 2020, some seven to nine trillion dollars will be inherited by the baby boom generation. Almost all of that money is rooted in gains made by whites from overtly discriminatory housing markets before 1968. Adult white wage earners are likely to inherit money *from* parents, while adult non-white wage earners are likely to have to give money *to* their parents to compensate for low wages and lack of assets resulting from discrimination. Shapiro's research reveals that white inheritance is seven times larger than black inheritance. One third of baby boomer whites in 1989 could count on bequests, compared to only five percent of blacks. White families are four times as likely as blacks to receive a significant inheritance, and of those who do receive inheritances, on average whites inherit \$102,167 more than blacks. White families are 2.4 times more likely than blacks to have parents who can provide help with down payments or closing costs. Blacks get \$2.10 in net worth for every dollar earned, whites get \$3.23. Cuts in inheritance and capital gains taxes disproportionately benefit whites and make property income more valuable compared to wage income. Middle-class whites have between three and five times as much wealth as equally achieving blacks. Twenty-six percent of white children grow up in asset-poor households, compared with 52 percent of blacks and 54 percent of Latinos. According to Shapiro, inheritance is more important in determining life chances than college degrees, number of children in the family, marital status, full time employment, or household composition (Shapiro 2004).

Skeptics may argue that the nation lacks the political will to implement fair housing practices, that they fly in the face of the direction that land use and tax policies have been going for decades. But this inverts cause and

effect. It is not that suburban whites are innately racist and consequently favor land-use policies that have increased the racial gap, but rather that prevailing land-use policies provide extraordinary inducements, incentives, and encouragement for a system of privatization that has drastic racial consequences. In his excellent study of the origins and evolution of the social movement for tax limitation that emerged during the 1970s, Clarence Lo notes how anti-tax and anti-busing activists drew upon their experiences as suburban dwellers who benefited from racial discrimination in housing to fashion a common notion of consumer citizenship. "Whites joined antibusing movements," Lo observes, "because they sought to maintain advantages for their racial or ethnic group in the consumption of government services." (Lo 1990, 58). Even the use of the term "forced busing" by white activists as the way to describe desegregation plans copied the example of opponents of fair housing laws, who in the 1964 campaign to repeal California's Rumford Act had declared themselves opponents of "forced housing" (Ethington 2000, 25).

The defenders of segregated housing became the defenders of segregated schools. The segregated neighborhoods and social circles that resulted served as the main sources of mobilization for tax limitations, budget cuts on social services, and the denial of social services to immigrants. Philip J. Ethington's empirically rich and theoretically sophisticated studies of race and space in Los Angeles show that the white neighborhoods most physically isolated from black communities provided the most enthusiastic support for California's unconstitutional 1964 repeal of fair housing legislation, Proposition 13 tax limitation initiative (1978), and the unconstitutional Proposition 187 (1994) denying state-supported education and health care to undocumented immigrants (Ethington 2000, 25–7).

Homeowner and condominium associations give the appearance of democracy without the substance. Homeowners with direct financial interests in association activities do participate in governance activities. Yet the burden of work usually falls to self-selected, untrained, and unregulated individuals with spare time

who find themselves dependent on property managers, lawyers, and accountants for guidance and advice. These professionals have a financial stake in continuing to work with the associations. For both volunteers and professionals, maximizing property values becomes the one sure sign of success. These dynamics encourage what Robert Reich calls “the secession of the successful” from the communities around them (McKenzie 1994, 186). Even though they need low-wage workers to landscape their grounds, build their houses, repair their streets, clean their homes, and take care of their children, suburban property owners seek to avoid paying taxes that contribute to the shelter, health, education, or transportation needs of their employees in order to have more money spent on services and amenities for themselves. Conservative scholar Charles Murray celebrates this organized abandonment of aggrieved communities of color as a harbinger of the demise of the state and the end of its regulation and control of private property. Bringing the spatial imaginary of the national landscape full circle, he predicts that the wealthiest fifth of the population will control sufficient privatized services and political power to simply ignore inner cities, to view them with the same detachment that urban and suburban dwellers now have for American Indian reservations (McKenzie 1994, 187).

## CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONS

Landscape architects, planners, and other land-use professionals can play an important role in disconnecting the nation’s racial regimes from their spatial grounding. Environmental designers must begin consciously to write and draw the under-represented and the disenfranchised into their schemes and plans rather than ignoring or excluding such groups. They must also work actively to diversify the fields of practice in order to challenge white dominance in design and decision-making. These efforts need to go beyond the kinds of tokenistic community participation (critiqued so effectively by Arlene Davila in her study of gentrification

in East Harlem) to surrender actual decision-making power to community groups (Davila: 2004, 211).

Serious commitment to implement and strengthen fair housing laws would encourage the development of new kinds of spaces and spatial imaginaries. Measures to increase diversity among design professionals and to reexamine the power dynamics between insiders and outsiders in landscapes and urban settings would encourage urban restructuring based on the black spatial imaginary. Landscape architects and other land use professionals can help create these spaces and spatial imaginaries by helping build communities characterized by racial and class heterogeneity, inclusion, and affordability.

In many cities, plans are already underway among fair housing groups to sue mortgage lenders and insurance companies for the harm done to entire cities by their redlining policies, to sue realtors for the long-term effects on communities of systematic steering of clients to houses in neighborhoods composed largely of members of one race, and to sue large banks that supply capital to predatory lenders. Members of these communities need to engage in discussions with experts who can help them assess how they have been damaged by discrimination and how they can craft appropriate remedies. Talking with presently poor and powerless people about what kinds of communities they would like to live in would enable land-use professionals to envision new spatial and social relations grounded in another kind of expertise—the black spatial imaginary.

Public space also needs to be protected and enhanced. Austin Allen’s film *Claiming Open Spaces* presents examples of how struggles by African Americans over access to public parks and recreational spaces have placed planners and community residents in antagonistic relationships to one another (Allen 1995). Robin D.G. Kelley argues that the creation of private parks and the destruction of public play areas in New York City during the 1990s are a small part of a larger project of racial subordination and suppression (Kelley 1998). Walter Hood, Margarita Hill, and Randy Hester have developed innovative ways of re-imagining the

work of design professionals, and their work should be imitated and augmented.

## AFTERWORD

Eight weeks after Tootie Montana died, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. The organized abandonment of poor and working-class black people, already affected by decades of disinvestment, deindustrialization, and defunding of public services, left them isolated in high-poverty neighborhoods especially vulnerable to the effects of flooding. Now they face a concentrated campaign to disperse them to other regions, permanently removing them from New Orleans. These plans threaten particularly vicious injuries to blacks in New Orleans who have come to depend so much on neighborhood support networks that Mindy Fullilove describes as emotional ecosystems grounded in the solidarities of space, place, and race (Fullilove 2004).

Displaced residents of the Seventh, Ninth, and Thirteenth Wards should have the right to return, the right to rebuild, and the right to occupy and traverse urban space in their city. As a result of Hurricane Katrina, they stand to lose even more than the owners of mansions, luxury apartments, office buildings, and hotels, because working-class blacks in New Orleans were resource-poor but network-rich. The reconstitution of those networks, and the spaces and social relations that nurtured and sustained them, should be the first priority of any rebuilding effort.

Yet from the perspective of the white spatial imaginary, New Orleans should be rebuilt for the convenience of investors, entrepreneurs, and owners. From this vantage point, poor and working-class blacks in New Orleans are not people who have problems, but instead are problems. Alphonso Jackson, an African American who serves as George Bush's Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, articulated what the rebuilding of New Orleans looks like from the perspective of the white spatial imaginary: "New Orleans is not going to be as black as it was for a long time, if ever again," Jackson predicted. "I'm telling you, as HUD Secretary and having

been a developer and a planner, that's how it's going to be" (Rodriguez and Minaya 2005, 1). Secretary Jackson could have said that it would be unwise to build new houses in the flood-prone, mostly black lower Ninth Ward, but that new housing throughout the city would be made available to all residents of New Orleans as required by Fair Housing Act of 1968 and Civil Rights laws dating back to 1866. Yet in keeping with the dominant spatial imaginary, he proposes to rebuild New Orleans for the convenience of owners, investors, and tourists. Residents of the Seventh Ward who parade as Indians under the Freeway overpass on North Claiborne Avenue, or who assemble on the corner of Washington and LaSalle because urban renewal has destroyed the spaces they previously called their own, have no place in this vision of rebuilding the city. The ways in which land-use professionals respond to the rebuilding of New Orleans will have a major impact on the spatial imagination of this society.

In his extraordinary opinion in the 1968 *Jones v. Mayer* case, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas described obstacles to fair housing as evidence of "slavery unwilling to die." Like slavery, most contemporary forms of discrimination have spatial as well as racial dimensions. The struggles waged by fair housing advocates affirm Douglas's judgment about the continuing consequences of slavery in American society. But they also provide evidence of abolition democracy unwilling to die, of the persistence of struggles for freedom by people whose spatial contestations entail steadfast refusal to "know their place" or remain confined in it. Their spatial imaginary has something valuable to teach us about democracy, justice, and the built environment, if only we can train ourselves to see it.

## NOTES

1. Excellent comparative work has been done, however, drawing mostly on case studies from the United States, South Africa, and Brazil. See Howard A. Winant, *The World is A Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books), 2001. David Theo Goldberg, *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America* (New York: Routledge), 1997

2. Clyde Woods, *Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta* (London and New York: Verso, 1998) 68–71. Woods also explains how debt peonage in Mississippi relied on laws that punished tenants who entered into contracts with new employers without notifying the old ones, and how vagrancy laws provided criminal punishments including terms in prison and on chain gangs for leaving a contract after receiving small advances. See 92–94.

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