INVISIBLE MEN: SPACE, RACE, AND HOUSING
IN AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

"Invisible Men: Space, Race, and Housing in African American Literature" uses an archive of novels written roughly between 1940 and 2000, American Sociology, the philosophy of phenomenology, and ethnography to argue that representations of housing in African American literature form part of a negative discourse that relegates space to forever being racialized but that this discourse is interestingly contradicted by my chosen texts' very mediation of housing. Problematizing, as examples, the conflict between discriminatory and liberating spaces in *Native Son (1940)*, the narrator's underground refuge in *Invisible Man (1952)*, and the class and Levinasian boundaries of responsibility in *Linden Hills (1985)*—among more—my dissertation posits the question, what does it mean for space to be raced in a body of literature simultaneously concerned with contesting the stigma of race, and with it, delimiting structures of subjecthood? If one attempts to separate the conversation about race from the built environment it censures (i.e., slum housing), what is left?

My dissertation emphasizes a focus on African American men because, as my dissertation title alludes, they constitute a present absence in the representational fields within literary and ethnographic texts about housing. Pointedly, a large number of representations of housing inequities in African American Literary Studies and American Sociology demonize black men, and yet, beyond Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* and the Black Panther Party's work in public housing in the 1970s, the narratives of black men in relationship to housing justice is startlingly undertheorized. My project contributes to both disciplinary fields by addressing the configuration of urban crises seemingly dependent on the high visibility and yet discursive silence of low-income African American men. I examine black men's intimate and political uses of space through novels, participant-observation, interviews, and photographs to argue that the

ways in which black men construct and negotiate housing as shelter are both universal and uniquely transgressive.

My efforts are intended to move the literary discussion of ghetto space away from the binary of this space being perceived as either culturally productive (e.g., via the blues and hip hop) or socially destructive (e.g., as geographies of violence and poverty). Extending my textual readings to qualitative research (which I do in the final chapter) continues the complicated relationship between sociology and black literature in order to widen the picture of African American masculinity that we see in groundbreaking studies such as *American Project (2000)* and *The Dignity of Everyday Resistance (2004)*. Additionally, my project can be viewed in conversation with feminist and queer studies of domestic fiction. If the domestic is "a site where massive negotiations between often competing ideological pressures are undertaken and then processed into viable, even pleasurable, experiences of [or I would add, resistance to] domestication,"[1] then "Invisible Men" locates black male figures both inside and outside resistance narratives of family, uplift, and the state exactly through their counter uses of the domestic sphere of housing and their agential understanding of that use. This is an overt exploration of the dialectic between space as racialized and race as spatialized, ultimately with the goal of promoting the acceptance of abject space like public housing as a universal place to call home.

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[1] George, Rosemary Marangoly. *Burning Down the House: Recycling Domesticity.* Oxford: Westview Press, 1998.

To God, my God: with you, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26)

To my parents and my other thirds, for believing that I could do it

To the best friend who became my husband on this journey, for helping me to see my light

Love and peace always to the crew at Cabrini, for being yourselves and welcoming me in

And to Ms. Carole Steele, who inspired it all,

May the struggle continue until the human right to housing is respected!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PREFACE

During an ordinary hot afternoon in June of 2008, a mother allowed her son to play out of her reach for the first time in his young life. She was watching at a window as he wheeled his tricycle down their apartment's sidewalk; but she could not get to him in time as the complex's heavy iron gate detached from its hinges and fell, crushing the toddler, who then later died at an area hospital. According to residents, the gate was one of many that had not been repaired, in spite of numerous complaints. Even so, as tragic it was, this story may never have made the news if not for the fact that young Curtis Cooper was African American and that he "had the misfortune to live in Chicago's criminally neglected Cabrini Green," as one scathing op-ed put it.[2] Cooper may never have sustained national headlines if the property developers of Cabrini had not also been politically connected to the newest presidential nominee and the recipient of millions in federal subsidies for thousands of other housing units in equal disrepair. From the facts that were soon unveiled, it appears that President Barack Obama had optimistically endorsed private development of public housing while he was an Illinois Senator, and yet, during his run for national office, hundreds of those apartments sat in his district deteriorating from blight (The Boston Globe). The sad truth is that this event is only a synecdoche of a historically larger problem that crosses lines across politics, media, and urban policy—even literature. Because of a historical positioning as expendable labor and a hapless entanglement with certain built environments, the violence done to black male bodies, whether young or old, whether intentional or haphazard, is an enduring crisis in American society.

It is the position of this dissertation that the continued stigmatization of the black male subject is a direct reflection of how little our minds have changed in the way we understand social

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[2] Geller, Pamela. "Obama and 3-Year-Old Curtis Cooper." *ChristianNewsWire.* 15 October 2008. Web. 12 July 2014. See also *The Boston Globe,* "Grim Proving Ground for Obama Housing Policy," (http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/06/27/grim_proving_ground_for_obamas_housing_policy/).

space. Conversations with my undergraduate students reflect the wider discourse that low income

spaces such as public housing are undesirable even to talk about, and the schools, corners, and

basketball courts surrounding such places where "thugs" and "ghetto people" stay.   This

construction of housing and the poor forecloses conversation about reinvestment in truly affordable

housing in lieu of gentrification, and leads to an especially rigid spectrum of imagery of black men,

which the mass-consumed rap artists and mass media representations don't help overcome. The

poles between multi-millionaire rappers, athletes, and drug dealers and the young men who emulate

them stretch over streets where slumlords are allowed to cut off the heat to save on their own

property expenses and where neoliberal regulations have led to the closure of manufacturing plants,

mental health clinics, and schools. Partnered with the twin chains of reaction from disinvestment

and demolition, companion hallmarks of urban 'renewal,' this convergence has only resulted in

further alienation of the black male subject, already pushed to the outskirts of city living; and all

because our current imaginary says that in a productive city, some people belong and work there and

some don't.

I am using the nomenclature "black male subject" to signal the discursive figure who

occupies the fascination of sociology and Hollywood but who stands in for the real experience of

many men who move through and around American neighborhoods at risk of their own safety.

When you are stopped and frisked visiting your mother because the neighborhood she resides in is

newly gentrified, you have been subsumed by a subjectivity that attracts daily injustice. When your

domestic arrangements are called into question because your partner lives in government-subsidized

housing, you are experiencing the effects of a federal housing structure designed to exclude the

subject position you occupy. When media sound bites misrepresent you as a potential offender

because your environment (e.g., Chicago's South Side) recalls a stock image, it is reflective of a

deeply-embedded representational scheme that subordinates people like you to a hegemonic view of

social space. As a body politic, African Americans have responded to this demonization of black

men and others through the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Black Arts Movements; through

NAACP-launched lawsuits; and voting organization. They've rallied, they've rioted; they've run for

office. Through cultural productions such as music, literature, and literary criticism, those vested in

a creating a positive discourse about African Americans have contributed serious works and research

for consideration that unequivocally affirm the humanity of black people and their right to occupy

the seats, sidewalks, and neighborhoods similar to everyone else. And yet, a mysterious black

subject still lurks in the theatre of representation. He emerged out of the twentieth century ghetto

and remains marginalized: unknowable and unreachable. And because he is generally poor, assumed

nihilistic and frequently criminalized whether engaged in criminal activity or not, he is often the

scapegoat of what bell hooks has identified as "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy." He is the

reason why a brilliant black scholar, internationally published and recognized, could be arrested for

crossing his own lawn.

Black men are continuously harassed, constrained, and harmed in front of—and evicted out

of—their homes, because home in our country belongs to a landscape of permissible and

impermissible spaces. In our country, home is not simply the place of intimacy where our family

grew up, where we played as a child, and had memories and friends. Home is a racially discursive

site that informs how we are viewed and treated when we leave the home, and how the housing that

may make up our home is impacted by federal, state, and local policy. Some people—men of color,

in particular—have more of a strained relationship to the home space because of the confluence of

rental, mortgage, and probation restrictions that seem written against them. This is not to excuse

those who transgress the law or who are in actuality predatory neighbors. This is to point out that, in

spite of history's exposure of segregation, sundown towns, redlining, racial profiling, and

unrighteous arrests, a great injustice continues to be inflicted against a significant population among us that hits black men where they live.

Significantly, though not surprisingly, black men make up a primary cache of representation in African American literature about housing inequities: Bigger in *Native Son (1940)*, of course; Walter in *A Raisin in the Sun (1959)*; Memphis in *Two Trains Running (1992)*; and Cedric and Bobby in Mat Johnson's *Hunting in Harlem (2003)* to name a few. However, quite like Hazel Carby's observation that twentieth century black scholarship disproportionately displaced the black female voice, the voices of poor black men are startlingly missing from African American literary criticism. In fact, aside from their victimization, perspectives about African American men's lives and participation in housing have been very narrowly written. Contrapuntally, literary criticism that does discuss black men and the home (usually low income environments, AKA slums, AKA the ghetto) tends to focus on the racialization of these homes and that attendant discrimination, more so than the possibility of home as an intimate space for black men, as an abode worth living in. Therefore, in spite of the large amount of attention given to black men in African American literature and criticism, *little* attention is given to the ways in which the black male subject may create and confirm his home space as any human being would, and consequently, little value is put on thinking about this space for space's sake.

As I understand it, the goal of research is to confront old problems and suggest new ones that allow a set of questions to be examined in a nuanced way. The framing of our questions we inherit from discipline-specific traditions which may or may not support each other. While literary criticism, critical theory, and Cultural Studies, for example, emerged in concert with one another, there remain assumptions of these disciplines that might preclude some questions from being asked or that might resist questions being asked in a certain way, such as to write about African American men in novels, do you really have to talk *to* black men? And if we try to talk about space without

talking about race in a white supremacist capitalist system, do we risk losing housing rights' critique of power? Does this mean there are no cultural 'black spaces'? The difficulty of a project that crosses disciplinary boundaries is the threat of being in a theoretical no man's land.

Like Feminism, Black Feminism, Queer Studies, and any other alternative project encounters, there is danger in blurring the lines when seeking different ground. Literary analysis is primarily text-based, with a heavy emphasis on history, culture, and materialism when it serves the need of close reading. What started out for me as close reading (an interest in the metaphors, metonymy, and symbolism being used to describe built environments in which black characters lived) grew into a political concern as I observed those same metaphors across discourses: Housing Authority websites, real estate pamphlets, and literary criticism. Low income housing in America represents a twentieth century heterotopia: a site that seems to accumulate all of our anxieties about class, it functions to maintain the appearance of the state's good will all the while promoting the paradox of social domination. Low income housing and housing stereotypes relegate poor black men to the bottom of the totem pole in a spatial and political economy that positions the rest of us relative to them. Black men are undeniably frozen in a double bind of invisibility and hyper-visibility, but what is also evident is that everyone else, including black middle class women like me, gains visibility or the privilege of invisibility relative to that hierarchy of difference. A discussion of housing in literature necessitates more than more readings of literary writing, because the representation of housing impacts real geographies, real policies, and real people. Too many literary critics have spoken on behalf of or in the place of low income housing residents as the objects of study. By going beyond the bounds of literature, in this study I include a mode of critical ethnography in an attempt to bring male residents' voices to the fore.

Even riskier, I may broach cultural betrayal by advancing the thesis that our deep investment as housing rights allies and activists in the racialization of space might actually detract from an

atmosphere truly progressive enough to permit difference. This is risky because the greatest

masquerade of a neoliberal and democratic society is its pretension to color-blindness, and a

discussion about suspending difference in favor of concentration on what we have in common may

appear to some like a reversal. On the other hand, if we aspire to a future in which all people are

allowed to live where they want, unmolested, it may require a temporary neutralization of the racial

particularity ascribed to space. In order to truly see the individual we need to re-see the universal.

Sometimes the house in flames is the only light in the dark.

INTRODUCTION

Figure 1. Hudson Street, Chicago, 2012

Look. The above photo illustrates a historical spatial contest, although its subject is a

Chicago street in October 2012. On the left and leading to the horizon is a three-year-old

condominium. Its average asking price of half a million nestles easily into the landscape just beyond

it. On the right—behind the fence—stand the Frances Cabrini Rowhomes, built in 1942 as part of

the city's public housing and, just as most public housing in the United States today, is home to

predominantly African American tenants. Both developments are partially occupied, yet one space

reads as open and the other as closed. One is "listed" as an invitation. The other is chained and

locked against trespassers, so it's claimed. In 2009, the building on the left had a lonely FOR SALE

sign in the window. Now, green plants hang from its second story patios and C-Class Benzes and

the like vie for its parking space. In 1999, the townhomes on the right were targeted as buildings

needing rehabilitation under Chicago's *Plan for Transformation*.[3] Today, 446 apartments remain empty,

despite the increase in homelessness of income-burdened families and activists' claim that the work

has been stalled specifically because the current residents are black. This photograph depicts an ur-

story of the neoliberal urban landscape, and—I hope to show—the literary problem of seeing space

in black and white.

　　Combining methods from phenomenology, literary criticism, and ethnographic interviewing,

"Invisible Men: Space, Race, and Housing in African American Literature" moves through an

archive of African American novels written between 1940 and 2000 to argue that representations of

urban housing in African American literature form part of a critical, often negative discourse of

racialized space, and that this discourse is interestingly contradicted by those very representations'

mediation of the built environment, particularly the ways black men construct and negotiate housing

as shelter. Problematizing, as examples, the conflict between discriminatory and liberating spaces in

Native Son (1940), the narrator's underground refuge in *Invisible Man (1952)*, and the class and

Levinasian boundaries of responsibility in *Linden Hills (1985)*—my dissertation posits the question,

what does it mean for space to be raced in a body of literature simultaneously concerned with

contesting the stigma of race, and with it, delimiting structures of subjecthood? If one attempts to

separate representations of race in African American literature from the built environment the

literature censures (i.e., slum housing), what is left? (As an analogy, the Chicago skyline depicted in

Figure 1 is regularly promoted as a global portal for one and all, but the presence of the unattractive,

unnecessarily tall fence around already gated housing exposes that there are certain subjects

prevented from moving freely through its spaces. The photo visualizes a segregation discourse that

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[1] Commenced in 2000 under the umbrella of Hope VI legislation during the Clinton administration, the *Plan for Transformation* was a multi-million dollar redevelopment project that targeted 25,000 public housing units in Chicago for renovation or demolition. Aiming to redress structural deficiencies as well as mismanagement in Chicago Housing Authority properties, the *Plan for Transformation* led to the clearing of all of the cities high rise public housing developments, including the infamous Robert Taylor Homes, Stateway Gardens, and Cabrini-Green.

coerces people, in this instance, poor black people, to stay in their place. And yet, if this coercive

discourse is resisted using the same terms of segregation, it fossilizes the binary of black and white

and renders true mobility a vista hard to reach.) "Invisible Men: Space, Race, and Housing in

African American Literature" interrogates this spatial paradox primarily through the genres of

literature and literary criticism but considers photographs and interviews as well. It investigates the

way critics continue to think about space by investigating the way housing, particularly low income

housing, continues to be discussed. A potential illumination for contemporary housing politics,

however, it also argues that by recycling rhetoric that attaches race to space, not only do we undercut

the power of recognizing home as universal, we also consign the indiviuality of black men to the

shadows, prolonging the opportunity that instances of transgressive male domesticity create.

Low income housing functions as an important symbolic landscape for African American

letters. From kitchenettes to brownstones to Brewster Place, the representation of housing (and

particularly, the cultural ramifications of inadequate housing) is a central theme. In African

American literature, this theme is greatly influenced by American sociology and plays out as what

Houston Baker might call a tropological "black (w)hole," that is, a rich figure or device that attracts

desire and language, a reduction of discourse to a zero image *and* an intense site of power-knowledge

about the haves and the have nots.[4] In other words, black authored literature focused on problems

of city living reflects a preoccupation with ghetto housing and its occupants. In response to

hundreds of thousands of former slaves and sharecroppers flooding north, stories like Rudolph

Fisher's "City of Refuge" (1925) and novels like Walter Turpin's *O Canaan!* (1939) capture the

roughness and despair of crowded tenements. Dorothy West's novel *The Living Is Easy* (1948) uses a

contrast in the setting of Boston slum housing and middle class homes to express the ambitious

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[4] In *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature,* Baker inducts this term in reference to Richard Wright's
depiction of himself in *Black Like Me*, arguing that Wright himself becomes synecdoche for African American
narrative's disruption of American literary discourse.

protagonist's desperation. Gwendolyn Brook's well-noted *Maud Martha* (1953) concerns the

disillusion of its characters' with her Black Belt kitchenette. Playing into the sixties fascination with

the black juvenile delinquent, *Manchild in The Promised Land* (1969) by Claude Brown portrays the

paradox of a reformed narrator who can't get enough of a dangerous housing project. And in

Philadelphia Fire (1990), John Wideman personifies the city itself as a conspirator in the demise of

MOVE, the historically black urban commune that was bombed in 1985 by the Philadelphia police

and black mayor.

Much of this preoccupation of African American literature has to do with the experience of

African Americans under the spatial and psychological constrictions of the Jim Crow era.

Governing as it did the private and public imagination about bodies and the environment, as well as

the legal and illegal practices that stipulated where Americans ate, learned, and lived, segregation

could be defined as a discourse of spatiality par excellence. Premised on the illogic of racial

difference, it touched every aspect of African American life and culture with devastating effects on

purse and social integration. Sociologist Gilbert Osofsky confirms, for example, that one-room

units in Harlem during the 1920s rented to African Americans at two and three times the rate rented

to White Americans, and that "high rents and poor salaries necessarily led to congested and

unsanitary conditions" (136). Richard Wright called these units "the new form of mob violence"

that either killed black Americans through depression from their monetary exploitation, or through

exposure to criminal elements, or disease (*12 Million Black Voices* 105-107). This experience of

overcrowded living was not unique; most American immigrants in the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries had been baptized into the same ocean of ills. But while other newcomers to industrialized

cities were eventually able to improve their living wages and therefore housing choices, Black,

African and Caribbean Americans were held back by the white racist economic structure of twentieth century capitalism and left behind to be dramatized in terms of their abodes.[5]

Because of this history, some literary critics have argued that segregation be considered a literary aesthetic, as a distinct set of properties in writing that may evince ways to understand the racial separation of the past and of the present.[6] Brian Norman, for instance, in his book *Neo-Segregation Narratives (2010),* points to fragmentation in contemporary African American literature as a temporal articulation of segregation by authors confronting the *de facto* specter of Jim Crow. Kenneth Warren, by contrast, has suggested that the legal overturn of the social logic of segregation means that African American literature as we may have known it no longer exists. He contends that the coherence we assume of this body of work is really a twentieth century race project hinged on combatting black inferiority, and that barring that focus, "African American literature would not have existed [at all]" (17). What Warren accurately points out is that literary works by African Americans, like the architecture of the Cabrini Rowhomes (Figure 1), might have been integrated into the national landscape if it weren't for their dependency on Jim Crow's injustice to demarcate their worth. This argument is crucial to our respect for how history's claim on African American identity shapes reading paradigms; however, both Norman and Warren's perspectives of segregation's relationship to literature takes segregation's raced construction of space for granted.

Segregation as a law, as a cultural discourse, has been a major organizing structure for the modern era. After the severe reversals in constitutional freedom and legislation during the early years of the Hayes presidency, newly freed backs were lured away from crop sharing in the South to rapidly industrializing northern cities in the new manufacturing economy. According to Farah

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[5] Even from 1842, Charles Dickens described housing in Harlem occupied by Blacks as "places where 'dogs would howl to lie'" (Osofsky 10).

[6] See the Spring 2008 volume of *African American Review,* in which contributors discuss a through line in works by Charles Chestnutt, Lorraine Hansberry, and Richard Wright (all concerned with spatial containment of the black poor).

Jasmine Griffin in *Who Set You Flowin: The African American Migration Narrative (1995)*, migrants sought the familiar "safe spaces" of pool halls, barbershops, and churches to "resist the detrimental effects of urbanization" (107). Griffin alludes to the effects of the same harsh kitchenette Richard Wright condemns and acknowledges that the North was perhaps even more debilitating than the American South due to the surprise of its equally violent racism.[7] The violence that accompanied redlining and segregation led city dwellers to internalize spatial maps of not only where blacks and whites physically lived but where they could *imagine* living as well. Compounded with the ebb and flow of urban disinvestment, which means the uneven distribution of resources, this spatialization of racism consequently resulted in a cultural pact to label space first empirically, and then discursively.

As Raymond Williams seminally points out, the existence of any literature is "dependent on the cultural system within which [its] notations are current, as well as, in a secondary way, on the social and economic system within which they are distributed" (169-70). In this vein, Warren's argument may be correct that African American literary works, like the urban landscapes they captured at the turn of the century, not only encoded the period's racism but also participated in that period's understanding. As a container for so many reflections about the African American housing experience, African American literature is a primary site for understanding the ways in which blacks have been oppressed by their environment and how representation was and can be used as a vehicle for human rights protest. *Native Son* and Ann Petry's *The Street (1946)* are the best known examples. They focus on showing the injustice of how unfair their characters have it and the opportunities they would have claimed were it not for an unjust, racist society. On the contrary, by claiming the representativeness of Bigger's and Lutie's environments, the authors presume or are responding to a belief in metonymical characterization, which in a way obscures the many other narratives possible

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[7] Some of the country's bloodiest riots over alleged segregation trespasses took place in Chicago, for example, most notably along the Lake Shore in 1919.

when it comes to navigating space. When literature cannot reflect alternatives or even an opening

for the possibility of an alternative, it is constrained by the traditions or cultural system within which

it sits and is probably adding to that culture's structural effects. By representing space in the same

raced or racist terms as the exploitative capitalist system we still live in, African American literature

and its criticism reifies a discourse stuck in the afterbirth of Jim Crow.

What we're talking about when we talk about space and race in African American literature

is often some version or rejection of the ghetto. A "house…strewn with rats and cockroaches,"

black fiction focused on the urban imagination has more often than not employed an exaggerated or

grotesque personification of the housing environment as an ironic means of contesting social and

economic oppression engendered by US housing policy and real estate regimes.[8] Frequently using a

racial tautology borrowed from sociology, these literary works contribute to an architecture of

signification repeated and taught in African American Studies. Twentieth century criticism of

African American literature promotes the idea of an immanent relationship between the

development of African American literature and an urban identity; yet similar to debates in

sociology, this discourse has sometimes transposed the experience of inadequate housing with the

pathology of a particular consciousness. You know the phrasing: "that person is so 'ghetto.'" Such

an inversion contributes to the easy rhetorical trap of labeling the people that live in low income

environments in the same derogatory or reconstructive terms as the buildings they live in, and from

the vantage of a cultural critic, the troubling subject position that presumes the social and political

inferiority of a people because of an over-determined agency given to the environs that house them.

In Houston Baker's illuminating work, *Workings of the Spirit (1993)*, for example, which I take up in

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[8] The language here is Henry Louis Gates' (46). In *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the "Racial" Self,* he criticizes black writers for building a system of signs that negatively portrays black urban life, arguing—with significant attention to space, I might add—that "novelists…fail to realize that by the very act of writing…they commit themselves to the construction of coherent, symbolic worlds related to but never relegated to be merely plausible reproductions of the real world" (46). I think this same allegation can be made of critics at times.

my second chapter, there is really no material way for African Americans to establish ownership of low income environments such as the twentieth century kitchenette and housing project. Slum spaces are inevitably an echo of the underbelly of the slave ship and as such are marked in terms of commodification and ever-devaluing property that deny the potential for quality interpersonal and *intra*personal relations (Baker 108). Because of this, Baker shifts his focus to the possibility of spiritual rather than material productions, although contrary to his title being gender neutral, he seems to promote only the cultural and artistic expressions of women. Griffin challenges this leaning of Baker's, just as she does Wright's, but she also gives short shrift to the possibility of ghetto housing itself as a vehicle to liberate black people.

In her study of black postmodernism and the urban sphere, Madhu Dubey argues that this devaluation of the urban is due to its function as a cultural commodity in the modern and postmodern era. "The process of commodification doubles and evacuates [bodies], converting [their] use value as "home" into the abstract exchange value of [capital]," Dubey writes (118). As it relates to urban housing, its simulacra can be spotted throughout culture and reconstructed by both its producers and its defenders. Consider a dialogue between sociologist William Julius Wilson and Warren, writing as a literary critic, about the 2002 hit *The Wire* on cable's HBO. While Wilson maintains the show's portrayal of Baltimore housing projects permits an aesthetic visualization of structural inequity, Warren questions Wilson's uneven focus on the former McCulloh Homes relative to the equally income burdened space of Baltimore's struggling port authority.[9] I would

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[9] Ironically, while he never quite overcomes this himself in his work, Warren rightly interrogates the powerful politics of representation that occurs when the word of sociologists, or academics, fix certain spaces as problematic and certain classes—more specifically, the underclass—as inevitably doomed. Rightfully treating ghetto housing as one of modernity's excesses, for example, well-meaning critics have relied on a sociological imagination to critique the African Americans who live there. Treatises in the 1990s such as Eugene F. Rivers' "On the Responsibility of Intellectuals in the Age of Crack" (1992), Cornell West's *Race Matters (1993)* and *Keeping Faith (1994),* and Henry Gates' "Are We Better Off" (1999) suggest a role for the academic but, ultimately, may recreate the talented tenth split in the black population by positioning black critics as the speaker and the black underclass as the spoken about. A further irony is that the other two critical responses to *The Wire* written in the

argue further that the only reason this debate carries so much traction outside of the show's

popularity is that the architectural and social space of public housing is always-already fetishized.[10]

Its geographic isolation contains within it a disavowal of interconnection which produces a desire to

know and rationalize its subjects. By this I mean there are no two houses or housing developments

facing each other that are not bound by complex social relations. But the transformation of homes

into cultural products for consumption or sociological analysis prevents African American neighbors

from being seen as equal to others and self-determining occupants of their place.[11] This bias is

certainly the signifier of a race problem, but it is also one that too often obscures a

'misunderstanding-of-space' problem.

My interest is in parsing out how we ascribe racial identity as a production of segregated built

environments, and therefore, as African American literary studies' primary understanding of "place."

By reading depictions of low income housing in African American literature for their universality

rather than cultural pathology, my hope is to interrogate the referent of the signified meant when we

say "Black people live there" and to open the possibility of a more positive politics of space. Space

is racialized; that is, paraphrasing Omi and Winant's classic thesis, it is produced through a socio-

historical process created and inhabited discursively, then re-presented through hegemonic

institutions and media (*Racial Formations in the United States* 13). As George Lipsitz and others argue,

race and racism are still cogent constructs of power by which African Americans and others imagine

the world and structure their experience of it. And it is true that "The racial imagination that

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same issue of *Critical Inquiry* by non-black cultural critics offer spatial frameworks and metaphors for
understanding the TV show's setting that manage not to reiterate the same the issue of privilege.
[10] Google, for example, the set of *The Wire*, and you may come across these problematic tourism narratives:
http://rustwire.com/2011/08/16/lewis-lehes-wire-tour-of-baltimore/
http://www.independent.co.uk/travel/americas/close-to-the-wire-on-the-mean-streets-of-baltimore-872174.html
[11] "Mike Davis has most famously argued, the economic and racial polarities of the postmodern city are
reproduced at the level of the built environment, with spaces of privatized consumption being built to exclude the
underclass" (Dubey 64).

relegates people of different races to different spaces produces grossly unequal access to education, unemployment, transportation, and shelter" (Lipsitz 6). But what if we don't accept that segregation always and completely totalizes social space? What if there is a simultaneous view of the material environment that might focus our attention elsewhere than the illusion of racial difference? What new sides of familiar African American literary characters or genres might we uncover if we critiqued them through a broader philosophical lens? These questions require not that we abandon the way we understand African American literature that features housing but that we *add* to our reading of it.

One of the ways that I propose to do this in my dissertation is through the lens of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy (multi-limbed as all branches are) that seeks to describe consciousness in the face of experience of the materiality or object-hood of things. A layman's way of explaining this is that phenomenology strives to label our experience of objects or the conditions for an experience with a certain object as it would *appear* to consciousness, not necessarily as it would be *represented*. The distinction is that if I see a car, what appears is foremost the familiarity of its shape—the squared hood, round wheels, and various lines composing its wipers and antennas. There is an apperception before perception of the many representations of cars, which may carry with them feelings of nostalgia, cultural affinity, or fear (if the car is moving fast). In Chapter One, I delve into a deeper application of this, but as introduction, suffice it to maintain that one of the principle aspects of phenomenology that grounds my argument is the trust in, or assumption of, the first person point of view. The phenomenological perspective is above all subjective, which means that it prioritizes the individual experience of reality and grants agency to the first person, while not dismissing the possibility of a structural or universal consciousness. In fact, phenomenology—by respecting and ultimately moving towards a collective experience or

conditions for a collective experience—marks the relationship between the individual and universal as an ongoing tension.

A prime illustration of how a phenomenological lens can be adapted to literary analysis occurs in the namesake of my thesis, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man (1952)*. In this all too familiar novel, the nameless protagonist comes of age through a series of increasingly traumatic rebirths. Its categorization as a race novel is hinged on Ellison's admitted deconstruction of the Jim Crow pejorative to "keep the nigger running" (xv). And yet, Ellison's concern with refuting what he called the "pseudoscientific sociological concept" that all of African American life centers around racial visibility also places his novel in a different category than the black and white segregation discourse outlined above. Another way to categorize this work is as a housing novel, since many of the protagonist's most pertinent self-discoveries occur as he is negotiating the precarious and culturally constructed space of American housing. His unfortunate foray to Trueblood's cabin; his time in a Men's House and then a rooming house owned by a black woman; his exile to a sealed off basement—this mobility through housing environments precedes, and in some cases, catalyzes the narrator's reflection on his relationship to self and other just as pertinently as race and gender.

Invisible Man is a phenomenological novel. Throughout it, the narrator's perception of objects in and around housing spaces reveals a condition and tension of consciousness, or a *type* of experience in relationship to housing. On the one hand, the narrator's eye responds to the sensory aspects that accompany housing in an individual and perhaps universal manner, noting colors and shapes, as well as objects of comfort and objects of threat. On the other, he wrestles with his *apperception* of these same objects—the way that racial and cultural and historical contexts battle for primacy over the 'thingness' that he views. For instance, in the following intensely phenomenological passage in which the narrator sees an elderly couple evicted into the street, he

wrestles with how to take in the objects in front of him both as an individual and as a subject within the structure of racial history:

> [Wiping] my eyes and coughing, I almost stumbled over it: It was piled in a jumble along the walk and over into the curb into the street, like a lot of junk waiting to be hauled away. Then I saw the sullen-faced crowd, looking at a building where two white men were totting out a chair in which an old woman sat…I turned aside and looked at the clutter of household objects which the two men continued to pile on the walk. And as the crowd pushed me I looked down to see looking out of an oval frame a portrait of the old couple when young, seeing the sad, stiff dignity of the faces there; feeling strange memories awakening that began an echoing in my head like that of a hysterical voice stuttering in a dark street…My eyes fell upon a pair of crudely carved and polished bones, "knocking bones," used to accompany music at country dances, used in black-face minstrels...(had he been a minstrel?) (267, 271)

Notice the repetition of derivatives of the verb 'to look.' This passage lends itself to being read through a phenomenological perspective because in the narrator's act of looking, he fixes the evictees' belongings onto a visual plane to be studied and therefore analyzed dispassionately. He does not immediately associate the objects with their context, that is, that they, like their owners, have been evicted. Instead, he begins to catalog what he sees, asking questions of them before affirming their meaning.

The narrator goes on to catalog all of the couples' belongings, which for the most part appear representative of the African American journey to freedom and standing in the north: there is a tin photograph of Abraham Lincoln, a straightening comb, memorabilia from world fairs and baseball. Mingled amongst more benign objects like baby shoes, there are also freedom papers. It is easy, therefore, to emphasize the racialization of these objects and their effect on the narrator's

sense of being. However, I think there is other affect at work here that is a condition of this type of

experience. That is, to watch someone being ruthlessly evicted reminds us of the vulnerability of

our own housing ownership and access. For the narrator, this experience is compounded by race,

but race isn't the only marker. This is a sensory experience for him, confusingly familial and

personal.

He confesses,

> I turned and stared again at the jumble, but inwardly-outwardly, around a corner into
>
> the dark, far-away-and-long-ago, not so much of my own memory as of remembered
>
> words, of linked verbal echoes, images, heard even when not listening at home. And
>
> it was as though I myself was being dispossessed of some painful yet precious thing
>
> which I could not bear to lose; something confounded, like a rotted tooth that one
>
> would rather suffer indefinitely than endure the short, violent eruption of pain that
>
> would mark its removal. And with this sense of dispossession came a pang of vague
>
> recognition: this junk, these shabby chairs, these heavy, old-fashioned pressing irons,
>
> zinc wash tubs with dented bottoms—all throbbed within me with more meaning
>
> than there should have been: *And why did I, standing in the crowd, see like a vision my*
>
> *mother, hanging wash on a cold windy day…why were they causing me discomfort so far beyond*
>
> *their intrinsic meaning as objects?* (273)

I would like to suggest that at the same time the narrator is perceiving a racialized context, he is also

apperceiving through memory a nostalgia for a bygone space and time. We could read the self-

consciousness of the narrator and those around him as an awareness of their blackness during a

social injustice. But we could also read their shame or "intrusion" upon this event as the emotional

effect of the tragedy of a poor couple being put on the street. The theme of dispossession in *Invisible*

Man is certainly metaphorical of racial identity, hence the narrator's increasing disaffiliation from both whites and blacks throughout the plot; but dispossession is also a spatial metaphor that indicates that where one dwells holds a surplus of meaning, over and beyond segregation.

As case in point, the narrator's race is only heavily implied in Ellison's famous Prologue *after* the hole the narrator has made a home is richly described. Boasting in his acquisition of a space off the map, or rather in a "border area" "somewhere into the jungle of Harlem," the narrator tells the reader about his sectioned-off parcel of basement that is "warm and full of light" (5-6). Again, the fact that this space is located in a "whites-only building" could compel a racial reading of his subversion. Some critics might even argue that the narrator's hole is a non-place because racial oppression drove him there and he is outside of the realm of property ownership. But a perceptual, spatial perspective reveals the pride the narrator takes in his purposeful manipulation of the built environment. By admitting his use of illegal electricity, the narrator's use of space becomes a subversive act against capitalism not just racial oppression. By decorating with his 1,369 light bulbs and radio-phonograph, the narrator also creates a domestic space—that is, a home that permits enough safety for hibernation and enough room for personal flare. While the narrator's invisibility remains throughout the novel, his individuality evolves so that by the end of it, we cannot predict or foreclose who he will emerge to be. The phenomenological description of housing in *Invisible Man* then serves as a useful critical lens for reading other African American texts. How can we relook at spaces that are typically looked through and pined for their culpability with racialization? How can we re-see those who are typically looked over in association with those spaces? I want to argue that starting with the body's relationship to housing might be a productive means of rereading such representations.

Invisible Man stole my attention as I was scrambling to write grants for Cabrini Green's youth in the summer of 2008. I was working in the aforementioned Cabrini Rowhouses as an intern with the Midwest Coalition for Human Rights. At the time, the Rowhouse Tenants Council was in the midst of a lawsuit with the Chicago Housing Authority, losing funding, and transitioning staff. The residents were themselves in transition. Being ordered to move as part of the Chicago *Plan for Transformation* with only vaguely worded promises to return, many of the Cabrini tenants waxed both worried and nostalgic and, surprising to some, mounted a rhetoric to "Redevelop, [not] Replace" their stigmatized apartments. Why would residents want to continue to live in buildings that others demonized and that were, in fact, structurally unsound and plenty dangerous, some might ask? Who wouldn't want the reminders of such tragedies as Girl X and Eric Moore wiped from the face of society?[12]

What I learned is that residents of Cabrini, especially those more activist tenant officers, had realized what the media and mainstream society continuously seem to miss. A home is not determined by the people who live outside of it. It is not premised on the bad things neighbors do. A home is made up of family, and memories, and familiar geography. In spite of being overrun by gangs and vulnerable to the drug trade, that is exactly what many residents argued the Greens and the Rowhomes signified for them. Particularly those elderly residents who had moved into public housing in the 1940s "during the good years," an important history was attached to those units and hallways, a history of friendship and even entrepreneurialism, a history that understandably is articulated with pride. To be clear, some residents were also very glad to leave. They saw the Section 8 vouchers offered to them as a panacea, and during the summer I worked there, some even resisted the work that we were doing in exchange for promises from the Chicago Housing Authority

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[12] Girl X is the media name given to the nine year old girl viciously raped, assaulted, and blinded in one of the elevators in the Cabrini Towers. Eric Moore was five years old when he refused to steal candy for two eleven year olds from Cabrini. They dropped him to his death from a fourteenth story window.

to be one of the few able to live in the new housing being built. However, peruse the internet for public housing reunions by the names of the buildings that no longer exist. You'll find images and Facebook pages and chats with poetic elegies dedicated to the intangibility of community that can't be erased.

The Cabrini high rises and their kin no longer stand, but a fight for fair housing practices in Chicago continues. The Local Advisory Council has sued the Chicago Housing Authority twice since 2000 for eviction practices and for not fulfilling agreements to develop the Cabrini Rowhomes in a timely and informative manner so that residence could return.[13] While an intern, I observed residents collaborating with various law firms, journalists, university professors, and volunteers to mount resistance strategies to the *Plan for Transformation*'s effects. In addition to law suits, they also initiated relocation studies and produced video documentaries with counter-testimonials and policy recommendations to the *Plan*. They coordinated numerous direct actions in the tradition of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements to gain a say in the allocation of Chicago TIF grants and to have key public housing policies amended for affected residents. This same group brought not one, but two United Nations Special Rapporteurs to Chicago to observe and make recommendations on the city's housing and racial discrimination, an amazing feat for people who some might discount because of the literacy, violence, and employment statistics produced about their neighborhoods. Because the phenomenon of tearing down public housing and displacing its residents to uncertain, equally segregated areas is happening across numerous cities and counties (Rantoul, Danville, and Champaign, Illinois, for example), the effort of Chicago tenants to maintain a prolific physical, national, and virtual presence in the affordable housing debate demonstrates a greater commitment to democratic inclusion, safety, and basic shelter than that of some politicians.

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[13] "Cabrini Tenants Sue CHA." *NBC Chicago*. N.p., 16 May 2013. Web. 31 Aug. 2014.; Korecki, Natasha. "Cabrini-Green Residents Sue CHA over Relocation Notice." *Chicago Sun-Times*. Chicago Sun-Times, 4 June 2004. Web. 31 Aug. 2014.

The conjunction of reading *Invisible Man* while working in Cabrini gave me a new respect for the many ways that home can be constructed and the worthiness of protecting its sanctity in spite of what we might presume based on the outside of a built environment. At the heart of this issue is the problem of representation and discourse, representation being the circulation of the image of low income housing, discourse being the combination of that image with power-knowledge about the residents who live there and subsequent effects on those residents' lives. Representations of these spaces takes the form of a type of "architectural fetishism," in which the built space of housing stands in for the desire to fix the societal constructs of race, gender, and class onto bodies, and poetic devices such as anthropomorphism, metaphor, and metonymy are sometimes used negatively in policy rhetoric, real estate language, and casual dialogue. Because representation is a part of ideology, it can be used to rationalize social welfare decisions, and in our country, these decisions have frequently restricted the rights of female citizens dependent on public aid, and positively excised the rights of men. Discursive constructions of low income living influence how we look at poor black people and tangentially how we determine who belongs to what space.

Henry Lefebvre in his treatise on social space provides some cue to as to why this is. Firstly, he argues that space is a product of daily life and our relationship to capital. It takes on both pragmatic and mythic proportions as knowledge is produced by the architecture, design, and "symbolic use of objects" (39). Space is also not free from ideology, and it conceals its inner workings through the omission or overloading of meaning. When it comes to the portrayal of slum or low income housing, Lefebvre's formulation of representations of space versus representational space helps us to see how greed, racism, and the incoherence of class create a nexus of strategies to "protect" ideas of superiority, and thus, through design of inner-city borders (many invisible), urban

anxiety gets displaced onto a map.[14] Representations of space can be thought of the images that are circulated that tell us about space while representational space is how where we *live* is constructed in relationship to those images. Representational space is, therefore, the intersection between ideology and social reality; it is both the convergence and dissonance that nineteenth century immigrants and twentieth century black migrants experienced through the sign system calling to them (i.e., America the land of the free, the North the land of promise) and their physical conditions (the reality of labor and housing practices).[15] Because twentieth century housing did offer such appalling living conditions to African Americans moving to cities, and their experience was doubled by a discourse of abjection, it is easy to understand why representations of the built environment would favor the prison image over the refuge and the "hole" metaphor over the home.

Literature and its representation have not been innocent. Like real estate, the trend in African American fiction and criticism has relied on a negative construction and cultural particularity to describe spaces in which black people live. In "Reconstructing the Fictions of Sociology," the

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[14] According to Lefebvre, the way that capitalism translates into spatiality must be taken into account:

1) The reproduction of labor power → **representations of space** (or conceived space) → is the order that relations of production impose, for example, the White House versus public housing; this discourse is always influenced by ideology

2) The reproduction of *social relations* of production → **representational space** (lived space) → the symbolism that class stratification may take on, for example, as we live out our relationship to the labor hierarchy, for example, the ways in which certain housing spaces come to be associated with certain people.

3) **Spatial practice** → (perceived space) → are the cultural behaviors, regulations, and narratives that help to provide cohesion between the other two levels of space.

4) Lefebvre also mentions **abstract space** → a space that asserts itself as everywhere and supported by power and violence (I think examples would be the modern state and 'globalization' and commodities); Abstract space, according to Lefebvre, overlaps with spatial practice and is governed by 'consensus' or collective ideas about how the space *works* (not necessarily is governed) i.e. the Internet (56).

[15] It is notable that Lefebvre's "extreme example" of this type of "modern spatial practice" is "the daily life of a tenant in a government-subsidized high-rise housing project (38).

fourth chapter of Warren's *So Black and Blue*, he points to the tangle between American sociology

and criticism of African American works that still lurked in the 1990s: because early white

sociologists universalized the black experience, particularly in urban centers (i.e., housing), African

American Studies, including literary criticism, found itself restricted to a defensive model of culture.

Citing Gates, Warren synthesizes,

> Black writers and critics had not only mistaken their aesthetic mission for a
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> sociological one, but more importantly, they had also failed to recognize that
>
> sociology has perpetrated a bait and switch on the its literary adherents: under the
>
> guise of presenting literally true representations of black life, social science has
>
> palmed off tendentious 'formulaic' fictions as the truth about black reality. (85)[16]

The problem of this tendency, other than ignoring the subjectivity of individual experience, is that

this exchange between literature and twentieth century sociology has led to a slate of narratives,

devices, and racial tropes that mostly stem from the stigma of urban housing. In spite of the

distinction W.E.B. Dubois tries to clarify in *The Philadelphia Negro* in 1899 and that St. Clair Drake

and Horace Cayton make again in *Black Metropolis (1945)*—that unemployment and land values cause

the degeneration of slum buildings and their inhabitants—the "Negro Problem" and "The New

Negro" emerged as tangential sociological constructs, impacting the way African Americans were

viewed and discussed, and rendering them vulnerable to stereotypical attitudes that easily glom to

space. Osofsky's *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (1963) makes this clearer. In it, he fastidiously

illustrates how restrictive housing covenants worked throughout Reconstruction and the Great

Depression to isolate and New York's largest migrant population—black laborers—even while

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[16] This opinion of Gates is interesting since, as Warren later points out in "The Ends of African American Studies,"
Gates also turns to sites of abjection for his formulation of culture (i.e. vernacular language) (640).

fascination with this post-slavery "expressive…singing race" promoted national visibility (192). As African Americans continued to be restrained spatially and sometimes physically within cities, cultural critics and sociologists debated whether the adaptation of African Americans to urban conditions was unique. Were disparaged modern subjects like the tragic mulatto and juvenile delinquent as authentic and trustworthy for pinpointing blackness as cultural forms like the blues? Ultimately, I agree with Warren's critique of early sociology and its biased representations of black culture, but I disagree with his suggestion that a radical break in the African American literary project is the solution (or the new problem). Just like others build their periodization of literature around the motives behind *place*-based renaissances (e.g., Harlem's and Chicago's), Warren's periodization is ironically still premised on race, even though he argues that the racialization of space has changed. My contention via Lefebvre is that space does not have the same boundaries as race; we can look at labor practices and tell that black men's incredible disadvantage is largely unaffected by the post-segregation era. Thus, I would say that Warren's periodization claim is false even though his sociological claim is true.

Overall, there are generally two trends that African American Literary Studies follows in its analysis of race and space. On the one hand, scholars writing in the vein of a nationalist aesthetic, such as the Black Arts Movement, contest that sociology verifies the sign of racial difference, but it is up to literature to correct its over determination. In other words, black artists like Richard Wright and Chester Himes would say The Chicago School was 'speaking the truth' about race and racial conditions but lacked access to the psychological interiority of black people. On the other hand, critics such as Henry Louis Gates, Houston Baker, and Robert Stepto also rely on a claim to difference, but in service of an *a priori* or immanent chain of signification, which has developed slum spaces as an origin point for black vernacular. The line of this theoretical premise claims that because black people have had to live in certain places on the road to equality, those spaces have

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highlighted an intrinsic culture that all black people share, particularly when it comes to literature, speech and creative performance/production. My own cultural affinities aside, one result of these two approaches is the compounding of a binary that positions the *representation* of blacks as either delinquent/tragic because of racial injustice or talented/exemplary because of racial struggle. Given that the key lens for understanding urban space is through the lens of sociology, and that much of African American literature as I've already established is focused on urban space, this reliance on social realism to make cultural claims seeks to present the African American collective in its best light. But in doing so, it risks not being able to account for the individual or transgressive reading; and in the case of representations of the urban, reading *against* race is an act of cultural transgression.

"Invisible Men: Race, Space, and Housing" is an intervention into this literary and political problematic. While indebted to these approaches and their utility in explicating urban characters of the twentieth century, both schools maintain a static image of low income housing that dangerously reinforces the racialization of city space. Urban space does subsume all of us into collectives based on social behavior, and in that way, is always political. However, it is also uniquely personal and intimate. It encompasses everyday practices and distinct modes in which people encounter the environment that have nothing do with race. Moreover, by yielding to rhetoric that establishes a hierarchy in which black people are largely understood in terms of where they live, African American Literary Studies may undermine the very ideals of liberalism that its century of work promotes. Traditional liberalism extends the promise of equality and the right to participate in a "blind" public sphere. If, by focusing on the cultural vagaries of housing inequities and accepting them under a racial umbrella, how are we not also colluding with the discipline that federal and urban policy enact to locate and "straighten black people up" using the scapegoat of space?

The argument of this dissertation is not a rally for a post-racial era, or even a post-racial reading of literature. It is a suspension of a trope that has been naturalized in discourse with the

aspiration to preserve a counter-history of low income space and to work towards greater understanding of its presence, and in fact, disappearance. No one will deny that racial imaginaries have had a detrimental effect on the ability of African Americans to secure adequate housing. One can point to the Homestead Act of 1862; the 1934 Federal Housing Act; the restrictive covenants, rent ballooning, racial zoning, and mortgage redlining throughout three-fourths of the twentieth century; the hasty urban clearance and infrastructural divestment in public housing during the 1970s and 1980s; the call for gross demolition of high rises across the nation in 1996 without one-for-one replacement; and, most recently, the "scandal" of sub-prime mortgage rates of which it has been proven African Americans are disproportionately the victims. These specific legislations demonstrate that although the legal auspices of Jim Crow no longer constrain bodies to space, segregation's legacy remains an extralegal ontology that pops its head up in covert places. Contrapuntally, where race's groans and pains seem to be the most symptomatic these days is in the arena of economic difference.[17] In an era of globalization and increasingly diverse class stratifications, capitalism's whispers are most seductive to the middle class and nouveau riche (of which African Americans now form a significant part), so it may be imperative in this neoliberal era to find ways other than race to organize collectives that will include people who don't define themselves in terms of racial identity.

A spatial problem requires a spatial reading, and this cannot be done by ignoring space itself as the text. I want to draw attention to the construction and poetics of the space of low income housing in order to suggest a way of thinking about undesirable housing conditions as a transformative politics. Whereas some scholars may hold out hope for the rise of a race "drum

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[17] To the point: In 2010, the Institute on Assets and Social Policy reported the wealth disparity between black families and white families increased fourfold between 1984 and 2007 wherein "even *high-income* Blacks" average $56,000 less in assets, a gap due specifically to interventions of the state on behalf of subsidy programs like mortgage lending (Lipsitz 4). We can assume the situation for those dependent on public and Section8 housing is only that more extreme.

major" or put their faith in expressive culture's power to mobilize,[18] I want to suggest a site for radicalism a little closer to home. The same holes, stoops, buildings, windows, corners, and kitchenettes so demonized in cultural discourse can be used to confront opposition to coalition building if we focus on the universal aspect of shelter. Cultural geographers and landscape historians desribe the built environment as architectural structures that inscribe attitudes towards modernity, capitalism, the nation, and democracy. These structures include the physical exteriors and interiors of buildings and neighborhoods (hallways, bedrooms, and maps) as well as spatial interaction with infrastructure, objects, and public sphere(s). Moreover, following the philosophical work of Martin Heidegger, Gaston Bachelard, and Michel de Certeau, the built environment not only inspires collective social identity but is just as importantly a phenomenological space containing individual narratives of "dwelling." My contention in this dissertation is that the presence of micro-narratives about the built environment in African American fiction ironically makes a case for de-pathologizing housing and for looking to the tensions within its representation for a productive platform for twenty-first century housing justice.

Specifically, I look at three groups of novels clustered around particular moments in US housing history: the 1940 *Hansberry v. Lee* civil case respecting restrictive covenants; the 1964 *Gautreaux* v. *The Chicago Housing Authority* decision illegalizing public housing segregation; and the 1992 HUD legislation to demolish American public high rises. While these laws are not the focus of the study, their narratives serve as an important backdrop for my analysis because each serves as evidence of the conditions of abjection my selected archive takes up. Moreover, they mark specific attempts at promoting a race blind politics based on the warrant of segregated space,similar to the impetus of the novels under discussion. But discourse around these laws and the representation of

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[18] These hopes are observable in *Betrayal,* wherein Houston Baker draws an analogy between Martin Luther King's work and the leaders of Florida A&M's marching band, as well as in Paul Gilroy's *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line (2000)*.

housing in this literature create a doorway to larger arguments about the articulation of the universal

and the particular as they relate to race. It must be acknowledged that universality is such a loaded,

amorphous construct that to ask under which auspices race and space belong is to recycle the pitfalls

of democratic liberalism, cultural nationalism, and the bourgeois public sphere. For my purposes,

housing as a specific built environment serves as a metphor or site for the intersection of what

Etienne Balibar describes as the "scattered meaning of the universal [and its] modalities" (49).[19]

Amplified by its connotations of both dwelling for the soul and residence within a social structure,

the attainment of housing reflects one of the more crucial ideals for blacks and whites, citizens and

non-citizens. Especially when it comes to public housing, such environments make transparent all

of our interdependency on the state for income subsidies. They also psuedo-classify people along

class and intra-racial lines, which may then lead to emphasis on the wrong part of the fiction of

housing's unifying narrative: in other words, the spectre of public housing in the cultural imaginary

sometimes permits a displacement of the sameness of social status in favor of a focus on the

difference of race.

  Phenomenology, then, is critical to this project because I aver that regardless of our race or

class, we all participate in key universal moments and experiences when it comes to inhabiting a

space. Far more so than perhaps we have cause to remember, distracted as we are by the political,

living in a house or creating shelter out of housing materials lends itself to the *collective* experience of

homemaking. Yet, this homemaking becomes unique to each one of us, so that through home the

universal is individuated. At times, the blare and glare of social structures cause us to forget. We

can forget that those around us are creating their own places too, places whose spaces escape the

subsumption of race because home at its heart is not marked. Interdisciplinarity is also crucial to

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[19] See "Ambiguous Universality" for a discussion of these three constructs (the Real, Fictional, and Ideal), which ultimately Balibar argues helps to individuate us.

this project because the different methods and mediums I rely on provide another intersection. Taking cue from Milton Curry's "Emancipation Theory," in which he advocates for "a call and response between different manifestations of spatial meanings" (67), I contend that oppositional readings and triangulated genres enliven the texts being read. In the dissertation, the first person perspective of photography meets the first person point of view of narrative fiction meets the first person transcriptions of ethnography, each "I" revealing multiple points of identification for their audience. Though still mediated by *my* representation, the select group of activists I interview bridge the twentieth century's literary discourse of how blacks viewed home to the twenty-first century wherein housing struggles display new negotiations of home to confront the rise of neoliberalism.

Building on urban studies that link the configuration of urban crises in housing to the visibility and invisibility of low-income men, I examine the spatial possibilities already present within ghettoized spaces and mine them for interpretative openings for the black male subject's transcendence. Beyond sociological categories; beyond literary stereotypes. Such a study contributes to African American Literary Studies' scholarship on blacks in the city and interlaces with prominent sociological texts on everyday resistance in public housing, notably Sudhir Venkatesh's *American Project (2000)* and Roberta Feldman and Susan Stall's *Dignity of Everyday Resistance (2004)*. These sociologists focus on the former Robert E. Taylor Homes and Wentworth Gardens development in Chicago; thus, my discussions with Chicago activists of the Cabrini Rowhomes and former high rises complement this scene as well as scholarship. Further, my project culminates in a discussion of black masculinity as formed through participation in housing justice. Although gender can be just as constraining as race, the men I interviewed and followed exercise a masculine performance I conceptualize as the "Civil Outlaw" –when men transgress the domestic or housing sphere in order to achieve a higher notion of home. My project, then, can also be viewed in conversation with feminist and queer studies of domestic fiction. "Invisible Men" locates black

male figures both inside and outside narratives of family, uplift, and the state but affirms their counter uses of the domestic sphere and their agential understanding of that use.

In Chapter One's "theoretical détente," as I call it, I begin a consideration of the potential of housing as a spatial analytic for African American literature. I turn to photographs of urban space as documentary records that exemplify an alternative mode of reading the built environment, particularly slum or ghetto tenements. The city shots of photographers such as Gordon Parks and John H. White display a panorama of shadow and light dancing over crowded tenements and the surprising expression of whimsy inside dark kitchenettes. Through the aesthetics of the visual frame, these texts conjure an imaginary of intimacy, entrepreneurialism and play which, if we readjust our reading paradigm, can also be said of representations of housing in African American literature. The phenomenology of bell hooks, Gaston Bachelard, and Martin Heidegger provide another counterpoint to the novels I focus on subsequently by each presenting a mode of thinking about our encounter with objects and by helping me to argue the particular way that bodies and buildings attract and repel each other. Revising Bachelard's poetics of space which presumes spaces of intimacy can only carry associations of wellbeing, I suggest that supposed dangerous and insecure spaces offer intimacy too, but that black male characters in fiction and even film are constrained by images of housing abjection. Low income urban housing should be respected for its positive contribution to the history of space, as well as interrogated for its inequities. Analogizing an engagement with the visual highlights possible spaces of freedom within African American literature when one focuses on the paratactic construction of space as "home."

Chapter Two traces the effects of pathologies stemming from twentieth century discourses of racial realism and sociological determinism to examine how they continue to structure our imagination of African American literature's protest genre. African American literary criticism has been highly dependent on both the acceptance and disavowal of sociological determinism for its

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explanation of genres and periodization. By putting this criticism in conversation with phenomenological theories of spatial relations, however, I assert that a stretching of this genre's categorization and its characters is necessary. Arguing against the predominant understanding of place as a site of cultural production and racial authenticity, I draw on *Native Son (1940), The Street (1946),* and lesser known *Trumbull Park (1959)* by Frank London Brown, because each corroborates material conditions under Jim Crow and, paradoxically, each refutes such deterministic thinking through the tension and ironies inherent in the texts' descriptions of the built environment. I point, for example, to instances wherein the protagonists encounter racialized places but create subjective, unmarked spaces within the architecture, apart from any embodiment of the cultural hero trope. Distinguishing the racialized interaction with space from the individualized interaction with space enables an *ouverture* for otherwise doomed characters, such as Lutie's son, Bub, in *The Street.* When only considered from the umbra of segregation and slavery, the effect of Jim Crow on African American fiction and its attendant discourses is potentially paralyzing, but examining the literature through an intimate politics of space illustrates another historical arch.

In Chapter Three, Gloria Naylor's *Women of Brewster Place (1982), Linden Hills (1985),* and *Men of Brewster Place (1998)* set the stage for a discussion of "the invisibility blues"[20] low income black men face as they are disciplined by cultural discourse differently from their female and even middle income male counterparts. The legal history of the *Gautreaux* cases[21] is background to explore a

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[20] Michele Wallace invokes this phrase in her 1990 collection of essays, and in the essay "Invisibility Blues" in particular bemoans the lack of authority of African Americans over their own cultural production. While Wallace's emphasis is on black female intellectuals, her case is relevant to low income African American men even as one could argue the music industry has permitted this demographic a certain level of self-representation.

[21] In 1976, a class action suit brought the Office of Housing and Urban Development before the Supreme Court for funding the Chicago Housing Authority's concentration of public housing residents (by then, mostly African American) in high-poverty, segregated areas. The Court's upholding of this suit as a violation of the 1964 Civil Rights Act not only created the nation's housing voucher program, beginning the liberalization of public housing, it set a precedent for the rhetoric of "deconcentration"—an urban renewal program spurring the exodus of low income residents to wealthier, integrated neighborhoods and suburbs.

rhetorical paradox: while African American men were gaining visibility in the seventies and eighties as dangerous urban subjects and cultural superstars, they were simultaneously rendered invisible within the discourse about the urban African American family, often due to lease restrictions on public and low income housing. The cultural discourse of this period is cited by studies such as the 1964 *Moynihan Report* and the 1995 Million Man March, which both relied on an apologetics for black patriarchy in an argument for restoring black families in primarily low income neighborhoods. Naylor uses the built environment of 'ghetto housing' in her trilogy to register the conflict behind this ideal, and additionally, to critique the *classing* of space in an intra-racial sphere. Because of how the binary of good and bad space gets reified in public policy and cultural representations, black middle and lower classes have been forced to negotiate an ever lessening responsibility to one another. In these novels, the male characters expose the pressure on black collectives to counter negative images attached to housing discourse.

As aforementioned, my dissertation concludes with a short qualitative research study in order to bring the stories of male public housing residents to the fore. Like literature, qualitative methods that rely on phenomenology/social constructivist theory see social outcomes and social identity as the effect of historically situated contexts. Chapter Four includes in-depth interviewing and a summary of participant observation with six male housing activists from Chicago who deftly exhibit a localized and global understanding of spatiality. Denzin affirms, "Sociology should make the invisible visible" (33). How do these men describe their relationship to housing and the use of race in housing politics? What is their understanding of place and space and does it correspond to the illuminations from African American literature? Sharing their narratives with me and influencing my own are founders and torch runners from three not-for-profit organizations that specifically work on urban justice issues. In spite of continued housing policies that encourage their disappearance and unemployment, the participants in this study possess knowledge of the twenty-

first century American landscape critical to sociologists' and literary scholars' conversations.[22] I

examine their activism and constructions of masculinity but also offer commentary on what the

rhetoric of public housing activism and literary criticism of African American literature might have

to offer one another.

By borrowing Ralph Ellison's title for my own, I am implying that black men are a present

absence in the representational fields within the literary and sociological texts about housing and that

the purposeful consideration of their subjectivities sheds important light about the impact of

neoliberal policies on our neighborhoods. Lisa Duggan has argued how "Neo-liberalism, a late

twentieth century incarnation of Liberalism, organizes material and political life *in terms of* race,

gender, and sexuality as well as economic class and nationality…But the categories through which

Liberalism (and thus also neoliberalism) classifies human activity and relationships *actively obscures* the

connections among those organizing terms" (5). If liberalism was always a discursive illusion (with

its free enterprise built on the backs of free labor, its cheap housing based on the privilege of white

identity), then its descendent, neoliberalism, is like a magician doing the same trick but under poorer

lighting. Per David Harvey, neoliberalism is enacted spatially through the development of uneven

geographies wherein countries, schools, and property owners are favored that collude with the logic

of enterprise.[23] When it comes to housing, a ready example is the extreme shift of public housing

over to mixed funding privatization models and the conversion of land where African Americans

once predominantly lived into new, overpriced spaces for consumption. This is not the mob

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[22] Similar to Hazel Carby's observation that twentieth century black scholarship disproportionately displaced the black female voice, the voices of lower income or "non-intellectual/artist" black males involved in housing activism are startlingly missing from black literary criticism and sociology. Literary interventions from Claude McKay, James Baldwin, and John Edgar Wideman are notable. For an example of the prominence of the Black Panther Party's work in public housing, see also *Showdown in Desire: The Black Panthers Take a Stand in New Orleans (2010).* My work extends the twenty-first century conversation by highlighting the ongoing everyday resistance of invested working class men.

[23] Much of David Harvey's work deals with the effect of modernization and capitalism on space, but his later work is instructive when it comes to spatial politics, for example, *Spaces of Hope (2000).*

violence of Jim Crow but the stealthy violence of displacement. The largest group unable to fit into these new spaces is overwhelmingly low income black men; through exacting policy trends, they are often osctracized, criminalized, left out of the discussion, or killed. This historical spatial contest is one to which most African Americans are accustomed. It is a long black song. But under neoliberalism, anyone poor—or who for whatever reason cannot comply with the program—runs the risk of being disciplined by the increasing marketization of the state and public lands.

While racial disparities have not gone away and, in fact, remain absurd when it comes to traffic stop profiling, police brutality, and incarceration rates, a racialized spatial discourse used in conjunction with housing might be attenuated by continuously shifting grounds under global capitalism. It might be that the built environment requires a rhetoric that is premised on universality but that is also attentive to difference, one that both pinpoints identity-based inequities and minimizes the threat of urban proximity. This does not negate the spatial strategies that African Americans have employed in American ghettoes: acute attention to the relationship between architecture and oppression, defiance of spatial boundaries and counter-vigilance, or efforts at spatial redefinition. Rather, such rhetoric would acknowledge that the experience of racialized space in the twenty-first century is historical but also highly personal, and that varying levels of privilege might exempt one from the same pressures of the past, as well as entice unexpected allies. This adds nuance to the view of African American literature as historically bound by segregation. "Invisible Men: Space, Race, and Housing" then positions itself at the intersection of two implied streets: down one avenue, a concern for the disappearance of race and the politics it still holds—the politics of visibility, solidarity and responsibility; down the other, a disavowal of the uniqueness of race as it has been projected onto bodies in adverse living conditions. If, however, the assumption that Katherine McKittrick establishes in her book *Demonic Grounds (2006)* is accepted, that space and place give black lives meaning because those spaces contain overlooked lives within them (9),

deeming those spaces black is a problem because, in some cases, those overlooked lives just happen to belong to black people. The act of having your life overlooked in space (being a victim of spatial amnesia) could just as easily happen to squatters in Jaipur as a Latina family in Atlanta or, since the foreclosure crisis, a white couple in Maine. Black matters are very often spatial matters. No space in and of itself is "black."

Another critical problem: due to increasing focus on degrees that directly feed into the corporate world (for instance, majors emphasizing big data), the risk to African American literature classes is competition with other 'minority' literatures for funding and enrollment. This begs the question of what African American Literary Studies does or should do, and what it will do in the future to maintain its relevance.

Rather than abandoning the legacy and the literary configuration around Jim Crow, African American Literary Studies should reexamine literary genres such as the protest novel for their contemporary political relevance. Because the discrimination, abjection, and displacement African Americans have experienced in housing is, in fact, a global trend stemming back to colonial practices, the presence of housing struggles in African American literature makes it a prime location to explore both the uniqueness and the universality of black characters' spatial negotiation. This is something that perhaps qualitative research and literary criticism focused on squatters in Indian and West Indian cities have done well.[24] Teaching students how to understand the dynamics of housing injustice and yet to respect alternative living patterns as spatial creativity and resourcefulness rather than pathology is an ethical pedagogy sorely lacking amongst university students who may take one literature class and go on to inform public policy after graduating. African American Literary

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[24] See, for example, *Literature, Geography, and Postmodern Poetics of Place* by Eric Prieto, Jean O'Brien's *Dispossession by Degrees,* and the work of Maryse Conde.

Studies could give students an alternative way to think about the landscape or themes they find familiar when it comes to depictions of housing, thereby making difference more accessible and yet shifting the conversation away from trite stereotypes and generalizations. The universal right to housing and the universal ideal of home as a legitimate space transcends racial difference. However, by triangulating literature with ethnography and housing rhetoric, we can talk about the manner in which specific people have responded and could respond to housing injustice. By helping to validate low income and affordable housing, African American literature would be illustrating a purpose for one type of collective difference without joining the neoliberal chorus that seeks to rationalize moving beyond it.

CHAPTER ONE

(A Theoretical Détente)

Space, Housing, and Phenomenology

> *But space is not black unless there is no light, and since*
> *there is always a little bit of light, such space is always dark grey.*
> Roy DeCarava

Figure 2. *New York, New York: A Harlem Street Scene*, Gordon Parks, 1943

Look. The photo above and many of the photos that follow belong to acclaimed

photographer Gordon Parks. Other photos discussed include images from John H. White and

Wayne F. Miller of Chicago. They are images of Harlem and Chicago, spanning the years of 1946 to

1982. Historian Sherrie Turner DeCarava, lifelong curator of her husband Roy DeCarava's work,

provides an axiom that this chapter will unpack: "The visualization of the scale of walls is the matrix

in which human imagery is rooted…It is always self-referential…Yet its ultimate function to evoke

and provoke extend[s] the act of seeing and wider comprehension" (10). To extend our act of

seeing is to look at what is before us in a suspended or protracted way. In *New York, New York*, the

angle chosen for the image creates the illusion of a street that stretches into the horizon. The light

emphasizes the arrival of morning on one side of the street, giving the photo a pronounced

temporality, while the contrast of shadows on the opposite side draws attention to the

environment's spatiality: the iron railings, the hanging cross, the lone unlit lamppost. Positioned off

center, behind the small figure walking and a distance from the men in the doorway, the camera's

lens implies a subjective point of view, a self-referential perspective that seems to extend from the

unseen porch steps beyond the edge of the frame. It is not an image of "black Harlem" that a

secondary observer sees unless we happen to know the address. Isolating what is within the frame

alone, it is, at first, a neutral setting cast over by shades of grey.

Jonathan Friday in "Photography and the Representation of Vision" attributes the

subjectivity of the photographic image that also creates objectivity to the Keplerian effect, an effect

in which the visual representation inside of the photo implies the perception, and even experience,

of someone outside of the photo but inside of the photograph's world (354).[25] In reference to her

husband's photographic style, Turner DeCarava calls this "the proscenium for the summation of

[black] life" (9). Both of these metaphors, of the Keplerian observer and proscenium, suggest an

invisible wall connected to the frame to which multiple, intimate perspectives can be attached. The

physicality of the photo's surface as object mirrors the optical exchange between eye and mind, and

opens up the possibility of in-sight. Similarly, in what I am calling a theoretical "détente," I would

like to extend the way low income spaces are typically viewed and suggest a different attachment to

the frame: to draw attention to the ways in which the self-referential properties of an image can

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[25] Johannes Kepler was a German astronomer, mathematician, and in some ways, a popular scientist. He is said to have coined the term "camera obscura," an optical device reliant on a small pinhole of light to project an image into a darkened room from the outside.

emphasize possibilities for multiple readings and, therefore, interrupt the immediate attitudes, histories, and prejudices that often pathologize space.

By manipulating height and depth, shadow and light, photographic images invite us to see space aesthetically and imaginatively. Because the photo automatically originates from first person, the "I"/eye of the photographer, photographs are phenomenological by nature. Unlike literature, which is distanced from the signified by the sign and representation of language itself, the realist photo is one *pas de deux* closer to the actual object. The two-dimensionality of the image draws us again and again to the material limits possessed by all objects at the same time that the image's representation reinforces these limits and yet calls the imagination beyond it. When it comes to thinking about how to represent and re-present low income housing, then, a brief tour or ekphrastic journey seems necessary. Ultimately, I am arguing that literary and cultural criticism of African American literature would benefit from an extension of its spatial philosophy through another mode of looking. Inherently focused on space, African American literature leaves open the possibility of an array of readings that could readily add to twenty-first century conversations about spatial inequalities. However, the major critical voices and African American cultural trends that reflect spatial concerns continue to pose race as the center of difference and history as the primary narrative in order to speak back to mainstream theoretical negligence, and, I think, to preserve a certain politics of solidarity. This emphasis on race compromises the ability to think of space subjectively, even whimsically, and is, perhaps, heightened by a larger cultural context that posits "ghetto" as synonymous with undesirable.

To begin to unravel this seeming debt that housing pays to race politics, I want to suspend for a moment how scholars of African American literature are expected to read representations of ghettoized space. To do this, I start with a discussion of photography, focusing the eye on imagery that challenges sociological interpretations of the urban as abject. The 1940s kitchenette, for

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example, has become a literary symbol of the despair of African Americans migrating north, per Richard Wright, but analyzing a diverse selection of photographs of the kitchenette reveals how such tropes are not cohesive. Borrowing questions from scholars Kenneth Warren and bell hooks, I rehearse how space rather than race is more aptly the problem facing African American literature today and how repositioning the built environment as an object of analysis could provide an opening for new directions in the discipline. Finally, by summarizing the perspective and methods of phenomenology, and in particular, Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space,* I lay the groundwork for the type of close reading I utilize in Chapters Two and Three (as well as its limitations), conjecturing that a more philosophical understanding of the "poetics" of housing that some consider abject might be a quicker path to believing in all housing's potential to be considered "home." Thinking about the way the mind perceives space and separating that experience from other cultural mooring is another way of extending our sight. Though paradoxical, here I interject the visual as a theoretical "pause" or *détente* before the evaluative description of language.

The photographers I refer to in this chapter were all given cameras at a young age and found their defining work in urban communities predominated by African Americans. All of them were award-winning and achieved a number of firsts: first black photographer to work for a major magazine and newspaper (Parks and White), first photographer to take pictures of post-war Hiroshima (Miller). They all traveled or worked internationally, whether as part of the military or doing contracted work for outlets such as *Life.* Three of them worked for government agencies promoting social documentation in the forties, e.g., for the Farm Security Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency. All of them illustrate a commitment to portraying the social realities of black people, even if—as Roy DeCarava wrote in his Guggenheim Fellowship in 1952—they were not aiming to make "a documentary or sociological statement" but "a creative expression."

So, look. In Figure 3, the depiction of a city space that might otherwise be characterized as neglected, wasteful, or empty is transformed by the photographer's capture of two boys eternally vaulting backwards into Olympic-worthy flips. The boys are smiling, their bodies frozen into the athletic form that will propel them back on their feet, the acrobatics (and the film's exposure) converting the background of the photo's ghetto surroundings into a mere set piece. The other photos in John H. White's series are equally striking. Over and over, he catches the tumblers in midair, the implied repetition of the exercise also implying the boys' mastery of this brand of skill. In addition, the boys' horizontality interrupts the vastness of the urban canvas. Brick, wire, and weeds give way to both the human eye and body, and a presence that might otherwise be interpreted as loitering is visually uplifted into a state of completely 'owning' the space. A similar argument

Figure 3. *Springboard to a Dream,* John H. White, 1978

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could be made of several of Roy DeCarava's photos, such as *Lingerie (1950)* and *Two Boys in a Vacant Lot (1949).*[26] *Lingerie*, a photo in which four boys perch on the tips of window sills and stair rails, depicts a parallel expression of bodily freedom, horizontality, and absence of surveillance that we see in White's. On the other hand, DeCarava's *Two Boys in a Vacant Lot* minimizes the bodily presence of the two boys by emphasizing the *verticality* of the wall behind them, and in doing so, transforms the vacant lot into a blank palette, an entire world. As the wall towers to the sky behind the boys, who hold court in the lower right quadrant of the image, a black wooden fence in the left quadrant asks to be read as a spatial divider or boundary. If viewed literally, it perhaps separates the tenement building of the boys from another. But extending out of the frame as it does, if viewed imaginatively as young boys might view it, the fence becomes the figurative gate for the imagination, in which black two-by-fours could become the show jumping fence of an equestrian—in another life, or another place. The trash littered about becomes blurred specks in the camera's lens, obscuring a possible treasure trove for aspiring *bricoleurs*.

The image in Figure 4 taken by Gordon Parks shows another *bricolage*. Two young boys have climbed a fence and tentatively explore a scattering of junk in their backyard. The photographer captures a collage of bottles, broken bits of wood, pots, a decaying trunk, and paper. The younger of the boys toes an object, seemingly unaware or unconcerned with being observed by the camera's eye. The other boy perches ambivalently astride the fence. The caption tells us that this is their backyard, but the background shows a row of low-rise tenements. So perhaps the hodgepodge of household items once belonged to the boys' family, or perhaps they have been tossed over the fence by neighbors and strangers. No matter the origin, anyone can recollect how one's imagination in

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[26] DeCarava images cannot be displayed for copyright reasons. However, all photographs mentioned are easily viewable via the World Wide Web.

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youth imbued power over objects. An empty chest could become a pirate's treasure. A washtub could become a steel drum.

Figure 4. Washington (southwest section), D.C. Two boys playing in their backyard, Gordon Parks, 1942

In each of these photos, the spatial behavior of children overlay a playfulness and leisure onto spaces that might otherwise be considered dangerous and unseemly. Rock piles,[27] sidewalks, front stoops, and fire escapes are readily transformed into pommel horses, hopscotch mines, and magic castles. This creative use of space authorizes a liberating way of thinking about urban areas. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, spaces of play for the well-to-do were located away from the home: on the hunting grounds, at the beachfront, and later, private pools. Here, we see children of the so called slums enacting an inversion of the local, thereby illustrating an improvisatory and agential relationship to space usually only afforded to the upper class. It also offers another perspective of low income housing sometimes missing from documentation of the

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[27] See Baldwin's short story, "The Rock Pile."

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social behaviors of 'the poor': residents of these spaces may not be content or consigned with these environments as is, but may launch specific strategies to convert the environment into use value—whether for profit or play. At the very least, the spatiality of the photograph inserts an alternative narrative. The story begins, not ends, with what we see.

Photographs like this pose a counterpoint to Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*, the monograph I mention in my dissertation introduction, in which Wright arguably becomes one of the louder voices about how to interpret the African American experience of space and modernity. He writes,

> Sometimes five or six of us live in a one-room kitchenette, a place where simple folk such as we should never be held captive. A war sets up in our emotions: one part of our feelings tells us that it is good to be in the city, that we have a chance at life here, that we need but turn a corner to become a stranger, that we no longer need bow and dodge at the sight of the Lords of the Land. Another part of our feelings tells us that, in terms of worry and strain, the cost of living in the kitchenettes is too high, that the city heaps too much responsibility upon us and gives too little security in return. (104-105)

On the one hand, Wright admits the possibility of this newfound urban space—possibilities of dignity, of agency, and anonymity. His nod to the seesawing of emotion spurred by the former slave's introduction to modernity accurately portrays the ambivalence that city life often engenders and, more acutely, the role that the material environment plays. On the other hand, Wright's use of the kitchenette, and specifically photographs of the kitchenette, as a symbol of the disintegration of social intimacy undercuts the fact that families did survive the urban and created "spaces of

resistance."[28] Farah Jasmine-Griffin reads the same photographs on which Wright bases his claims and points us to their inconclusiveness. Griffin does not ignore the depiction of squalid toilets that Wright includes but rather balances this portraiture with the inference that the families posed for the book seemed cleanly and, at the very least, ambivalent about their surroundings.

One could surmise the same about the family shown in one of Gordon Parks's photographs taken during his work for the Farm Security Administration. In Figure 5, it is obvious that the family's living quarters are close and perhaps not ideal for four children by twentieth or twenty-first century standards. But there is also a seeming pride taken in the upkeep of the kitchenette and its

Figure 5. Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman, with three grandchildren and her adopted daughter, Gordon Parks, 1942

[28] In *'Who Set You Flowin?': The African American Migration Narrative,* Farah Jasmine-Griffin's actual theoretical term is the "safe space," a space which can encompass conservative or liberal ideologies as they promote both nurture and resistance (9).

furniture. The children are appropriately dressed, and there is blatant evidence of their being fed and unrestrained. Tangentially, Wayne F. Miller's photograph in Figure 6 shows the crowded space of a basement tenement, but it also shows the many layers of life and private moments that can fill a room: learning, romance, leisure, family relations, labor (note the mother's domestic shoes). Miller provides a well-rounded portrayal of urban life, including how popular culture plays an intrinsic role in creating the domestic sphere. The scene in Figure 7, similar to Figure 6, includes the iconic image of soda pop, and in spite of the close quarters, reveals its subjects in a moment of merriment. There is glibness on the young man's face as the young woman doubles in laughter.

Figure 6. "This basement apartment was condemned. The widow had nowhere to move with her three children," Wayne Miller, Chicago

Figure 7. "Three Teenagers in Kitchenette Apartment," Wayne Miller, Chicago

Perhaps a Charlie Parker record plays in the background. [29]

Whether Parks or Miller posed their subjects is up to question. Their social documentary style is certainly borrowed from the same heritage as Wright's, meaning the intended goal was for the text to come across as both naturalistic and yet subjective. Both discuss spending days (and even weeks, in the case of Parks) with their subjects, but they did so in order to blend in or become unnoticed, i.e., in order to assume the stance of insider- outsider.[30] Regardless of this possible bias, both photographers' representations offer glimpses of whimsy that definitively contrast the

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[29] Elegized in twentieth century poems by black authors, Charlie Parker –and musicians like him, Coltrane, Miles Davis—could arguably be said to have provided an aural *détente* for urban dwellers. Think of the Prologue of *Invisible Man* in which a Louis Armstrong record and hash usher the narrator into a trancelike state. Jazz and the blues as musical escapes are often freer from the cultural narratives or stigma that we associate with pure space.
[30] See, for example, descriptions of Park's process in *The Making of an Argument*.

hopelessness of the kitchenette that opens *Native Son* and about which Wright writes in *12 Million Black Voices (1941)*: "it blights the personalities of…growing children" (110). Here, instead, a safe space opens up that exists in the midst of urban drudgery that could be ascribed to the limits of segregation and redlining.

In spite of the plurality of meaning that allusions to space and place should suggest, scholars of African American literature have been particularly bound to a bias of reading space for racial history because of the impact of racial dynamics in our institutionalized systems (such as the American political and penal systems, and higher education). Therefore, the problem that Kenneth Warren poses in his 2009 Harvard lectures and 2011 book, *What Was African American Literature*, is decidedly a historical question, but it is also implies a spatial one. Warren asks critics, historians, and readers of African American literature to interrogate the "shared set of assumptions about what ought to be represented and…those representational and rhetorical strategies that at their peak served to enable authors and critics to disclose various 'truths' about [American] society" (9). He argues that the historical conditions that motivated the canonizing of African American literature in the twentieth century have largely been dismantled and, with them, the rationale of using literature to make universal statements about the black experience. While acknowledging that socially exploited and underprivileged members of the African American population still make up a disproportionate percentage of the population as a whole, Warren cautions against the false connection between that particular plight and what he sees as an elitist interest in using a shared idea of history to maintain a vanguard status as keeper of the criteria for what makes art "black" (116-7). In that the legalized versions of racism and segregation constitute historical objects (that is, objects of memory), their use in formulating identity is always precarious, since our imagination of them in the present can never capture the fullness of the actual past. Warren is weary of hinging definitions of blackness and black literature on such obvious and well-studied instability.

Such a proclamation presents a risk for literary critics not merely invested in a historical reading paradigm but in African American literature's instrumentality. (To think about this literature in relationship to housing justice, for example, is to invest in its instrumentality.) African American literary history is a subset of the history of American literary criticism and, therefore, has a genealogy of responding to the skepticism of white critics by advancing the realities of black humanity through aesthetics, in general. This is a history that is unavoidably raced. Responses to Warren's inquiry in the 2011 winter issue of *African American Review* suggest an anxiety about losing this orientation, because how can the past not always be with us? Sharon P. Holland, for instance, in critiquing Warren's use of *Man Gone Down (2007)* exposes a rhetorical asyndeton we might avoid if thinking more flexibly about space: Warren synopsizes, "The younger son, Michael, who goes by the initial "X," looks just like his father except with skin so white he could pass. And then there is his little girl, who is never named but whose brown eyes suggest she is more like her older than her younger brother" (129). Holland exclaims that "this is a profound and telling redaction" and that she "wonder[s] how that little black girl is going to grow up so unhinged to both race and place" (583). Commendably, Holland is connecting the significance of the black female presence to the racial history of discrimination against darker skinned people, but in erasing the portent of the conjunction "and," due to a lens filtered by race, she ironically denies both equality and possibility to Thomas's female character. She assumes that because the little girl does not receive a racial designation from the narrator or Warren, that she similarly has no spatial designation—that is, that her existence alone is not enough to demark a "place."

If we accept Warren's thesis, the implication seems to be, we would be giving up our right to memorialization and the evidence of historical injustices such as the color line, which we can trace as a racial construct over time. However, the temporality of "was-ness" is not the only way to understand Warren's question. Photographic texts also illustrate how representational strategies

disclose 'truths' about society, and similar to literary texts, they capture multiple historical concerns at once. But the nature of the still image also indicates timelessness, an "out of timeness," that is, a history that can be read through the lens of the future in the present. In Roy DeCarava's classic photograph, *Graduation*, a young girl stands poised in white—the eternal symbol of purity and innocence.[31] Around her are the signs of community neglect: a vacant lot, fading graffiti, litter. It would be easy to make the leap to an analysis of urban renewal, a spatial phenomenon which has historically disadvantaged black populated communities, especially in the fifties. But there are other markers within the frame that call out for attention. The juxtaposition of the Chevrolet ad with the handcart brands the alley, pointing to a consumerist vision of manufacturing. The dissection of the photo into shadow and light interrupts the subject's path and renders her direction ambiguous—is she backing up or bravely marching forward? The way her dress interpolates the figure of Cinderella could demarcate the sign of black middle class etiquette and/or indicate gendered entry into the American Dream. When I first saw this photo five years ago, the combination of symbols exploded it for me as a text. It clearly resonated of the urban, so often coded as "black" space, but there appeared so much more. Moreover, the title, *Graduation*, connotes both the past and future, but given the combination of all of the objects in the frame, we might ask which future? Whose past? The invocation of multiple questions implies that there is more than one interpretation possible of the image, just as narratives, by nature, should provoke more than one mode of reading.

John White's photograph of an abandoned building in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood evokes a similar discussion. A youth is seen climbing along the window sill of an abandoned building while another youth runs past him on the street. The building fills the entire frame, so that the boy on its rim appears miniscule, ridiculous. Because of the dimensions of the photo and the

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[31] Image not displayed for copyright reasons. However, like others mentioned, this photograph is easily viewable via the World Wide Web.

distance at which it is taken, the boy and the building are intimately related. He could be hugging its

walls, rock climbing. It is not just a picture of a boy but a warrior and his conquest. The great

Figure 8. *37th And Prairie Streets*, Chicago, John H. White, 1973

empty windows and the overgrown weeds waving above the other boy's head create a timeless effect

in the form aforementioned. Clearly, the building is vacant, but for how long has it been in this

state? If read through the lens of speculative fiction or sci-fi films such as *I Am Legend*, the depicted

Prairie Street gives the sense of the end of the world. In such a post-apocalyptic imaginary where

black boys run free, what is it that enables such liberation—the absence of possible molesters or a

space upon which one can imprint one's own meaning? Tangentially, since fiction is like a

photograph of whatever it depicts, then perhaps we should not only be asking why history was and

is so important to African American literature, but why a full examination of space—equally integral

to its production and representations—has been subordinated in importance.

   To think, 'space first,' requires a commitment to acknowledging subjective spatiality. Several

of the critics responding to Warren hint at spatiality through their titles, metaphors, or specific

mention of place but do not fully stake out novel ways of dealing with issues of representation, hierarchy, or identity through space as a framework. John Ernest's essay, "Canals and Rivers," for example, uses the water trope to distinguish two ways of looking at literary production, Warren's method would be the manual construction of the canal; and Ernest's proposal the natural chaos of a river's current. Ernest does suggest a spiritual and geographic aspect of understanding literature tied to space but ends up representing the wrangle over historical narrative (574).[32] Holland advocates it being high "time to think of our *humanity* not solely in racial terms," but "perhaps the *biosphere*" (584, emphasis mine). This biosphere, which Holland leaves unexplained, indicates a possible *ouverture* for discussing African American literature in terms of ecology; public spheres; materialism and anatomy; yet Holland anchors her conclusion to "the stuff of blackness…literally sometimes—at our feet" (584). Here is a fascinating context for African American literature that could lead to inquiries or more creative writing about blacks' relationship with the planet and other life forms, to individual and collective negotiations of health and disease, but the "stuff of blackness" too quickly mires this imaginative direction. Thinking space first means thinking race second, and that is a challenge for this scholarly field.[33]

Cultural geographers and feminists have produced ample evidence that unequal power relations can be traced just as readily through the 'is-ness' of space and place, as through the 'was-

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[32] It should be noted in Ernest's book, *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History,* he does devote a chapter to time *and* space and uniquely uses the spatial metaphors of dance and choreography to describe how African American authors coordinated textual performances in order to represent a complex legal and social reality. However, his emphasis accordingly focuses on textual and historical events not on space or material reality itself.

[33] In fact, Russ Castronovo has the most enlightening response to Warren in service of thinking about space outside of the box of race. In "Trains, Planes, and *What Was African American Literature*," he argues that the materiality of *the travel* of Warren's book necessitates a consideration of the spaces of its consumption. His descriptions of airplane seats and bookstores, and of course the metaphor of travel, illuminate the influence of economic structures on reception and literary history—not just racial structures. And while he does incisively draw our attention to "the social geography [he] inhabits" as a white man, his tour of the book through spaces like coffee shops, conferences, and the state of Arizona somehow puts more emphasis on the performativity of the object in a grid of racial understandings than on the racial grid itself (580).

ness' of history. Famously, Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* exemplifies how written texts, objects, architectural spaces, and cultural trends can be brought together to deconstruct metanarratives of history—from his account, to the advantage of the bourgeoisie. Just as imaginative is bell hooks' formulation of the multi-dimensionality of poor, rural settings and the productiveness that can arise from marginalization. Indeed, if Richard Wright's voice clangs loudly from the twentieth century canon on how to interpret African Americans' negotiation of modern space, bell hooks stands out as a poignant voice for an interpretation of the postmodern.[34] One of hooks' most significant contributions to postmodern thinking about space is her argument that low income housing is not only fit to be the object of academic study—that is, worth talking about—but it can also be a location from which to critique other settings—that is, it forms its own discursive center. Additionally, in one part of the incisive commentary of *Where We Stand,* she writes that neither the intellectual and political classes nor mass media "suggest by their rhetoric that one can lead a meaningful, contented, and fulfilled life if one *is* poor"(169). Similarly, the housing of the poor is rarely represented in a manner that might be helpful to the interruption of spatial competitions such as gentrification and redlining because housing continues to be one of the visible markers of societal difference and the even more visible guard of capitalist interests.

hooks's impulse to acknowledge the phenomenological character of space and of spatial readings is a springboard for my own. The easily overlooked materiality of her Baba's house serves

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[34] hooks continues to be a leading African American feminist critic of popular culture, black culture, and education. Because of the focus of this project, I cannot do her justice in this chapter. However, her dedication to issues of justice, gender and race equality, and critical pedagogy has been highly influential on my work and teaching. In spite of criticism and misunderstanding by fellow scholars, including scholars of color and feminist scholars, hooks courageously points to the ways in which a white supremacist patriarchal racist and sexist society pits men and women against each other because of the seductive allure of capitalism *and* that academics may be complicit in this ideology by their effective silencing or ignoring others who do not possess the same gender/class/publication status. She encourages us to be critical of all cultural production, no matter the producer, and to keep fighting to strive for open, radical dialogue in the name of love. Most helpful to this project were her books, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (1984), Yearning (1990)* and *Outlaw Culture (1994).*

as the basis for mounting a counter-hegemonic standard of appreciation, which hooks argues is an aspect of black culture that has always been in operation; she even analogizes the darkness and so called ugliness of her parents' house to the unappreciated beauty of black skin (hooks, "An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional" 103). She confirms that American segregation has influenced a social reality of unequal housing conditions that can be spied from the differences in housing size, structural soundness, and the inability to distinguish between cultural forms of ornamentation and materialism. Yet, because hooks's primary investment is in a politics of racial solidarity, her work for the most part digresses from a revision of the negative representation of the material environment and instead emphasizes the problems with the sociocultural production of knowledge that reinforces those representations. I also am concerned with multiracial solidarity, but where I depart from hooks is in believing that some negative representations only become more marginalizing the more we focus on the manifestations of them. I am more interested in a positive politics of revision that emphasizes the universality of space, rather than an overworked racialization that can become a card for policymakers to dismiss. Moreover, men, while acknowledged, embraced, as well as challenged in hooks' work are not described as integral to the construction of home spaces. In this project, I try to consider how the domestic counter-narratives of men might act as a window to better understand how space can be read as oppositional to and affirmative of race politics at the same time.

Let it be clear that I believe in and support the advancement of race when it comes to the history and importance of black community as a kinship network that establishes a needed sense of history, social organization, and—to an extent—traditional values. I mean those values that have always been in favor of progressive education, the preservation of folklore and culture, and social justice. However, as hooks and other scholars have noted, the postmodern and globalized world invites us to partake in a widened sense of connection through digital communities, and yes,

consumption. The twenty-first century invites black people, like all people, to choose their spiritual *and* geographic affiliations, where and how they wish to be moved—ideally. And it must be acknowledged that the mobility of too many poor people of color remains limited by strangling wages and prejudicial real estate opportunities which have no regard for the disadvantages of the race card. Furthermore, black men are particularly constrained in their freedom of location by the persistent image of them as criminals and by racist profiling, incarceration, and lending practices that still make the playing ground uneven. If we allow for black subjectivity to be multiple, we have to clear space for all black bodies to be mobile; and if we allow that space must be cleared for this type of mobility to occur, we have to confront all spatial obstructions for the subject: mainly, the rhetoric that rationalizes prejudice based on appearance and the fear of decreasing property values and the overlooking of landlord abuses and the justification of structural abandonment in service of gentrification, all of which are very difficult to detach from the marker of race. As hooks states, "Our individual and collective accountability to the poor…begins with the politics of representation" (hooks, *Where We Stand* 169). As I hope to persuade, the vehicle of African American literature is a provocative site for an alternative politics of space; or rather, if we think aesthetically, phenomenologically, it is a lens for refreshing our thinking about space, one that until this point has been somewhat shuttered.

Embedded in any question is an ideological perspective that orients (and limits) the question's answers. Because of the need for history as a mode of nostalgia and redress, not to mention the daily pressure of working and living in an ongoing racist democracy, it makes sense that identity politics and specifically white-black identity politics would continue to weigh down spatial questions about African American literature. Warren is right in his recapitulation of the historical burden African American critics have born in order to prove that African American literature *is* literature and worth writing about. Moreover, the concern for injustice against bodies that are

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"colored" logically manifests in collective defenses premised on color. Our judicial and voting systems, as well as the public sphere, promote this—*this* being the "class action suit," "the representative vote," or the idea of "one voice." The pathos created by a collective identity is legally more persuasive, and certainly economically so. But allowing the ideology of collectivity, which necessarily suppresses the individual, is dangerous when it compromises spatial ethos.[35] Asserting race claims that ignore the Boolean character, the fractal locations and complications, the subjective repulsions and attractions within our experience of space is to be less than honest. It is to ignore the particular in service of the collective, which ultimately, is a denial of universal truth.

I don't mean the truth of the nineteenth century transcendental subject in its cosmopolitanism, nationalism, and enlightenment. Nor the truth of the twentieth century depoliticized subject who eschews identity for a false embrace of colorblind identity. The universal truth I mean is the truth of the subject as a human being: who resides in a body and experiences the brunt of the elements; who seeks pleasure and exhibits emotions; who interacts with the object or material world in ways that are creative, routine, harmonious, and disruptive out of choice and survival. This is the truth of space "real and imagined" that the collective can't ignore. It is a different type of particularity than racial particularity, and it is a different type of universality than the liberal subject's universality.[36] We might say it is an "inter-versal" particularity, to borrow the

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[35] This term has recently gained urgency in urban planning and architectural studies as designers appropriate these Aristotelian terms to describe the "rhetoric" of spaces and their architects. See, for example, *Tensions and Convergences (2007)* Reinhard Heil, et. al, in which Le Corbusier's ethos is discussed. Spatial ethos can be thought of as the validation of integrity and credibility of a spatial inquiry by attending to all of the rhetorical, cultural, social, and *individual* concerns of that space.

[36] This tension between the universal and particular, especially when it comes to race, is something like the state of being dispossessed that *Judith Butler* and Athena Athanasiou work through in their incredible written conversation in *Dispossession*. They ultimately argue that the experience of being dispossessed—out of land, country, or identity—requires a simultaneous recognition and disavowal of recognition that leads to one having to assert one's self (perform belonging) at the risk of one's sense of self. My thinking about the particular and universal is that, on the one hand, giving in to race gives one access to the pleasures of cultural affinity, even the pleasure of the affect of solidarity due to racial discrimination. To disavow this category is also not a currently supported option by the state On the other hand, by laying claim to race, one forfeits unity with the liberalist

terms of Wu Kuang-ming, who in arguing the uniqueness of Chinese philosophy admits to an

unspoken discourse out-of-range of Western ears. To achieve any kind of cultural oneness, whether

it be globalization's dream of multiculturalism or a racial collective premised on justice, " 'Otherness'

and 'difference' must be mobilized as a critical dynamo [of] *individuality-in-mutuality* if we are to push

cultural togetherness forward" (Kuang-ming 200, emphasis mine). Kuang-ming's study is

specifically written about the differences in Western and Eastern logic, yet his conclusion is

applicable to a righteous ethics of space. Our perception of space is culturally and socially

constructed, true; however, our first encounter and subsequent cognitive navigations of space are

sensory and individual. We touch or bump into a surface that is hard, or hot, or textured, and it

sends messages to the nerve endings in our individual fingertips. That we receive such messages is a

mutual experience of humanity. Even the fact that we may each interpret those surfaces differently

based on what we have been taught they mean is inter-versal, a difference encompassed in sameness

that is an effect of how humans think.

Culture can only mirror not capture the individual consciousness. If life were a fun house,

literature and history, which help form culture, would only be two mirrors reflecting part of the

whole, a skewed whole at that. This is not to suggest that a spatial lens is objective, innocent, or

even preferred. It is to suggest that more lenses are needed to expand what we can see and to help

us critique *how* we see what we have in view. I take up the lens of space, and more specifically,

housing, because it appears endemic to an overall presumption that black people are somehow

defined by space and yet cannot be agential in that definition. This underlying presumption even

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vision of being "one nation under God" and may suffer the marginalization of having 'separatist' concerns. I'm
interested in distinguishing those moments that are first and foremost human and that have always been
politicized in the name of universality for the sake of justifying civil rights though the very nature of them carry
with them, as well, particular habits and particular routines, for example, how one puts on one's pants—right leg
first or left. The experience of elements of home is not far from this.

marks studies which would seem to assert the opposite. Take, for example, the two covers of

Gilbert Osofky's *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*, first published in 1966. The second edition,

published in 1971 by Harper & Row, ironically participates in the very obscuration of racism that its

author contests. The silhouette's profile extends from the side of the shadowy tenement, suggesting

the inextricability of this figure from the modern ghetto problem. Because the building also forms

the back of the figure's head, the image communicates the embedding of one's built environment

into one's consciousness, or conversely, that the built environment is so ripe for personification it

only makes sense that its inhabitants would be anthropomorphized: that buildings could be

described as metonymic of who people are, or that people might be characterized in terms of where

they live. The latter edition (as late as 1996) presents a middle class vision of black Harlemites and

shows blacks, specifically black women, on a seeming trajectory of material success in spite of their

built environments. The cover art is a photograph by James Van Der Zee, another African
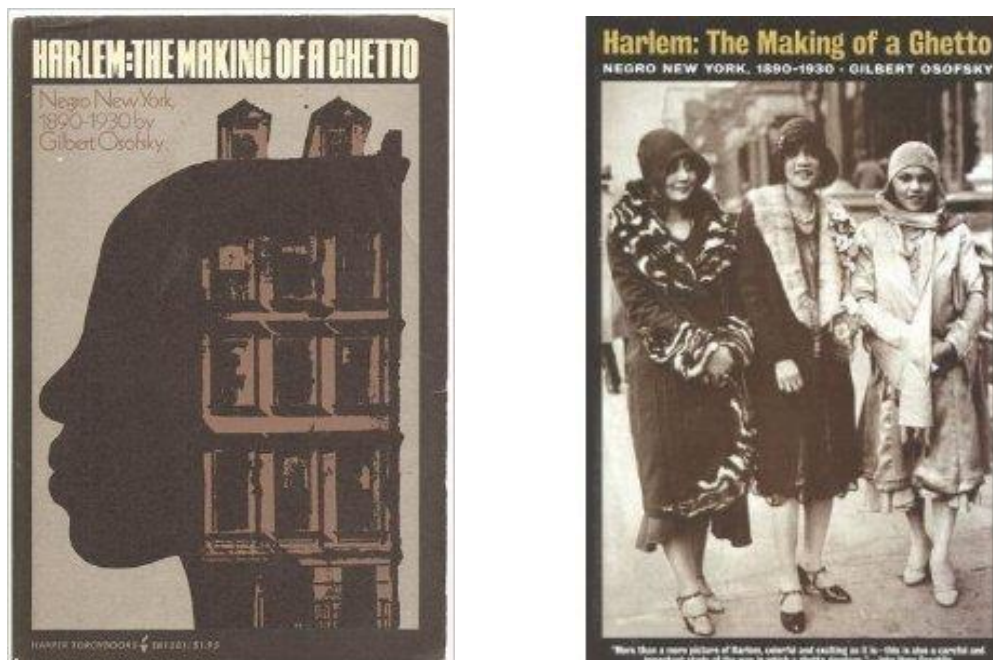

Figure 9. Book Covers of Gilbert Osofsky's

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American photographer who gained notoriety during the Harlem Renaissance for his depictions of blacks in elegant furs and formal wear. Of course, this is another side of the coin of obscuration within urban spaces—the respectability politics that come with not trying to be associated with certain spaces. Spatial representations are powerful and often visual. But like literary history, they only tell a part of the truth. And like literary history—if a 2005 ad run by the Chicago Housing Authority to rationalize urban renewal is any clue—[37] there are still historical spatial totems supported by our culture that require tipping over.

Therefore, what we need is a pause. A freeze frame. A silence. Just enough of a stillness to sense the air around us, to feel our bodies in space, and to connect to the biosphere. hooks demands a pause as a type of recognition, "what [she calls] the 'subject-to-subject' encounter," as opposed to one person perceiving the Other as object and treating him/her as such (*Yearning* 241). Another prominent scholar has argued for a pause in our method of literary reading in order to disrupt historical melancholia.[38] My pause is a phenomenological pause, or perhaps only an extension or protraction of our reading. It is meant to be a détente from the aforementioned anxieties. Theoretically, such breathing room would accomplish the following: 1) bracket the focus on the racial, historical and cultural to allow for more reflection on the individual subject's relationship to the built environment and the potential that may imply; 2) exert a willingness to believe the spectrum of subjectivity that phenomenology permits and that spectrum's inter-versal or mutual existence with other imposing collective conditions; and 3) provide an opening in discourse

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[37] The ad to which I refer is one I often use in my undergraduate composition classes to critique the discourse of public housing. In the ad, an elderly black woman is positioned in front of a panorama of blurred buildings. To the left of her face is the caption which implicitly serves as her dialogue: "I feel just like the buildings. All brand new." The ad is one in a series called "CHAnge" to announce the 1999 Plan for Transformation and to suggest (as the CHA website once did) that, in addition to rehabilitating spaces, it would be rehabilitating people."

[38] By the time this dissertation is published, this second scholar's Newberry Seminar paper may have become a part of his forthcoming book. But at the time of my writing, his request was that the specifics of the work remain confidential.

for the possibility of *Being* apart from race, and subsequently (at least, ideally), an opening for a discussion of the redemption of stigmatized spaces.

In DeCarava's 2001 composition, *the sound I saw,* a string of photo-poems, he juxtaposes portraits of jazz musicians with interiors and exteriors of the urban environment with poetry. DeCarava captures such a stark geometry and intimacy through his photos that he injects potentiality into otherwise disregarded landscapes. One of the settings in this book is reminiscent of the New York alleyways of William Dean Howells' *A Hazard of New Fortunes (1889)*; its exteriorization of poverty (through clotheslines and debris) draws the curious eye. As the eye travels down the page, one could simply read the scattered waste and concrete blocks as trash. In fact, two pages before, DeCarava mourns the "lonely cats and neglected/children/who prowl the streets/of man made/worlds within worlds of steel and brick…[the] boys alone/in/garbage apartments with asphalt gardens of/watered dirt/that dries and flies to throats agape/through noses/to early opened and too quickly ringed/with illusions formed at the mouth" (1, 3). On the other hand, DeCarava's preface to the book acts as a linguistic double-negative in which alternative narratives can come to the fore. "Everything that happens [in this book] takes place…between sets…Their significance is relative and will depend on who you are and what you are," DeCarava writes. Without the terminology of phenomenology, the photographer's eye makes room for other perspectives and for a personal relationship to the material environment, even outside of the one the photographer himself outlines. Rather than simple objectification, then, the collocation of these images of sound and music transform the lines of clothing into the visual analogy of sheet music, the imagistic impression of a score. This is not to overemphasize the aesthetic but to use aesthetics "as the foundation for emerging visions" (hooks, *Yearning* 112).

This bracketing that I call for is borrowed from the philosophical method of Husserl. It is an attempt to isolate the remembrance of the moment of apperception of space from the common

sense notions of perceived space we are used to, already saturated by the cultural and the social. When it comes to low income housing tenements, for example, rather than imposing the understanding of those buildings as objects within class relations first, we might separate our observation of the architectural structure from its social history and then from the lived possibilities offered by it, meaning the different ways the building is lived in and can be used. Robert Sokolowski gives this definition of the work of phenomenology: "[It] is reason's *self*-discovery in the presence of intelligible objects" (3). Apperception brings a particular surface or "profile" of the object into view, and depending on what features are presented to us at a particular moment, we might glimpse not only the object's essence but trace how our own consciousness directs itself towards it. This is "the phenomenological attitude," which, starting with the 'I', moves from the subjective to the universal; it travels from a personal interaction with objects to the acknowledgement of a higher order of dwelling, which is a shared experience (Sokolowski 12).

For Husserl, "the Body, in virtue of the constitutive role of [its] sensations, is of *significance for the construction of the spatial world*" (164). This is first and foremost a kinesthetic process whereby the body picks up on, or is attracted to, the things in front of or around it. Husserl's most famous examples are the cube and the writing table, two objects assumed to be familiar to us all. However, distinguishing between the self and the universal, he writes,

> If we consider the characteristic way in which the Body presents itself and do the
> same for things, then we find the following situation: *each* Ego has its *own* domain of
> perceptual things and necessarily perceives the things in a certain orientation. The
> things appear and do so from this or that side, and this mode of appearing is
> included irrevocably in a relation to a here and its basic directions. (165)

By attributing a "characteristic" or typical way the body appears while also allowing the Ego its unique determination, a reading of Husserl allows for the freedom of some subjective interpretation of the objects that we come close to. Phenomenology is first of all spatial. If our bodies are coming into contact with things in similar ways and yet inciting sensations in us differently, then object contact can be the basis for both individuality and collectivity.

Sara Ahmed has critiqued Husserl's premise of bracketing in both of her books, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004) and *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). She takes issue with the presumption that "bracketing" could permit a transcending of the social, complaining that its belief is only contingent on a willed blindness to difference and more often ends in an exclusionary practice (*Queer Phenomenology* 33). Her concern is the political entanglements that arise when the body's surface experiences feelings, or affective intensity, at the contact of sticky historical power relations (3). These intensities, constructs, and orientations, including but not limited to prejudice and fear, can become walls of energy that misdirect bodies and hamper them from feeling at home.[39] The body, per Ahmed, is most at home dwelling within itself. Thus, while phenomenology for Husserl is purely perceptual, via Ahmed, it is personal and political, although both start with the body—the *I*—as the first place of dwelling.

While I agree with Ahmed on the danger of blindness, it may also be true that the nature of some objects (and the peril of their natural relationship to the body) compels putting this fear aside. Even Ahmed admits "that the object becomes more than the profile that is available in any moment" (36). Every object that captures our gaze or attention is perceived on multiple levels. In

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[39] For example, in an intriguing discussion about the migrant experience and the act of moving towards new landscapes (an object), Ahmed explains that nostalgia or familiarity with the former landscape is the emotional tug back on the body's surface while it struggles to intend the new landscape as home. Ahmed calls "the disorientation of the sense of home" a "migrant orientation" ((*Queer Phenomenology* 9).

Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty avers that objects command varying "grips on our gaze" in relation to a central perceptual perspective (279). In American cultural discourse, the central perspective we perceive housing against could be said to be the sanctity of property and who has and has not had access to it over the country's history. The history of exclusion of non-males and non-whites from ownership sets itself as a stickiness that attracts and constrains certain bodies, forming a collective memory and projection of what places are available to live in and how comfortable we can be within them. From this perspective, a racialized view of space would seem the most probable profile to rear its head. And yet, "Identity is never reducible to one of its appearances…If the identity presents itself now in one way, it also holds in reserve other ways of being given…it always both reveals and conceals itself" (Sokolowski 30-31). This fact phenomenology considers the transcendent or total "manifold" essence of a thing. If the presence of an object can never be fully gleaned, perhaps bracketing one angle at a time is a reasonable method of inquiry. In the case of American housing, the result could be hopeful.

To make housing the object of study, and the relationship of black men to it, is to acquiesce to a material and political construct outside of the body that exerts power over dwelling and yet to maintain the agency of the body over the space it inhabits. This means revising the orientation or recollection of the mind's eye in which black men and housing "appear" as an ominous or surprising connection. For such a revision to occur, not only do we have to reinforce our inter-versal commonality with black men, but we may have to re-envision what being at home looks like for the black male subject.

Similar to the photographers highlighted, hooks, and Husserl, Gaston Bachelard sheds a foundational light to assist with this proposition. In *The Poetics of Space,* Bachelard's goal is really to examine the phenomenology of the poetic image, but through emphasis on the home as a primary case study, he establishes the multidimensionality of any space that eludes capture by one discourse

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and ultimately illustrates what we may miss about the intelligibility of housing if we stick to the capitalist and racist language of every day. The poetic image presents a psychological and cultural impasse in which language is not quite enough: "exactly where the function of unreality [of poetry or poetic signification] comes to charm or disturb—always to awaken—the sleeping beast lost in its automatisms…The most insidious of these automatisms, the automatism of language, ceases to function [if] we enter the domain of pure sublimation" (xxxv). Because by nature, the mental images that poems suggest become photographs in the mind, they act as imaginative interceptions between what is known and familiar, and meaning that can only be grasped at. The home, for Bachelard, is a ready analogy, since it too relies on imaginative associations and its appearance spurs a confrontation between memory and the present that has the power to endow new profiles of Being. He further argues, "All really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home…whenever the human being has found the slightest shelter: we shall see the imagination build "walls" of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection—or just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls" (5). The idea of "slightest shelter" extends our seeing further to realize that any structure can become a home. Moreover, it is one's imagination that is the key determinant, since we finally "learn to 'abide' within ourselves" (Bachelard xxxvii).

By privileging the home as a poetic imaginary, Bachelard demonstrates how phenomenology enables us to "'read a house,' or 'read a room'" for universal value and how it is appropriate to apply this reading to literature (38). Drawing on Baudelaire and other writers such as Henri Bosco and Thomas De Quincy, Bachelard explicates selected lines of poetry for the image of the house that he feels sets up an ideal. He revels in the fact that a simple house can provide refuge, even on paper, and through literature, initiates ontology:

> I dream of a house, a low house with high
> Windows, three worn steps, smooth and green
>
> A poor secret house, as in old print,

> That only lives in me, where sometimes I return
> To sit down and forget the gray day and the rain. (49)

In these lines cited from André Lafon's poem, "*Le rêve d'un logis,*" the house is equated to the soul. The soul is something that can dwell in print; the house is the metaphor that allows this. Bachelard finds in the architecture of the house "[a] body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (17). Even a "poor house" can reach beyond the page to establish the essential identity or the nature of a home. While the primary idea here is that the image of housing forms a text that can be interpreted just as literature is interpreted, Bachelard's extrapolation of the "soul as an abode" is his unwitting *cadeau* to black men as it relates to space.

If home is something carried within us, human beings cannot help but to dwell. We dwell according to and in spite of language imposed on us. This means that we are constantly told stories about where we live while we are in the midst of writing our own. By existing, we make space home; we make worlds for our bodies to inhabit. Thirteen years after *The Poetics of Space*, Heidegger's essay, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," would make this ontology more concrete. According to Heidegger, "The old word *bauen,* which says that man *is* insofar as he *dwells*," means "buildings that are not dwelling places remain in turn determined by dwelling insofar as they serve man's dwelling" (146-7). Following this line of thought, the black male subject is not merely shaped by the language of exclusion and oppression, but to the extent that he claims his own presence, he also shapes the space around him. He can make any space home. This is truly the subjective relation to location, to *being among things* (Heidegger 157).

There is an additional step of this logic, to connect the ontological experience of home to the material and to rethink the often negative association of black men and the built environment, particularly the space of the urban (ergo, the ghetto). This requires a rethinking of Bachelard as well, since he discounts urban space as a non-space, as "oneirically incomplete" and challenging to defend (26). Bachelard's problem with the urban environment is that it "lacks cosmicity," which is his way

of saying that it does not carry the valor of a natural landscape or the integrity of being hewn by an original owner. It is no surprise that his ideal analogy to the poetic image is the rural European cottage. Discoursing about twentieth century Paris, Bachelard writes, "there are no houses, and the inhabitants of the big city live in superimposed boxes… From the street to the roof, the rooms pile up one on top of the other, while the tent of a horizonless sky encloses the entire city. But the height of city buildings is a purely *exterior* one…*Home* [is] mere horizontality" (27). To dismiss the horizon is to dismiss the potentiality of this space; by critiquing the endlessness of horizontality, Bachelard is taking issue with the unoriginal design of city homes. Their honeycomb structure seems to deny personality and only support function. This is a relevant criticism of the artificiality capitalism has injected into city spaces, but it is also a contradiction to Bachelard's previous stance on the subject's role in dwelling.

If "our house is our corner of the world," as Bachelard asserts in his introductory chapter, then any corner where people live can veritably become a cosmos (4). Look. Though the windows in the following photograph of the Robert Taylor Homes are stacked in boxlike fashion, the exteriors we see are also tied to interiors. The rows of cabbage heads are metonymic and sustenance for the rows of apartment units. When we recall the poor lambrequin in Stephen Crane's *Maggie (1893)* that his protagonist tried so hard to dress up, we can imagine any number of ways

Figure 10. Robert Taylor Vegetable Garden, Chicago Housing Authority, 1981

an interior space can be arranged. Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha (1953)* also illustrates through her heroine that city dwellers may furnish their meager kitchenettes the best they can to exhibit dignity. In fact, it is not in spite of the proximity of city homes but because of their proximity that we can infer a multiplicity of cosmoses and overlapping spatial worlds, a lived phenomenology.

Although Bachelard would agree with Richard Wright on the unappealing aspects of the twentieth century kitchenette, who says the urban built environment does not have its equivalent of intimate spaces as Bachelard lays out for the rural in *Poetics of Space*? That a small nook can symbolize a nest of refuge and the verticality of stairs connote daydreaming and nostalgia is not particular to the farmer or the hermit. In fact, the complexity of African American life, particularly in urban spaces, has often required a double consciousness in relationship to social relations as well as everyday objects. Consider, for example, Gwendolyn Brooks' famous poem, "Kitchenette Building" written in 1963:

> We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
> Grayed in, and gray. "Dream" makes a giddy sound, not strong
> Like "rent," "feeding a wife," "satisfying a man."
>
> But could a dream sent up through onion fumes
> Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
> And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall,
> Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms,
>
> Even if we were willing to let it in,
> Had time to warm it, keep it very clean,
> Anticipate a message, let it begin?
>
> We wonder. But not well! Not for a minute!
> Since Number Five is out of the bathroom now,
> We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.

In this poem, there is enough of a double voice to open up a space for reflection on both the life that is and that could be for the speaker. In spite of the acknowledgement of the world as "grayed in, and gray," the colors "white and violet" are mentioned in the second stanza (2, 5). In this poem, verticality is not conveyed through the image of stairs but their connotation. The dream is "sent up" as if from a lower floor (4). It can possibly be sung down, as an aria (7). The multi-gendered speaker is harried but willing to be contemplative. The poem contains the sense of a collective by being written in first person plural and by also understanding that dreams may be shared and communicate "a message" (10). Yet the speaker castigates the collective to the involuntary status of "things" and numbers (1, 12); the rest of the poem conveys the speaker's simultaneous portrayal of personhood: consciousness of objects outside of the mind, inner tension, practical reasoning, even "hope" (13).

Although the bathroom is not a space that is described outside of its possessing lukewarm water, Brooks suggests that it is there that one can evidently be bracketed off from the world, since "Number Five" does not appear for the subject until coming out of it. So we might assume that in spite of the crowded bleakness of this building of kitchenettes, and the hammering outside of the

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bathroom door that surely assails its occupant, there exists a space (an interior) one can *hope* to get into for a little privacy or intimacy, that is, the sanctity of Bachelard's "hermit's hut" (31).[40] Bachelard's tautology is useful for reading symbols in a text as well as for determining how symbols create texts, but his tautology is not singular or primordial. The imagination does not have to be limited by urban space. When an object makes its appearance in time, its intelligibility is conditional on the language we have to perceive it. When it comes to describing urban space, there is ample, dynamic language to be used to interpret these rooms if we choose to engage it.

As a final example, in Michael Eric Dyson's 1992 article, "Out of the Ghetto," he comments on four films produced during this decade that seemed to epitomize all that was fascinating and wrong with the urban environment in the nineties. Namely, *Juice, Straight Out of Brooklyn, Boyz N the Hood,* and *New Jack City* each depict a somewhat exoticized ghetto, a cultural backdrop that pairs misguided black nationalism with a romanticized version of ghetto life. He argues that in re-presenting this built environment of projects, skyscrapers, and the streets, these films at once reify problematic constructs of black family relations while "for better or worse [helping] black masculinity find a discursive home" (19). These visual landscapes of the urban project an aesthetic that pits ideals of cultural nationalism, fatherhood, and community against the devastating effects of crack and consumerism. Basketball courts and high rise rooftops are sites of congregation and confrontation while the percussiveness of hip hop soundtracks imitate drive-bys and police sirens.

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[40] Bachelard contends that the hermit's hut is an image that conveys our primordial sense or need for "a center of concentrated solitude" (31). While his description may suffer from exaggerated picturesqueness (something he denies), I do think the image is a valorization of the human's sense of privacy or longing, at times, to be outside of the world. Therefore, his rhetoric remains fitting:

> The hermit is *alone* before God. His hut, therefore, is just the opposite of the monastery.
> And there radiates about this centralized solitude a universe of meditation and prayer, a
> universe outside the universe. The hut can receive none of the riches "of this world." It
> possesses the felicity of intense poverty; indeed, it is one of the glories of poverty; as
> as destitution increases it gives us access to absolute refuge. (32)

As stated, this is the perfect description of the hole in *Invisible Man*, and indeed of any haunt that man claims for himself. It implies that a meager corner found in an abject place can be transformed into one's own respite.

Yet, Dyson points to a theme of "black male love" that pervades the four films, albeit often expressed through the coercion of patriarchy or gang culture. Dyson wants to see the redemption of black male masculinity in this urban space, directed by and filled by black men, but he is troubled by the cultural baggage of the ghetto, a ghetto built around myths of delinquency, hyper-matriarchal roles, and the coming of the black Messiah.

The vigilance against black male sexism and confining cultural rhetoric notwithstanding, Dyson's well-nuanced reading of these films critiques their representation of urban space as cartoonish, campy, and overdrawn (20). Case in point, he sees the setting of *New Jack City* as "[exposing] the vocabulary of excessive cultural representation that characterized [Blaxploitation films]. Van Peebles' ghetto is a sinister and languid dungeon of human filth and greed…Its artifice is meant to convey the inhuman consequences of living in this enclave of civic horror" (20). But what if we bracketed the generic context of seventies films and the social cast of the war on drugs for a minute? Would the black male love in this film—as paradoxical and violent as it is—be so incompatible with the discourse of home? If we search the film for aspects of the material creating 'hominess' for these characters, would it lend itself to a different understanding of the dimensionality of this space?

I might hypothesize that those militarized aerial shots of The Carter, for instance, are subtly and briefly undercut by the vivid medium shots of flowerboxes with rosebushes. I might point to the interior of Scotty Appleton's apartment, not too distanced from his character's origins in the ghetto, as a contradiction or depth to the idea of the "new jack cop" being played by rapper Ice-T. Its lavender tones and soft lighting, the tended plants in the corner, foreshadow the maternal quality we see in his character as he rehabilitates and nurtures Pookie to sobriety. It is a stark contrast to the blatant machoism performed by Ice T and the other characters on the streets. Even Nino Brown's vampire-like lair is intended to contrast his performativity of the pathologized drug dealer.

His gold tipped cane and prowling Rottweiler add to the costume of the American fantasy—which

we buy into: of a glamorous underworld ran by Draculas afraid of the light. The reality may be

much more akin to the banal suburban shots of *The Sopranos*; other than name brand outerwear,

black kingpins are usually embedded into the social and material fabric of their communities. They

blend in. Therefore, the medium close on Brown in a nondescript trench coat and newsboy cap

sitting on an old sofa and watching TV at the end of his run might be a more accurate portrait of

this persona.

Tellingly, the scenes in which Gee Money are shown in his home, cradling a crack pipe

behind a giant fish tank, convey the irony of contesting stereotypical representations while also

exposing the attachment to a meager spatial vocabulary. Paradigmatic of the "art imitates life"

dilemma, especially when it comes to signifying how blacks respond to urban space—or

representations of themselves in urban space—Gee Money's home setting reflects the difficulty of

the black man just being allowed to be *at home*. The blue tones of the lighting and the fact that he is

shirtless in bed indicate the possibility of intimacy; however, the camera's filming through the

garishness of the fish tank's glass subverts this counter-notion of subjectivity. There is no place

"like home" for this type of character. And because there is not much character diversity proffered

by the American Grammar of cinema, these men are expected to respond to each other and

themselves in self-destructive, hyper-masculine ways, so that is what is shown. The discourse of the

ghetto, of dismal housing availability and sociological problems like the drug trade, limits counter

visions of "talking back" to that discourse, counter ways of inhabiting the space. Richard Wright

named the Father of twentieth century capitalism "the Bosses of the Buildings and the Lords of the

Lands" (26), but how do those of us who do not occupy these roles speak to the stereotypes they

originate while explicating African American expressive culture? That is, what other opportunities

for showing how we live exist outside of song, dance, and the drug trade?[41]

This is the dialectic we are dealing with when it comes to low income spaces. We wrestle

between how we are told to perceive such spaces (e.g., as a non-place that historically has denied

people humanity), and between other possible associations with them, with the spaces within the

space where humanity is actually affirmed. It is impossible to deny the legacy of colonization,

slavery, and discrimination that a neoliberal juridical complex has instituted in all of our cities and

which in the mid-twentieth century took on the material form of the public high rise building.

Wright may be pointing to this seeming impossibility when he writes of the "infectious rhythms"

that fill towering tenements "to reconcile the ecstasy of living with the terror of dying" (126-7). The

idea that such spaces were intended to be provisional, impermanent, until a real home could be

acquired through freedom, or hard work, consolidates the logic that industrialization influences the

shifts in how spatial boundaries are determined and which spaces are eventually abandoned and

rendered abject.

The architectural history of housing in the United States testifies to this theory, starting with

the slave then ultimately sharecropper's shack in the South and shuttling to the FHA-supported

public housing in the 1940s. Both were built on the idea of the home's necessary proximity to labor

and both, although in different ways, spill over into the promotion of home ownership. Moreover,

per Frederic Jameson, spaces distinguished by their architectural project reflect "a feeling and real

displacement 'everywhere at work' since, he argues, the emergence of multinational capitalism has

transformed buildings into images of the economic order (125). Therefore, over top the individual's

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[41] This is not a denial of unique African American *forms* of cultural expression (e.g., the blues, jazz, hip hop, etc.). But I appreciate that Wright attributes this expression to a universal response to oppression (i.e., "The English [said] of the Irish, just as America [said] of us, that only the Irish can play, that they laugh through their tears" (128). Moreover, he points this out to ironize the master-slave dialectic in which the oppressor and the oppressed only become aware of their limited expression when confronted with the plastic cage of slave and coerced labor.

lived habitus is the abstract field of globalized architectural regimes that support increasingly rigid ways of producing openings for a worldwide economy, so that Le Corbusier and "New Urbanism"—utopian modes of architectural standardization—became household names in American urban planning is no surprise. Following Jameson, housing allows us to think through cultural problems (125), like the spatial convergences created by gentrification and ideals such as "the global village," which throw the rich and poor next door to each other under deeply ironic circumstances. We're no longer sure where we live.

This flattening of class and even national distinctions may be problematic for those who need such distinctions to see, that is, to determine how to label their neighborhoods or locate where they are. Ahmed affirms that "social dependence upon agreed measures tells us more about the social than it does about space. Or if it tells us about space, then it reminds us that 'absolute space' is invented" (13). In particular, notions of absolute space have tended to hinge on the narrative of white, middle class, heterosexual respectability. Even in what have been historically considered African American neighborhoods by *de jure* or design, our picture of what constitutes the abject is lodged within a paradigm that bases its standards of rejection on being too different from the "norm." However, abjection calls attention to itself exactly because it puts the illusion of normativity into crisis.[42] Men and boys on corners in sagging pants rather than business suits remind us of differential labor practices and startling unemployment rates. Young girls and women walking alone with strollers call into question our definition of independence and sexual responsibility. Transgendered teens or teens in cross-dress expose the already porous boundaries of sexuality. Boarded up, abandoned buildings reflect on the property value of surrounding homes.

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[42] See Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Objection,* pg. 4.

Ahmed says that responses to the abject organize themselves around intelligible (though not always rational) emotions when objects stand in for an accumulation of signs. This is to say that an historical metonymy can intercept what we actually see, so that in fact, we are responding to a representational displacement at the same time we interface with the object's being, say that of a building. Sokolowski explains it more aptly:

> Suppose I say to you, "This view of the building is very attractive; come and look at it from here." As I move away from the spot and you move into it, you see the same aspect that I just saw, but you will be experiencing profiles that are different from the ones I experienced, because the profiles are the momentary presentations, not the look or the view or the aspect that can be seen by many viewers. An aspect, a side, and of course the building itself are all intersubjective, but a profile is private and subjective. The profile may even depend on my disposition at the time and on the condition of my sensory organs. (19)

A house, for instance, even with the curtains thrown wide and the lights all on remains a space of privacy. As I come upon one, I am presented with the two sides of the house at most and left to imagine the sides that I am not seeing. If the door is closed, the house is sealed against the elements but also against visitors. Even if the door to the house is left open, there is the perception of rooms and hallways out of view. This is only the physical dimension of housing, but there is an entire discursive aspect to what we see or don't see of its interiors and exteriors for reasons of class, aesthetic ideals, and race.

Figure 11. Chicago Housing Projects, John H. White, 1981

What is concealed and revealed when it comes to representations of blacks in urban space? We have been conditioned to respond to buildings in "black" neighborhoods or in which black people, or poor people, live by a metonymical displacement of a false civic ideal. When we point to a building or a house and think only of its structural deficiencies or the history of economic and racial discrimination, to an extent, it precludes us from seeing that building's other possibilities.[43] It adds on to the object and steals the truth of its function. This move is useful in the hands of political critique but only if a vigorous *parataxis* is maintained. On the contrary, African American literature and its study have, in a sense, organized themselves around *hypotactic* profiles of the low

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[43] I love this photograph of Stateway Gardens by John White because of its otherworldliness. The reflection of the figures and the buildings in the water doubles the effect of a powerful elevation of scene. The image creates two parallel scenes—the literal one of a housing project with a huge mud puddle in front of it, the other something mystic: the chunks of snow become cloud banks in the reflection, as if the housing project has risen into the sky. If one were to bracket the experience of approaching a housing project, or considering its profile, one would have to first leave behind all cultural associations. The first thing one might notice is simply the vastness of space, the number of windows or units, their similarity in form, before one began to even focus on the landscape. The hope is that then one could begin to choose one's associations or perceptions, depending on the logic needed at the time.

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income building. By relying directly or indirectly on housing in urban settings, African American literature and criticism serve as a body of texts that fastidiously reconstruct the contradictory architecture of social space of the twentieth century. Consequently, it is surprising that this literary geography so often disciplines itself to uphold a particular social map while subordinating its own revelatory counter-spaces (ones that have existed all along). Perhaps because the site of the African American home as object is still not free from the idea of a metonymical collective. When one person's home is in disrepair, we fear it reflects on the entire race. What can we say of this representational space that reveals and conceals when it aestheticizes acculturation, except that it has always been "giddy"?[44]

In the chapters that follow, I discuss an alternative profile of housing in African American literature that reveals housing's indeterminate and poetic nature even when used as a tool for resisting oppression, that is, as a tool for contesting racialized space. In the service of housing justice, I apply concepts of phenomenology to literary analysis and qualitative research in order to examine constructions of ghetto housing and the home as a domestic sphere. In this chapter, I have tried to relay a potential opening for close reading through analogizing photographs to literary texts, and then again, to architecture. Architecture is material and visual, just like a photograph. Just like the difference in neighborhood upkeeps and design fronts, architecture attracts the eye as an object and communicates to the brain. Novels, by presenting the language and the constructs of the writer's imagination, have no outside material object other than the book. Language and ideas are imposed, and it is up to the reader's mind rather than the reader's eye to contradict or meet the author's subjectivity with his or her own. Moreover, it is easier to succumb to the written word and

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[44] It is Ahmed who argues that homes are "'giddy' places where things are not always held in place" (9). She argues that they, like any object, are subject to moving around in our purview depending on the time we move into them.

distance oneself from actual social reality, while the photograph's visual reference to an object outside itself always brings to bear questions about the real–*what location does it capture? Who are the people in the picture? Where is the photographer relative to the scene?*

Just like a photograph, the visual logic of architecture invites different interpretations and subjectivities as an experience. Literature does too, though sometimes this goes under-theorized due to historicized ways we have of reading its subject. It is not that one logic is superior to the other; it is that they tell us different things and play on our phenomenological understanding differently. The photograph by existing in time and space rather than the imagination already resists the imposition of the containment of the frame. Yet it lends itself to the perception of recollection and recognition; it is a ready-made bracket of both a past and present experience. This example can be useful for close reading.

African American literature would benefit from a phenomenological perspective of its object because a spatial-perceptual analysis permits a cut between history and the personal so that other more liberating ways of looking come to the fore, even in black literature's theme of "holes."[45] There is no doubt that race colors any discussion of housing, and with it, class and gender. However, thinking about space apart from race does not make the black people occupying it less black, it makes them more human. What I have tried to show in this détente is the powerful "and" we must insert into any sentence about so called ghetto housing, since housing is first habitation, is first shelter. It is racialized *and* it is where one dwells and plays and dreams.

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[45] Here I am referencing Houston Baker's formulation of place in *Working of the Spirit*, which he extrapolates from a close reading of the description of the attic hideaway in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave* Girl. Baker argues that all spaces within a racialized economy are holes "'under watch,' guarded by the history of slavery, colonialism, and segregation (108).

CHAPTER TWO

Rereading the African American Protest Novel: A Phenomenological Perspective

Figure 12.

The reigning interpretations of the African American protest novel are the products of

African American literary studies' continued reliance on the conflicts of "racial realism"[46] and the

twentieth century's American sociological theories of determinism. These interpretations and how

we have come to understand this genre exacerbate the representation of space as racialized and,

therefore, also exacerbate the problem of representing inhabitants of this space as inevitable victims

of impending doom. What if, however, in keeping with the rejection of segregation as totalizing of

social space, we separated race from the ghetto environment's encoding in the protest novel? What

new sides of familiar literary characters and of this genre might we uncover if we critiqued them

through the lens of space? Critics who attend to space in arguments about the protest tradition have

mostly used space to show the negative impacts of race, class, and gender relations in America. In

doing this, they cannot help but deny the individual some form of agency in light of past and present

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[46] See, for example, Gene Jarrett's insightful book, *Deans and Truants,* which lays out the history of aesthetic platforms established by vanguards of both American and "African American" realism, illustrating how William Howells' commendation of minstrel realism, Alain Locke's parameters for "New Negro" modernism, Richard Wright's blueprint for black radicalism, and Amiri Baraka's Black Aesthetic all hinged on the idea that literature—and especially, realist fiction—was capable of revealing the "truth" about race (Jarrett 1). Although most critics recognize the underlying falsity of this, the discourse of cultural authenticity marks works well into the 2000s.

relations since those aspects of identity, while valuable to the body of literary criticism, also come

along with predetermined subject positions and histories. On the other hand, to focus on unmarked

spatiality in these novels is to insert a version of universal subjectivity premised on shared cognition

of a thing, or what I extrapolate in Chapter One as "inter-versality." Through space, we can see

how characters in the protest novel navigate the built environment in many ways just like everyone

else, regardless of identity; by keeping space and the nature of social realism as a literature in view,

we can also see how the genre enfolds both ideological assumptions about space and the everyday

habits of being that conflict with those assumptions. To uncover this, however, is to read the

protest novel against its classic paradigms. To uncover this requires a phenomenological pause.[47]

Frank London Brown's underestimated novel, *Trumbull Park (1959),* offers a strong example

of a protest novel that can be read against the deterministic nature of the social realism genre.

Heavily autobiographical, the novel tells the story of Louis "Buggy" Martin and his family the first

year that they and a handful of other black families integrate Chicago public housing by moving into

Trumbull Park Homes. Aware of the tensions surrounding desegregation but thinking mostly of

escaping from their former housing project, the Martins relocate and wind up facing more racial

violence than they were prepared for. One by one (or actually, two by two), the characters organize

around the civic-minded compromise of the Civil Rights Movement, disrupting the landscape of

perceived white space with the presence of their black bodies. Incited by racist fervor, the Martins'

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[47] Although only one book length work to this date has specifically focused on phenomenology in African American fiction (*Being & Race* by Charles Johnson in 1987), its focus was intended to help black *creative writers* understand the possibilities of narrative form outside of the tenets of naturalism and the Black Arts Aesthetic. Of naturalism, Johnson complains, "[it] seemed to conceal profound prejudices about Being, what a person is, the nature of society, causation, and a worm can of metaphysical questions about what could and could not logically occur in our "experience" and conscious life…It held the imagination close to the ground by [pretending] the camera-like illusion of objectivity" (6). Yet of *Native Son,* Johnson writes that it "still remains one of our most phenomenologically successful novels" because it thoroughly imposes Bigger's perspective of the world on the reader and by doing so signifies the *Lebenswelt* of "the black urban experience" (13). Even this view, while lifting up the possible subjectivity of the protagonist and the inferences we might draw, premises the subject's experience of the world on a reading of race first.

new neighbors greet their intrusion with daily homemade bombs and racial epithets, such as "*Get out, Africans—GET OUT!*" and *"Go back to Africa, nigger!"* (Brown 27, 29). In tandem to the rioting and overt racing of the space outside the home, however, the novel provides a critical look at unmarked space *inside* the home through the phenomenological appearance of a common object.

When Buggy takes his first bath in their new place, he describes the experience and appearance of the tub in phenomenological terms rather than racial ones. That is, even though an adjective that might elsewhere signal racialization is used in this passage, it refers to the physicality of the object and is not positioned as a metaphor that symbolizes the hordes of white people outside; or, if Brown does intend the tub as metaphor, it does the work of completely inverting the ready association of private property with whiteness by deracializing ownership:

> Boy, what a *big* thing that tub was! And white? The tub in the Gardener Building was so dingy that, even after you scrubbed it, that dime-store enamel was about as bright as the bottom of my shoe…I just stood up over that clean tub for a minute watching that ripply clear water fill up that big pretty white tub. My tub—well, mine and Helen's and the kids; but not Little John's and Bertha's—poor Bertha—and Johnnie's down the hall, and half the other people in town…Nice warm water… What a difference such a little thing makes! (Brown 77)

The word "white" here illustrates a material contrast between Trumbull Park and Buggy's former home, the Gardner building, but it is a distinction premised on cleanliness and not on the racial appellations being shouted outside. The scene emphasizes Buggy's belonging in the space and not his dispossession—the historical effect and affect of racial discrimination. Instead, Brown draws the reader's attention to the size and function of the tub. It is big enough for Buggy to lie "stretched out" in, and as he does, an image of the tub is iterated through the accumulation of another descriptor—"Nice warm water…Nice clean bathroom. Nice clean tub" (Brown 77)—replicating a

cognitive and spatial experience for the reader, of taking refuge in water. The repetition of the word

"Nice" is alliterative within the paragraph with other N words, such as "No" and "Now" (77). This

suggests a psychic immediacy as the character languishes in the present; no action is required from

him, even linguistically in the form of verbs. Through this sanitized description, before his wife calls

him down to breakfast and the racial tensions of the day mount, Brown allows Buggy to become

Bachelard's hermit, "alone before God," immersed in water as in baptism (Bachelard 32). In this

aloneness, the character's subjective relation to the space becomes more apparent, the tub more fully

his. He distinguishes himself from others through their lack of access to the tub rather than their

race. For this moment, Buggy is not a black man intruding on white space; he is a privileged man

luxuriating in private space. Closeted in this space within space, racial authenticity is not what is in

play; instead, it is both a liberal and inter-versal notion of humanity—liberal because of the subtle

implication of property rights, inter-versal because of the more overt condition of enjoying them.

Reading the passage phenomenologically, therefore, inserts a break from the concerns of racial

realism and endows the space with a more common meaning.

Despite this and many other common spatial experiences depicted in *Trumbull Park*, critics

such as Gershun Avilez and Mary Helen Washington primarily interpret the novel through the lens

of race, going so far in Avilez's case to argue that the novel "undermines the relationship of [Black

people] to domestic space" and reifies the perception of black-occupied places as "valueless" (135).[48]

In her book, *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s*, Washington

goes further than Avilez in her analysis of race and agency; however, she ultimately sees Brown's

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[48]*Trumbull Park* has not received much literary recognition, and most reviews emphasize Frank Brown's biography
as a union and civil rights activist rather than the narrative itself. But Robert Fleming's 1973 criticism praises
Trumbull Park for its representation of 'real blacks,' who are respectable *and thoroughly black* ("Overshadowed by
Richard Wright: Three Black Chicago Novelists" 79, emphasis mine). This illustrates how far back the perspective
that there is nothing outside of race goes.

main achievement as rearticulating a black identity rather than any "subversive and revolutionary act" (27). On the contrary, I would argue that these critics miss the movement of the second half of the novel because they are only looking in the wrong place (through a racial paradigm), which automatically limits their readings to a relationship based on a white supremacist hierarchy. Conversely, private moments like the one above and others I will highlight suspend the experience of hierarchy and put the emphasis on individual personhood (whether we understand personhood or individual identity as revolutionary or not). In fact, contrary to views made popular by early literary critics and sociologists that racial integration could only take place through accommodation or assimilation to race, *Trumbull Park* and its predecessors—*Native Son (1940) and The Street (1946)*, illustrate that a distinct individualism is possible within black occupied space when the text is read for unmarked or neutral spaces, that is, against the paradigm of racialization.

In Chapter One, citing Heidegger, this dissertation tries to establish the universality of dwelling apart from race, using the poetics of the image and the structure of the house to affirm that what makes us truly human—the inter-versal experience of being and dwelling—can be accomplished in any space, even those considered abject, or 'ghetto.' In this chapter, I use the paradigms of spatial poetics and phenomenology to produce close readings of the ghetto or raced environments of the protest novel. I specifically take issue with understandings of "place" imposed on this genre by scholars and try to reclaim these novels from ossified accusations of a dated sentimentalism. To see these novels outside of these criticisms requires a phenomenological pause borrowed from Husserlian philosophy: attention to the appearance of the object (in this case, profiles of homes and buildings); a close reading of their essential features; and a discussion of the conditions of thinking that this experience might allow. What emerges from a spatial reading are new angles we can apply to understanding protest characters' agency and subject positions but also a new angle to apply to African American fiction, overall. By putting *Trumbull Park, The Street, and Native Son* into conversation with

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spatial philosophy and history, the paradox of racing space to support claims for *unraced* equality and as a rationale for this genre's periodization becomes that much clearer of a problem. These novels portray the conflict between the representation of the spatialization of race and the reading of the racialization of space; and by doing so they expose new possibilities of the liminal spaces depicted, and new considerations of this literary form.

A Phenomenological Perspective, Take One: Finding PLACE Where There is None

Figure 11 provides the image of a front page headline from *The Chicago Defender*, marking 1936. It was this year that Carl Hansberry, father of the famed Loraine Hansberry, won the Supreme Court ruling *Hansberry v. Lee* the Woodlawn Property Owners Association over the question of whether white home owners had the right to determine their neighbors' skin color. *Hansberry v. Lee* stands in history as an eternal marker of the fight against segregation and Hansberry's address—6140 Rhodes Avenue—represents a huge overturn of the blockade against African Americans sprawling from the Black Belt at a ratio of 90 black residents to 10 white. Historically speaking, however, and visually, what does it mean to open new homes to race, especially since private restrictive agreements would not be truly regulated until *Shelly v. Kraemer* in 1948 and the amount of rental housing available to blacks would remain stagnant until 1960 according to Smith (xiv)? In fact, the actual ruling on the Hansberry case was made on the basis of a legal technicality and ignored the pertinence of race and racism all together. The Supreme Court of Illinois ruled that because the homeowners association representing the class in the suit had fraudulently affirmed that 95 percent of its membership had signed the restrictive covenant, they could not make the claim that their due process under the precedent *Burke v. Kleiman* had been

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violated.[49] [50] Because of this, the announcement in *The Defender's* headline seems not only premature in its language, but collectively untrue. As a declarative sentence about opening, it assumes the end of a prior closure, but by specifying a numerical limit, the sentence really encodes the anticipation that the racialization of space would stretch beyond desegregation. It is a statement of fact willed into being by rhetoric and not, necessarily, the reality.

I, intentionally, focus on semantics here because it is in the semantics and rhetoric of housing discourse that the representation of housing as raced continues. The history of Chicago in the forties is the setting or preamble for my readings of two important novels set there. Surely, the most exemplary protest novel that deals with the frustrations of racism and low income housing in the twentieth century is Richard Wright's *Native Son,* and as a literary artifact of the Hansberry era, it makes sense that race would be an overwhelming lens for interpreting the spaces it fictionalizes. Conversely, however, the Hansberry case proceedings and subsequent narratives about it demonstrate that race is by nature incidental to the material composition of space, and that the social construction of space often reproduces racial difference by eliding its own fiction, i.e., the idea that space can ever be closed in the first place. The distinction between the *racialization* of space and the *spatialization* of race is important. Racialization is the characterization of geographies and homes in terms of traits associated with perceived cultural differences in people. Spatialization is the use of racialization to create uneven geographies of privilege, access, and social rights based on those perceived differences.[51] While the spatialization of race is often beyond our control, racialization

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[49] 277 Ill. App. 519 (1934).

[50] See Allen R. Kamp's brief, "The History Behind Hansberry v. Lee" for a thorough discussion of the legal proceedings of both the covenants and the case.

[51] The 'racialization of space' is 'the process by which residential location is taken as an index of the attitudes, values, behavioral inclinations and social norms of the kinds of people who are assumed to live [there]." (Calmore, "Racialized Space and the Culture of Segregation: 'Hewing a Stone of Hope from a Mountain of Despair' *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 143 (1995), 1235-36. This index of factors, rooted in racial presumption, gives space a racial identity. Within pockets of such space, race-neutral terms serve as racial code words, such as, for instance,

and its dependency on discourse, rhetoric, and *belief* allows for a cut in what we might accept as the *natural* order of space and its obvious social construction. 6140 Rhodes Avenue will always be a symbol of the Civil Rights Movement and is integral to the history of African Americans' advocacy for change. But the building itself, benign in architecture, is unremarkable as an "opener" to race. Three stories, red brick, with a white porch and trim lawn (an architectural front seen all over Chicago), 6140 was first and foremost built to be a home. Similarly, the settings in the novels I will discuss signify invisible walling within neighborhoods bound by designations of blackness and whiteness, but those designations cannot erase that the underlying representations of space in these texts are as spaces for dwelling.

Space, and particularly the more quotidian and intimate theme of "place," is significant in African American literature but usually gets cast as a politicized sphere incapable of being detached from the strictures of a racial history or capitalism. I begin with a critical review of Houston Baker because his theorizing of space, place, and culture is illustrative of the constraint of racial realism that African American literature has been responding to since the early twentieth century. Baker argues, "PLACE as an Afro-American portion of the world begins in a European DISPLACEMENT of bodies for commercial purposes. Commodification of human beings meant that relationships of property, and not free, human, personal relations, [would always mark] the spaces between Europeans and Africans" (*Workings of the Spirit* 108). Therefore, he claims, it is impossible to think of African Americans occupying space without also thinking of that space's relationship to a system of ownership (108). Baker's reading of place and space is important because

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those identified as residents of the inner city, those who occupy public housing projects, and even those housed in prisons or sitting on death row. Regardless of color or class, people are likely to see those within such space as black or Latino. Their images are associated with place, which is a result of space having been racialized. (Calmore 143)

it shows how our imagination about space is linked to the social reality of migration. However, it also shows how successful adaptation strategies to new spaces (ergo, the European portion of the world) can cause those strategies to become authenticated as culture, and tangentially, as more valid expressions of agency.

Baker argues that the place(s) most featured in the protest novel (slave cabins, and ghetto apartments) are unlikely to promote any kind of agency outside of the "black *speaking* subject," a figure who gains access to the political, literacy, or economic sphere through the expression of acceptable forms of African American culture (Baker, *Blues* 165). Or, in other words, the only way to break free from the confines of ownership and to be recognized as a human subject is to become an owner or *mediator* of something that disrupts the political economy of labor and race relations. That "something" and the ultimate expression of this mediation, according to Baker, is the blues. For Baker, the blues is a constant reminder of the entire historical experience of the black body in America, a body both geographically embedded and excluded. The blues is a metaphorical and discursive synthesis of this dichotomy. Examining his argument about the blues' relationship to places raises two productive questions for this chapter: can the places within the protest novel show us anything outside of the dehumanization that occurs within a racist, capitalist landscape? Is the only threshold or opening for agency within any abject space an articulation of, or a form of homage to, collective expressive culture? Is it not enough to exist in a space and own the self?

Baker's formulation of a creative blues matrix arising out of the post-slavery industrialization era concretizes responses to American history through the analogies of buildings and the blues: "by invoking buildings *and* blues [one constitutes] an analytical move designed to incorporate into reality phenomena to which traditional historiography generally denies the status "real" (Baker, *Blues* 28). Baker argues that identity, or at least cultural identity, can be pinned down to the spaces wherein Afro-American expressiveness emerges: "the nonmonetary, "mythical" dimensions that arise from

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the size and arrangements of black homes" (31). Overall, he is working out a theory of black

vernacular that can help him synthesize African Americans' adaption to slavery and the post-slavery

period in the North. He, therefore, locates settings such as the slave cabin and the railroad tracks of

migration as the impetus for blues-making: within these settings or along them, blacks were able to

tell their story of exploitation and struggle in the name of democratic freedom. Thus, on the one

hand, this relationship that Baker establishes between the blues, myth, and home is complementary

and productive, because it implies creativity fostered by spatiality. On the other hand, however,

Baker's thinking reveals certain biases at work within his criticism, even as he criticizes the

disciplinary biases of others.

Citing and responding to the following description of a slave cabin in an article by historian

Samuel Charters, Baker's equation of spatial identity with cultural identity rears its head:

> About a mile and a half from the turnoff into Brownsville there is a sagging red cabin, the
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> bare patch of ground in front is littered with bits of clothing, dirty dishes, a broken
>
> chair…The cabin has two rooms; one of them empty except for a few rags that lie in the
>
> filth of the floor…In the other room is a chair, a rusted wood stove, and two dirty, unmade
>
> beds. In the heat of a summer afternoon it looks like the other empty buildings scattered
>
> along Winfield Lane. (qtd in Baker 30)

Baker tries to elevate the built environment depicted by Charters by labeling it "identity with a

difference," claiming that, "while the sagging cabin is like all such Afro-American dwellings in its

dilapidation and overcrowding …it presents [an exception]. For the sagging red cabin outside

Brownsville is the hoe of Sleepy John Estes…His brilliant expressiveness modifies, ameliorates,

orders, and sharply qualifies the bleakness of a sagging cabin's size and arrangements (Baker, *Blues*

31). Commendably, in spite of a sweeping generalization, Baker does not choose to romanticize the

slave cabin by pointing to its charm. He instead calls attention to the cultural production or birth of

a blues man within the slave cabin, who—through his articulation of slave conditions on the guitar—salvages the direness of slaves' homes with blues discourse.

While buildings, i.e., place, remain important to Baker's assumptions, alternative views of this material space give way to an emphasis on access to representation within a black public sphere.[52] Per Baker, and his reading of *Invisible Man* and *Native Son*, we cannot even consider a space constitutive of place unless that space allows for a particular expression of discourse, or a mode of *speaking*. This automatically discounts the spaces that Bigger and the narrator of *Invisible Man* occupy. Inarticulate and naive through the first half of their narratives, neither of these protagonists ever seems to be in control of their speech but instead has to rely on others to interpret the blues for them. Baker's related argument is worth quoting at length:

> "The two novels suggest an enormous confinement of black life; they are not disruptions of place but industrial/technological signifiers implying black placelessness. They have the effect of making traditional Afro-American geographies into placeless places. Why 'placeless'? Because Ras's Harlem, like Bigger's South Side, lacks the quality of *place* as it is traditionally defined…For place to be recognized by one as actually PLACE, as a personally valued locale, one must set and maintain the boundaries. If one, however, is constituted and maintained by and within boundaries set by a dominating authority, then one is not a setter of place but a prisoner of another's desire. Under the displacing impress of authority even what one calls and, perhaps, feels is one's *own place is*, from the perspective of human agency, *placeless*. Bereft of determinative control of boundaries, the occupant of authorized boundaries would not be secure in his or her own eulogized world but maximally secured by

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[52] See "Critical Memory and The Black Public Sphere" in *The Black Public Sphere* edited by the Black Public Sphere Collective (University of Chicago Press) and *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era* (Columbia University Press).

another, a prisoner of interlocking, institutional arrangements of power." (Baker, *Workings of*

the Spirit 104)

Baker denies these characters any spatial agency and eliminates the possibility of private or

interpersonal discourse being validated as coequal to the dominant discourse in play.

In spite of good intentions, therefore, Baker erases place under the pressure of racialization.

His placeless PLACES are ironically spaces that he ascribes as a result of the displacement of the

African American's position within Western history. But the bedrocks of the spaces that Baker

notes are the institutional and cultural forms that we are already familiar with, "the Afro-American

church and Afro-American sacred and secular song," expressions predominantly associated with

women as their progenitors (Baker, *Workings* 112). These spaces are acceptable disruptions of

culture because they rely on or give voice to black collectivity, and they are gendered feminine

because at the time or context in which protest novels were being written, the "voice" of African

American fiction was still overwhelmingly masculine.[53] (Baker was being revisionist.) The snag in

his tapestry, however, manifests when he further claims, "the African personality is compensated

[for this displacement]…by a new, operational law of personality…What emerges from the

confined, imprisoning, one-room hole [such as Linda Garrett's], in a word, is an instability that gives

rise to a *distinctive folk culture* (111). The snag is that Baker labels personality, an individual construct,

"culture," and he insists negotiation of the built environment takes a particular form.

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[53] Baker discusses Richard Wright's gender coding: Here we have the material reason…In the North, the Afro-American world of work splits in to "[black women] domestics" and "[black men] laborers." What is the result? The result is an essentially Afro-American male vision of the world. That vision projects a merger of Afro-American males and the progressive forces of Western industrial technology, a merger that, by its very nature, excludes black women and their domestic consciousness and calling (*Workings of the Spirit* 115). To counter this exclusion, Baker thus highlights that "the interiority of the cabin becomes conflated with the words "intimacy," "motherhood," "folk wisdom," and "domestic," suggesting a different set of markers and boundaries for woman's PLACE in in folk history (117.).

While his underlying purpose is to correct the trend of African American literary criticism that favors "an *exclusive* sphere of *written* art" and, consequently, disparages literary inquiry of a more sociological character (Baker, *Blues* 91), Baker does not quite avoid the trap of conflating sociology with culture, so that urban settings become the most viable or appropriate locale for blues production but *only* as that production is filtered by or through African American folk values *and expression*. In fact, Baker's emphasis on signification based on ancestral blues performance reifies the same fallacy he critiques in scholars such as Robert Stepto and Henry Louis Gates. As case in point, Baker grants potentiality to the protagonist of Richard Wright's short story, 'The Man Who Lived Underground," but denies it to the narrator of *Invisible Man*. From what I can glean, the difference in Baker's analysis of these two texts is hinged on the positive encounter that Wright's character has with gospel music and Ellison's character's dismissal of this convention.[54] Of the invisible narrator, Baker judges, "The protagonists of [*Native Son* and *Invisible Man*] are in states of confinement; neither is coming out" (Baker, *Blues* 123). For Baker, a character can only exemplify the blues and hence mark a distinctively African American presence if he uses the values passed down through older forms and articulates his negotiation of them through affirmation of those values. The narrator of *Invisible Man* and Bigger in *Native Son* both reject folk values and even blackness. They do not qualify as blues heroes because they do not properly give black identity *voice*. Baker seems to valorize sociological constructs such as "place," "space," and "housing" beyond metaphor and symbolic tropes; however, by only recognizing representations or criticism of these constructs in which speech, music, and song play an integral part, he winds up encoding the same strain of cultural determinism that a privileging of the *literary* sphere engenders.

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[54] Fred Daniels is chased underground and, while exploring, overhears a gospel choir singing in a church. Baker sees this as "the beginning of a "threshold perspective," asserting that the character's experience of the singing of gospel music helps him "to secure a distinctive outsider's point of view" and to assimilate the guilt of an unjust world into a "radically revisionist comprehension of aboveground existence" (Baker, *Blues* 160).

To put it plainly, by establishing the premise that the entry to discourse be marked by a

spoken expression of the blues, he sets up those of us indebted to his work to look for black

characters to perform the blues in a particular way. This penumbra can be spied in much later

criticism.[55] For instance, in Valerie Sweeney Prince's 2004 book, *Burnin Down the House*, she asserts,

"Because it seems [Bigger] has little regard for blues expressiveness, he must use other means—

ultimately destructive means—to reconfigure a home for himself" (7). Albeit Prince does

acknowledge that the men in the book achieve a critical consciousness through the oppositional

space of street culture, she sees this mainly as negative negotiation of the city's ills and not as a

possible positive alternative to blues discourse (123). The performativity of singing, churching,

publication, and political leadership—which are ways one enters the black public sphere—is noble

and a quite productive form of activism that does arise out of certain spaces. But if these forms of

culture are also equivocated as signs of racial authenticity and, even more problematically, as black

writers' unique claim to realism, then the African American protest novel can never be viewed as

more than a pamphlet that either verifies or disqualifies whether its protagonists are human.

Although *Trumbull Park* is a novel about desegregation and, therefore, of course is about the

spatialization of race, the sociological constructs of black and white space are rendered meaningless

through the text's ironic inversions of this designation. Furthermore, the novel signifies on the

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[55] The criticism of *Native Son* takes the racialization of space so for granted that environmental determinism is an automatic effect. In Isabel Soto's 2009 essay, "'White People to Either Side': *Native Son* and the Poetics of Space," she writes, "It goes without saying, moreover, that race/space is not infinite but bounded, marked off from other races/spaces both by material boundaries (as in free vs. slave states, North vs. South, Jim Crow racial vs. spatial arrangements, and so on) and symbolic ones, or rather, a single symbolic boundary: the color line" (25). Here, Soto is continuing a thread that rightly puts emphasis on the socially constructed color line but also exposes a contradiction: that raced space is only finite within a tautology of infinite racialized imaginaries. This supposition stems from theories of double consciousness that define how non-whites have negotiated modernity.[55] Wright provides his own formulation in *12 Million Black Voices*, connecting the African American experience to the impact of migration. Amiri Baraka in 1981 argues for a unique black *urban* consciousness, suggesting that cities highly populated with blacks hold the key to ameliorating black social ills. Maria Balshaw, in *Looking for Harlem* (2000), explains this "racialized urbanity" as the result of African American's projection of themselves into the Enlightenment narrative of progress and specific attitudes of blacks about uplift (19).

classic blues hero and yet demonstrates that this particular claim to political equality is difficult to sustain in a liberal democracy. Race is spatialized in the novel through the account of the daily mob actions of white residents in Trumbull Park that limit the safe entry and passage of black residents into the development. Multiple studies document the impact of the post-war housing shortage with the convergence of resistance to desegregation experienced by blacks across the country.[56] St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton describe fifty-eight house bombings between 1917 and 1921 due to the gradual influx of blacks into white neighborhoods (178). In "Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, 1953-1966," Arnold Hirsch writes that crowds numbering in the thousands cornered black families in their homes, launching "missiles of every description" against the exteriors of their apartments (522). Though these spatial aggressions were commonplace for several decades, Brown's novel is not written in a manner to condemn white society for its racism, as was the convention of the protest novel; he writes instead to a black audience to "get the Negro reader to identify himself with [Buggy]" in an effort to inspire *him* to similar bravery (Brown qtd in Washington 27). True to form, we watch Buggy's painstaking transformation from passive inhabitant of a slum building to an empowered activist ready to confront racism eye to eye. Mary Helen Washington in her foreword characterizes *Trumbull Park* as a civil rights novel since that ideology and form of activism features so prominently in the book. Tangentially, for a moment, I want to consider *Trumbull Park* as a housing novel, whose depiction of space exposes the arbitrariness of racialization, especially as it gets assigned to low income places. Through a reading of the novel's emphasis on sensorial mediation, the narrator's descriptions of interiors and exteriors focus the mental eye on the material environment, underscoring the built space first and the cultural/racing of space second.

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[56] See, of course, Drake and Cayton's *Black Metropolis (1945)* but also later studies by Raymond Mohl, Wendy Plotkin, and Roger Biles.

First, Trumbull Park inverts the assumptions associated with the pathology of public housing environments by comparing and contrasting the physicality of the two housing spaces in the novel but flipping the racial designation some might expect. The novel opens on an alliterative use of parallelism to portray the Martins' initial home, the Gardener Building, where only blacks live:

> We called the building we lived in the Gardener Building, after Mr. Gardener, the owner. He didn't live there, but it seemed like he did, because the Gardener Building was old—real old, like Mr. Gardener, and rotten. Rotten from the inside out. Rotten toilets. Rotten windowsills. Rotten lamp cords. Rotten porches. The Gardener Building had its own special smell: baby milk and whiskey, fried chicken and cigarette smoke, perfume—and the sick smell of rotten porches. (1)

The porches of Buggy's building are so rotten that before the first page ends, a baby falls through the banister and dies. Elsewhere, Buggy complains about the "the dampness" and scurrying rats in the building (217), so that the reader is given a complete spatial tour through a tour of the senses (sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch). At first glance, one could dismiss this passage as a stereotypical way to recognize "black" space if you caught the sardonic reference to the stench of fried chicken. However, the building is personified through an analogy to its white landlord: Mr. Gardener is responsible for the building's disrepair; by default then, he is also responsible for the death of black tenants rather than their own degenerate behavior. The novel reverses the frequent pathology that black people aren't good stewards of property by attaching the manifestation of those stereotypes to the landlord's neglect. There are other cultural stereotypes that Brown does include about Gardener's black residents, but here the slumlord's behavior is just as typicalized as theirs, which raises the question of with whom is Brown's black audience supposed to identify.

In *Trumbull Park,* so called black space is neutralized through its association with a white man, and the perceived "white" space of the text (the Martin's new neighborhood) is neutralized

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through an emphasis on the colorblind privacy that "place" offers. As with the tub scene, there are several moments in which Buggy simply reflects on the architecture of the built environment and the physical characteristics of his home's interior. Their first night in the apartment, for example, he "[looks] around the living room. It was painted cream, with green paint at the baseboards and around the doors and windows. No cracks in the ceiling, no cabbage stink seeping under the front door. Black-tile floor, big windows, and trees outside right in the yard" (40). In this description of the décor, the adjective "Black-tile" modifying the noun "floor" does not carry the same weight of the color's cultural connotation when applied to people. It could be the experience of moving out of familiar surroundings and into another that gives Buggy the distance to realize that the construction of space is both cultural and personal. At one point, while in his new living room, Buggy "[feels] like [he] was in the Gardener Building again. Floating fast as hell on nothing—all the way back to nowhere!" (346). Later, "walking on the white folk's holy ground," he realizes, "It didn't feel any different from any other ground…"that's what makes it so good to walk on. It's ground that don't feel any different than any other ground, yet they [wanted] to make so much fuss over it—something over nothing" (416-7). The reduction of whiteness to "nothing" is not intended to hierarchize blackness over whiteness, or Trumbull Park over the Gardener Building, but to signify a disavowal of the meaning of labeling social space. The spatial practice of race rioting forms part of the Trumbull Park landscape and colors the Martins' experience of the exterior of their home. But the competing imaginary of the private interior indicates that there is a choice to be made over which imaginary will hold sway in the Martins' minds, and by extension, the reader's. It also suggests that some access to a private sphere can enable the faculty of distinction. That Trumbull Park can *feel* like the Gardener Building means how we experience place and space determines how well we can see them.

The novel further reveals the choice we have in interpretation through deconstructing the appearance and sound of the racialized weapon, the homemade bomb. The prose is disrupted at several points with the repetition of the percussive word, "*BAR-ROOOM!*" This motif imitates the continual sound and force of the hand-bombs that were thrown at black residents' homes during desegregation era. In Chapter 33, the word "bomb" and its near rhymes, "Boom," and "BAR-ROOM" appear 31 times. As the structure of the novel and the depicted built environment are both imposed upon by bombs, we as readers are supposed to imagine and to "see" the impact on the housing development's walls under this constant barrage, as well as on the characters' mental stability. The bombs are obviously an extension of racial aggression and create a physical threat, but a few pages earlier, the novel educates the reader on the dual interpretation necessitated by the *perception* of their physicality:

> We are being trained by those bombs to attach a significance then—to select the
> noise of the explosion as a noise especially directed at us. It's almost as if the rest of
> the neighborhood—the whites in the neighborhood—are being taught that the
> bombs are *friendly* noises, and we are being taught that they are *enemy* noises…this
> means that we are being attacked by sound, and because of what that sound
> means…our own ears carry that attack to us; and our knowledge that enemies, not
> friends, are responsible for that sound makes it a painful, wearing, ever-present strain
> on us... (342)

As Buggy's neighbor Terry breaks down for him, race is the Sign that enables the contradictory signifier of the bomb to be read as both the declaration of war and "friendly fire."[57] The novel is

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[57] Acculturation happens as the body is trained to interpret the objects appearing to the eye (or ear) in a mediated way. The object, functioning as the visualization of the signifier, works metonymically as the Sign, yet its connotations may differ depending on the context in which it 'appears.' The novel argues,

conveying that our orientation to the world comes to the mind's understanding through sensory

interpretations. Furthermore, the sound of bombs can be attached to a greater logic, which

Lefebvre calls "a logic of visualization," in which the spectacle incites a conscious or unconscious

operation of thought that synthesizes ideological contradictions (98). Throughout the novel, the

aural stands in for the physical presence of white bodies and transmits the affective relations of a

raced superstructure through the apartment walls. But by the end of the novel, the black characters

have conquered their fear of this aggression and are able to discuss its cognitive function. (Thus, the

novel affirms that we are taught how to react to objects, but we can also separate the reaction we are

taught from the objecthood of the thing itself.)

If we were to boil this experience down to its essential descriptive features, we would start

with the disruption of one's sense of time and location by the jarring of the ears. There might be

confusion as to the origination of sound or the feeling that one is surrounded. Unless we were

already familiar with the sound and the literal denotation of bombs, our apperception of a racial

motive might be delayed by the simple perception of threat. And because we are shown that the

bomb means different things to the black and white characters, it is clear that the space does not

lead to an easy cultural determinism. The novel grants its characters the freedom of selectivity, a

characteristic of agency. Chapter 33 ends with Buggy, his wife Helen, and their friends making a

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To the black ear, bomb = <u>enemy</u> = SIGN of (whiteness) ➔ connotes racism, powerlessness, fragile position in
sound   the nation-state

To the white ear, bomb = <u>friendly</u> = SIGN of (whiteness) ➔ connotes powers, property rights, hierarchical
Sound   position in the nation-state

That the bomb can work in two completely opposite ways reveals the arbitrariness of the sign. Moreover, as a
modern symbol of war (that is, the death of nature by machine) in the context of post-WWII, the setting off of
these neighborhood bombs, which were meant to scare black residents, aligns ideas of American nationalism with
whiteness while reproducing the meaninglessness of war through constant repetition.

party set to the rhythm of the "Barroom" noise: "*Boom…Boom…Boom…Boom…Boom!* went the bombs! 'Go…go… go…go…go!' went Kevin and the rest. And Beverly danced and danced and danced" (Brown 357). In yet another understanding of space and the sign, the couples transform the sound of bombs to symbolic fireworks or a powerful bass to accompany their Louis Armstrong record, effectively relegating the threat of whiteness to the exterior background. By seeing through the arbitrariness of the racialization of objects, Buggy and his counterparts acknowledge the possibility of *simultaneous* understandings of space. We can accept the representation we are presented with, or realizing its construction, we can shift the grounds and relate to it in a way of our own choosing.

Similar to his realizations about the social construction of space, Buggy makes realizations about the gendered construction of space, albeit these realizations often come attached to some version of maternalizing or sexualizing the women in the novel. About halfway through the novel, Buggy muses, "Women were beginning to be on my mind more and more…the women had done something that we men didn't have to do. They had put in twenty-four hours a day in good ol' T.P.—no husbands, no nothing—and had faced up to the mob and the policemen, all day, every day…we still had not given or taken what the women had" (245). This seems like a tribute to women's strength and labor equality; and, in fact, the group of men in the book usually only reach a decision after one of their wives has given her input. Yet, in one illustrative passage, the sexualization of a female character almost undercuts Brown's effort at crediting her with social consciousness. While in on bed one night, Buggy's wife, Helen, provokes him to political awareness:

> The man on the radio says that a whole bunch of colored folks from all over the
>
> world –Africa, India, China, America, all over—area getting together to figure out
>
> how to keep from being pushed by all the things that are happening in the

world…[and Down] South, Buggy, the radio talks about how down South Negroes

are pushing, trying to get the Supreme Court to outlaw segregation in schools.

Everywhere, everybody is doing *something*—everybody but us, Buggy. (413)

When Buggy replies that long-term activism won't be profitable, Helen reminds him that

participating in a global movement for civil rights is worth more than money. Instead of allowing

the character to ruminate on the political leanings she is developing, however, Brown shifts the

scene to a focus on Helen as a pregnant wife. Grabbing her to himself, Buggy "[feels] that little so-

and-so in there just kicking to beat the band….[He kisses] her hard—and just that quick she was in

that soft green dress, and were in the hallway back at the Gardener Building, and she was kissing

[him] with her eyes closed, and [he] was feeling the *funniest* buzzing sensation under [his] skin…Does

'I love you' sound silly?" Buggy asks (413). Although overall a tender moment, this show of

affection also undermines Helen's independent political identity and reinforces that this is a novel

about Buggy's masculine development.

Mary Helen Washington argues that both men and women achieve agency through the

contribution to the group's collective organizing, denoting that "Women are given two major

political speeches" in the book (Washington, *Foreword* xiv). Brown does represent the political

awareness of his female characters, but, overall, the novel still ends up valorizing traditional

masculinity wherein men forge their gender identities through physical danger, competition, and

female approval. However, the goal of establishing this manhood is to contest what the author sees

as an even more dangerous ideology—that blacks don't belong in "white" space. Brown is

successful in promoting his anti-racism rhetoric when it comes to the regulation of social space.

Additionally, by showing that any man can transform from a politically inactive, scary, overly macho

denizen into a gender conscious civil rights leader, he does make strides towards arguing for gender

equality. I think a secondary takeaway about the construction of space, however, is that the

arbitrariness of raced space gives way more readily than the rigidity of space that is gendered.[58]

On the whole, the novel *Trumbull Park* is progressive for its time period, but it also reveals

that deconstructing the artificiality of racial designations may not lead to lasting social change. By

the 1980s, demographics in Trumbull Park would change so much that new racial frictions would

emerge—both inter-racial and *intra-racial*. Its residency composed of 75% African Americans and

25% Latin Americans resulted in a marked increase of black on black and black on brown crime

throughout the nineties (Green, *Chicago Metropolitan Local Fact Book* 134). To this end, the novel's

optimism about the stability and predictability of collectivity premised on the experience of

racialized space is ironized by the inevitable destabilization of space due to continually shifting

understandings of racial difference.   Buggy is Houston Baker's perfect blues hero in that Buggy

affirms a transcendent radicalism in response to space; he is transformed and encourages others to

do so through the explicit use of blues expression. [59] It is a wonder then that Avilez considers all of

the novel's characters jailed in an "unchanging sameness mandated by *White* communities" (142,

emphasis mine). A more apt inference is that even though the inspirational power of the blues (and

other folk culture, like Negro spirituals) has provided traction for race-based movements, it doesn't

mean that race-based protest strategies will always be productive, particularly when the racial

composition of a community may change but our political economy continues to be fueled by

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[58] The discourse of black feminism bears this out in its continual confrontation with sexist ideologies within black radical and religious institutions.

[59] The novel ends on a hopeful note, with Buggy and a newer resident marching together and Buggy dreaming of a horizon that will continue their legacy of resistance:

> We walked and walked and walked—walking through the great Trumbull Park…Mobs screaming, throwing things, pushing us, pushing the policemen who had orders to take cover or else…Walking. Kevin-Beverly, Terry-Nadine, Carl-Ernestine, William-Christine, Norman-Armela—all of them. They'd walk now. I knew they would…They'd follow the path that Arthur and Mona and Harry and Helen and I had made—widen that path and wear it smooth. (431) The novel's ending even incorporates the blues lyrics of "Big Joe William," sung in call and response, "*Well, it ain't nobody worried, and it ain't nobody cryin!*" (432).

maintaining the division between haves and have-nots. Thus, one of the problems that a reliance on Baker's theory of place and the investment in raced space illuminates (and *Trumbull Park* exposes) is that racing space supports the unspoken ideology that people don't change and causes us to miss that, on the contrary, just as the manner in which space gets racialized changes with the times, so should the strategies for its discussion.

A Phenomenological Perspective, Take Two: Clearing Space, Making Room

The other well-acknowledged influence on the protest genre is the twentieth century's theories of sociological determinism. In the nineteenth century, the "traditional view of the modern city" emphasized the city's "chaos, invisibility, 'unnatural nature,' and [seeming incompatibility] with outside history" (Capetti 36). As early as 1915, sociologists such as Robert Park and Ernest Burgess were theorizing the city's order and very naturalized growth process, arguing that the organization of urban areas was predictable in so much as its human residents could be counted on to acclimate to urbanization in similar ways. In their treatise, *The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment*, for example, Park and Burgess state that while on the one hand the visible (or architectural environment) of the city suggested that it could be "taken apart and put together again, like a house of blocks," the structure of the city actually followed "human nature, of which it is an expression" (578). They were resisting a static view of urban space but also instituting a model for understanding culture through the sociological record or ethnographic portrait of city inhabitants. Their companion argument based on urban history was that "the development of ethnic enclaves would eventually give way to the full assimilation of minority groups"; unfortunately, white liberal progressives took this to mean that "the pathological aspects of minority cultures could only be 'cured' through total assimilation into mainstream white American society" (Tolentino 378). Thus, in rendering neighborhoods, particularly slum neighborhoods, as different "by nature" and

not merely social organization, The Chicago School reproduced the paradigm of certain spaces as fundamentally outside of the mainstream. Together with a biased American social reform agenda, one of the prevailing social science theories of the modern era was that where one lived necessarily determined one's fate, and housing as a result often served as the social system's scapegoat.

Critics' displacement of the tension between ideals of cultural authenticity and environmental determinism onto our readings of social space in the twenty-first century is a direct symptom of this early sociological model and literature's response to it. Sociology proposed to make urban subjects knowable and, therefore, possible to assimilate; literature served as a corollary for this purpose. Park's thesis on this subject in "Negro Race Consciousness as Reflected in Race Literature," can be paraphrased this way: Black poetry reflects the internal life of Negroes; while not as telling as folk songs such as spirituals developed in slavery, the poetry of blacks can sometimes be trusted as an authority on their racial experience (129). As Warren critiques, students of "the Negro" [were concerned by] the relative paucity of an intellectual archive through which to understand 'the race' and in response…suggested that imaginative literature [could] step in to fill the void" (643). Black novelists of the protest era believed the same of sociology, or at least, expressed faith in its journalist style of writing.[60] Richard Wright, for instance, in his foreword to Drake and Cayton's *Black Metropolis* attests that the Negro's story could not be told without the aid of "honest science" (xviii). The underlying assumption behind sociological literature and the novel being that representations are metonymic; the fallacy comes in when the criticism or discourse surrounding these texts imply their narratives equal absolute truth.

Ann Petry's bestselling novel, *The Street*, is a rejoinder to this discursive problem, both because of paradoxes within the text and because of how its criticism reflects obscurations of

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[60] Carla Capetti bears this out in her discussion of the reciprocal relationship between sociology and literature in her book *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel*.

sociological and "racial realism" discourse. Though less an adherent of The Chicago School than

Richard Wright, Petry's naturalistic prose still encodes the theory that environment can be all-

determining. Eric Sundquist describes naturalism as "reveling in the extraordinary, the excessive,

and the grotesque in order to…dramatize the loss of individuality at a physiological level" (13).

Petry's novel reflects this through its almost melodramatic use of anthropomorphism to depict the

built environment. [61] Similar to *Trumbull Park, The Street* reflects ambivalence towards racialized

space even while contesting the effects of racial segregation and redlining. It also exacerbates the

construct of slum spaces as "black" by alternating between metaphors representing Harlem's

housing as dehumanizing and metaphors representing the social effects of that dehumanization. But

I draw on *The Street* to discuss how using space as a lens reveals a different sort of violence in the

text than the racism *Trumbull Park* characterizes, and which I think *The Street* is superficially about.

Due to an investment in sociological determinism, the politics of representation reflected in *The

Street* promotes the trope of a liberal democracy but actually punishes the "everyday" black man who

tries to achieve it.

   The Street tells the story of single, black mother Lutie Johnson who moves her son Bub into

a ramshackle Harlem tenement and has to fight against its daily depression of her gender, her

savings, and dreams. Ultimately, the novel's plot is about Lutie's eventual defeat. After failing to

protect her son from a mail fraud scheme due to her rejection of her building superintendent's

sexual advances, she winds up reacting to the oppression of two other men in the novel by killing

one of them, and her crime leads her to haplessly neglect her son. Rather than focus on the plot,

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[61] Doing such positions her work as a descendent of black *and* white progenitors in the protest and naturalism tradition, such as Paul Laurence Dunbar's *Sport of the Gods (1902)* and, even Stephen Crane's *Maggie: Girl of the Streets (1893)*. Investment in the representation of slum spaces stems from a literary response to immigration, assimilation, and intra-racial conflict. The use of ethnography, social realism, and naturalism by various authors, including Ernest Poole, Jacob Riis, and James Weldon Johnson, captured the ever-evolving convergence between classism and racism in the modern world.

however, I want to focus on the novel's treatment of space. Although critical discussion of *The Street*

has widened beyond the mere confluence of the built environment's architecture with the perceived

inescapability of racial, sexual, and gender oppression, even recent criticism continues to narrow its

interpretation to the limits of racialized constructions of space. Criticism in the first three decades

after *The Street's* publication emphasized its negative portrayal of black city life (Schraufnagel 41;

Gayle 192), either critiquing the novel's relationship to naturalism and social protest or debating its

treatment of the black woman as a vehicle for American ideals (Yarborough 43; Wurst 11;

Henderson 886).[62] Ten years later, Larry Andrews somewhat shifts the terms of this debate in "The

Sensory Assault of the City in Ann Petry's The Street" by considering the built environment's

phenomenological impact on Lutie—though he doesn't use this term—in addition to the

sociocultural construction of her subjectivity. However, Andrews too ends with a negative

assessment of the novel's setting, which ultimately forecloses alternative readings.[63]

Even later critics such as Lindon Barrett and Amanda Davis seem forestalled in reaching for

an alternative interpretation of the space in the text. In two different essays, ultimately culminating

in Barrett's book, *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* (2009), Barrett explicitly reads space as the

ultimate problem of the text but suppresses the inter-versal possibilities of space to the text's

dramatization of violence. Citing Raymond Williams, Barrett asserts that the repetition of poverty

cycles collapses space into a "grim social reality in which one faces an old age characterized by" a

non-existent future (Barrett 215).[64] Tangentially, Davis wants to ensure that we don't forget how the

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[62] Barbara Christian, for example, is one of many early critics who, in the vein of James Baldwin, criticized *The Street*'s dependence on the trope of tragedy as a character, in spite of its commendable attention to the black urban female as subject (12).

[63] In spite of very detailed sensory and descriptive paraphrases, Andrews only briefly mentions "[Lutie's] delight in the jump-roping girls" and other characters' appreciation of the street's activity to show the positive as well as the ugly sides of the street (210).

[64] In other words, the generational violence endemic to the street makes clearing space for alternative subjectivities "impossible" (Barrett 215). Relying on a warrant about the chronological nature of degeneration, for Barrett, space defers to time.

violence of the street often impairs the creation of *safe* domestic homeplaces for black women, arguing that *The Street* "challenges us all to think more broadly about home as an assumed location of safety and as a space that is not always infused with the type of protection, freedom, comfort, and security that homes are often associated with" (48). Albeit two worthy reminders of the societal, racial, and sexual violence that often accompany ghettoized environments, these essays fail to properly acknowledge the possible legacy of resistance that can thrive in spite of a history or cycle of social oppression. This is to say that although one's own life may lead to a particular and violent end, the fact of human nature and of domestic households is that some of the next generation may be influenced to follow the same pattern and, obviously, some may not.

More recently, critics have drawn our attention away from the doom and gloom of Lutie's environment to focus on more expansive readings of the setting and the characters. Heather Hicks, for example, complicates the novel's depiction of place in the protest genre by illuminating the ways in which the gaze might function as a mode of resistance to the deterministic surveillance of sexism and racism (34). Trudier Harris[65] makes a more direct case for the interpretation of the characters in the novel in relationship to the architectural, i.e., spatial, environment: "The tales of these three women are tales of wood, stone, and concrete on the one hand, and flesh on the other, finding or not finding they are compatible," she writes (69). Summarizing this influence, Harris on the one hand agrees that the street presents an architectural landscape ominous enough to discourage, even "cripple," its inhabitants (72); but, rather than emphasize this determinism on black women's lives, Harris focuses on the varying degrees of adaptability the women exhibit relative to their landscape. Responding to these arguments, William Scott provides a productive discussion of the physical "holes and walls" that Lutie encounters and shows how they are inscribed into an interpretative framework that Petry actually uses to counter objectification. He argues that "*The Street* should be

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[65] Initially published under Harris-Lopez.

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read as a story not just about one woman's subjugation and degradation by forces beyond her control but as a story about acts of material resistance" (93). Through attention to Lutie's tracing a circle across the mist of the train's window, Scott reads the ending—even as Lutie is abandoning her son—as an opening for new frameworks to understand Petry's disruption of Lutie's objectification as a female subject (112-3).

But while Hicks, Harris, and Scott each analyze spatial details to illustrate what Clare Eby calls Petry's "politics of sympathy" (35), the character they seem to give the least space and ergo sympathy to is perhaps the one who needs it most by the end of the novel.[66] None of the characters in *The Street* actualize into a blues hero that effectively interrupts the American landscape of racialized space (only Lutie comes close through her brief position as a singing, expressive subject); however, Lutie's eight year old son, Bub, a minor character whose actions serve as the catalyst for Lutie's demise, is the would be hero of Petry's novel. Alternating as both subject of his own phenomenological world and object of the desires of others, Bub's determination to contribute to the household and become the Super's junior detective are noble endeavors that merit him more than two-sentence mentions. Where I would interject into the new direction of criticism of *The Street* would be to suggest a longer pause in the treatment of Bub. From my purview, he holds an important place in the novel's construction of determinism and its undoing.

From a phenomenological perspective, Lutie's neutral apperception of space is not always immediately mediated by a racialized perception. Take, for instance, when Lutie first comes across the rental sign of the apartment that will serve as a primary setting, she realizes, "Reasonable…could mean almost anything. On Eighth Avenue it meant tenements—ghastly places not fit for humans.

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[66] I found Clare Eby's article, "Beyond Protest: *The Street* as Humanitarian Narrative," very insightful. Her discussion of the interiority that Petry establishes for minor characters to disrupt oversimplified understandings of male and female subjectivity influenced my own reading of Bub, since like most critics, Eby chooses to focus on Lutie's two attackers, the Super and Boots.

On St. Nicholas Avenue, it meant high rent for small apartments; and on Seventh Avenue it meant great big apartments where you had to take in roomers in order to pay the rent. On this street it could mean almost anything" (4). That the legibility of the sign is premised on its context points to the arbitrariness of both the sign's placement and meaning. In terms of cognition, meaning beyond observation of the pure function of a thing can only be derived when our thinking moves from the denotative to the connotative. In a sense, the building—like the street—could be any building until Lutie endows it with meaning, with her personal understanding of real estate and culture.

Relatedly, Petry's characters wrestle with the effects of the spatialization of race and the acknowledgment of the artificiality of the representation of raced space. In the dream that Lutie has before her attempted rape, the difficulty of maintaining a distinction between the stigma of living in a slum environment and its effects is made clear:

> The last thing she thought before she finally went to sleep was that the Super was something less than human. He had been chained to buildings until he was like an animal….He panted and strained to get free and run through the block, but the building was chained to his shoulders like an enormous doll's house made of brick….The building was so heavy he could hardly walk with it on his shoulders…. 'Unloose me! Unloose me!' he begged….She screamed and screamed and windows opened and the people poured out of the buildings— thousands of them, millions of them. She saw that they had turned to rats…Each one had a building chained to its back, and they were all crying, 'Unloose Me! Unloose me!' (191-2)

In this gruesome sequence, humans are animalized through their inability to detach themselves from the building's physical weight, indicating enslavement to the determinism that modern discourses about such buildings implied. Conversely, while its inhabitants are dehumanized, the building is

anthropomorphized through the metaphor of a vermin infestation. They pour out of the building's figurative womb or brain, suggesting that slum spaces are not only a part of human consciousness but humans are a part of theirs. However, the lack of racial descriptors here shows the universality of Petry's construction. She is not saying that this is purely "black" space. Similarly, in the book's final metaphor of snow "[laying] a delicate film over the sidewalk, over the brick of the tired, old buildings," Petry associates the dirt of the street with fatigue rather than race (435). Don Dingledine sees this final portrayal as Petry's recuperation of the fatalism of naturalism through a leveling of environmental conditions (98). But his formula still reflects the Chicago School's influence: the logic goes, if other streets can change and their environment be assimilated into the American landscape, Petry might be suggesting here that it may only be a matter of time before streets where black people live follow suit.

Make no mistake, in spite of Petry's desire to "show [Negroes] as people with…the same instincts for survival possessed by all men" (qtd in Ivy 49), there is a constraint at work in the text that seems to suggest black Americans are more likely to give in to the despair characteristic of racialized space, especially black men. But I argue, this strict determinism is recuperated through the character Bub. *The Street* as a novel struggles with sociological typology, but Bub's relationship to space provides an alternative typology that is foreclosed to the protagonist, because she is an adult. When Lutie looks out at Harlem from her apartment window, she sees "rusted tin cans, the piles of ashes, the pieces of metal from discarded automobiles…rubbish had crept through the broken places in the fences until all of it mingled in a disorderly pattern that looked from their top-floor window like a huge junkpile instead of a series of small back yards" (73). Scott reads this description as the "history of the invasion and destruction of personal space" (95). I read this as a possible treasure trove for neighborhood kids at play. In spite of the sprawling housing conditions, the street is a site of play and leisure where "Kids on roller skates and kids precariously perched on home-

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made scooters [whiz] through," "the sun [beams] on the boys and girls walking past arm in arm," and "half-naked children playing along the curb, [transform] the street into an outdoor living room" (142). Petry writes, "Kids were using bags of garbage from the cans lined up along the curb as ammunition. The bags had broken open, covering the sidewalk with litter, filling the air with a strong, rancid smell" (416). Whereas an adult might focus on the stench, a full out battle wages amongst the same rubbish that Lutie disdains, expanding this space into a shared public sphere rather than infringing on it. While these passages on the one hand convey a lack of privacy, on the other they suggest that there are authors of safe spaces in *The Street* other than the adult characters who typically arrest the critic's eye.

Lutie can acknowledge this different phenomenological perspective of the adolescent, but she cannot fully know it:

> She tried to see the street with his [Bub's] eyes and couldn't because the crap game in progress in the middle of the block, the scraps of obscene talk she heard as she passed the poolroom, the tough young boys with their caps on backward who swaggered by, were things that she saw with the eyes of an adult and reacted to from an adult's point of view. It was impossible to know how this street looked to eight-year-old Bub. It may have appealed to him or it may have frightened him. (415)

Critics frequently discuss this passage in terms of the limits of Lutie's knowledge. What obstructs her understanding is the appearance of distracting objects, fit for a negative perspective of the street: muffled sounds of obscenity, the silhouettes of young "toughs." But this is all perception. Furthermore, the young boys mentioned here are just as unknowable as the street itself because of Lutie's bias. This is when the methods of qualitative research would be useful if we could puzzle together more familiarity with Bub's prospective point of view. Although literature does not allow us to physically interview, it does allow us to collect evidence from the text and draw on inferences.

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We might ask, vis-à-vis the adults in the novel, what do we know about Bub? We know that against the severity of mortality rates of black children, which held double than that of whites for most of the first half of the twentieth century,[67] Bub is "alive with the joy of movement—his arms, his legs, even his head" (Petry 298). We know that Lutie admires Bub's stance and gains courage that she can "bring him up so that he would be a fine, strong man" (72). Bub's vitality even draws the envy of Jones'—a fully grown man when he "[looks] down at the kid…the roundness of his head, how sturdily his body was built, the beginnings of what would be a powerful chest, the straightness of his legs, how his hair curled over his forehead" (88). Although Bub is admittedly manipulated by Jones, his characterization is one of a young boy growing in panache. He protects his mother's belongings instinctively (Petry 105). He learns to play black jack and quickly excels (Petry 106). Both his relationship to the Super and to the space of the building are complex.

Bub is terrified of the dark of the apartment; contradictorily, his first apperception of the superintendent's basement apartment is surprising. Having visited the basement against his mother's wishes, it is revealed through free and indirect discourse that Bub saw the building's belly as "a mysterious place and yet somehow friendly" (Petry 349). Furthermore, we are told that Bub thinks, "This great, warm, open space was where he really belonged" (Petry 349)! This is completely opposite his mother's perception and shows how bringing an attitude of play to a space is transformative, even to a space that has already been designated as threatening. Reading about Bub navigating the building and venturing to the corner store, it is easy to imagine his likeness captured in a John H. White photograph. Like the sheer magic of his 1978 *I Want to be a Gymnast* photos of two boys somersaulting over an alley's debris, or the awe of scale to subject in his 1973

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[67] See Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto*. See also *Birth Control, Politics in the United States, 1916-1945* by Carole R. McMann.

image of a child climbing a vacant building on Prairie Street, visualizing Bub's inhabitation of space might lead our imagination to conjure the shapes and shadows of the street, but in a whimsical, otherworldly way. No doubt, if Bub's encounter were the dominant impression, we would not see the street like Lutie.

The text's disclosure of limited perception signals an understated crisis in the effects of the investment in determinism, and by extension, the goals of liberalism. Petry allots a limited freedom to Lutie that particularizes her humanity. Like *Trumbull Park's* Buggy, Lutie achieves spatial consciousness. Moving from the Chandlers' and "the contempt of the downtown world" to the streets of Harlem permits Lutie to recognize the vagaries of racial difference and to dream of a future for herself. Albeit her assignation of where value is located is conflated with the ideology of commodification,[68] overall, "Lutie's guiding logic" is the "American mythology of democratic mobility," the pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps republicanism that loves an underdog (Wesling 118). Yet the novel's freest, potentially strongest character (Bub) is for some reason denied Lutie's access to American exceptionalism. Case in point, when Lutie receives her first check as a civil servant after moving to the apartment on 116th Street, she revels in the thought that she might be following in the footsteps of Benjamin Franklin:

> [F]eeling the hard roundness of the rolls through the paper bag, she thought
> immediately of Ben Franklin and his loaf of bread. And grinned thinking, You and
> Ben Franklin. You ought to take one out and start eating it as you walk along 116th
> Street. Only you ought to remember while you eat that you're in Harlem and he was
> in Philadelphia a pretty long number of years ago. Yet she couldn't get rid of the

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[68] Lutie's view of the Chandlers' back lawn is compared to "a pattern like the lace on expensive nightgowns" (29). Narratively, Lutie's 'life' begins on 116th Street after she is sucked in by an advertisement on the subway wispily detailing "a miracle of a kitchen" (28). This ad, and its picture of a "girl with incredible blond hair," creates an atmosphere in which the built environment is of 116th Street is indirectly interpreted by Lutie through a racial lens, although as I have stated before, the arbitrariness of the sign and gender delay the text's explicit racial references.

feeling of *self-confidence* and she went on thinking that if Ben Franklin could live on a

little bit of money and could prosper, then so could she. (63–64)

Through the text's continual reference to the figure of Benjamin Franklin as an impossible double or

role model for Lutie as a racialized subject, the irony of her exclusion from this prototype of

nationalism is doubled when *she* refuses equal vision for Bub. When she finds out that Bub has been

shining shoes in the street, Lutie slaps him and despairs of his falling prey to a racial social economy

in which he will always be subservient. Her aversion is understandable in a context in which African

American men have historically been discriminated against and shining shoes been viewed as a

"fixed" position within the economy that calls forth the performance of "shucking and jiving" for

one's livelihood.

However, if we made the decision, just for a moment, to reject these racist terms of

democracy, another perspective of the shoeshine box–raced, classed as it is—is as a symbol of

entrepreneurialism. Archival photos attest that many an immigrant boy started out with a shoeshine

box, a fact which within the context of American exceptionalism would make the perfect rags to

freedom story. There are also noteworthy African American political and cultural figures who

started off as shoeshiners, among them James Brown and Malcolm X.[69] Even more compelling for

close reading purposes is following in the vein of Bill Brown and the methodology he lays out in *The

Material Unconscious*. Brown argues that "literature's repository of…unevenly developed, even

contradictory images of the material every day," call for further analysis of "the signifying structures

and…the history that [linger] within neglected images, institutions, and *objects*" (4-5, emphasis mine).

By this, Brown avers that ordinary objects should carry more interpretative weight in literary

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[69] See as references Richard Roger's blog post, "James Brown: Legend, Believer, Augusta Son" on WRDW News 12 web links commemorating Brown's death; Alex Haley's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*; and Kenneth J Cooper's article in *The Boston-Bay State Banner*, "Malcolm: The Boston Years." Shoeshining was also one of the labor fronts of resistance to Jim Crow.

readings since they can unlock both symbolism and institutional history. Bub and the Super co-design the shoeshine box and put it together through the proverbial sweat and blood. Page 88 to 89 recounts their rummaging for the materials and the labor it takes to nail a piece of old carpet to the wood. Bub is proud and excited: "He [sweats] and [leans] back on his knees to grin" (88). It is while he is finding an easy, natural swing with the hammer that the Super visualizes what he'll look like as a man. While investigating the historicity and iconicity of material space is a small arm of this project, exhuming the material unconscious of the shoeshine box even briefly reveals a gold mine for a new discussion of the representation of space in this novel—the correlation between male micro labor and public spaces for self-development, for example. Critics have paid a lot of attention to other objects, for example, the supernatural yet practical power of Min's cross and table. On the contrary, Bub's shoeshine box has never really been examined.

It is clear from the eagerness with which Bub takes up the mail fraud scheme that he is ambitious and desirous of societal and domestic contribution, but this alternative view of interpreting his subjectivity has not found its way to the critical spotlight, which raises even bigger questions. What discursive bind prevents us from rescuing Bub interpretively at the novel's end instead of believing that the only "truth" possible is that Lutie's failure automatically means his? What aspects of space are suppressed in order to make this foreclosing of possibility possible? The realities of post-traumatic stress understood, it is still incredible that Lutie, even after having committed manslaughter, would abandon the single person she has been living for since his birth. On the surface, Petry's narrative choice and critics' polarized discussion excludes any hope of a future for Bub, with or without Lutie. The only context that the novel provides to help explain its denouement is when Petry details the racism of Bub's white primary teacher in Chapter 14 and when Lutie later recalls her own. Both teachers recoil from the difference presented by black skin and perceived black inferiority. Riding towards Chicago, Lutie traces ominous circles on the train's

window, while hearing her teacher's condemning words in her ears: "Really . . . I don't know why they have us bother to teach your people to write" (435). Since Bub is the inheritor of this racist education, it is natural to presume that his future is written off.

This double indictment at the end of the novel, however, is really an indictment of the authority of democratic liberalism. Recall that one illusion of a so called liberal democracy is the storefront presentation of equality for all while, behind the scenes, spatial, racial, and gender hierarchies persist. Lutie is deceived by another promise of democracy, believing that its rhetoric of unrestricted happiness belongs to her if she can only work hard enough. Therefore, the overriding lesson of *The Street* comes through Lutie's disillusionment: that because of her sex and race, she is triply barred from ever attaining the material wealth and freedom of the ideal liberal subject. What comes through the text's silences and gaps is another lesson, however, that Lutie takes for granted. Like the acceptance of racialized space, a blanket belief in liberalism obscures the fact that a part of its allure is the reality of the gendered raced hierarchies it purports to expunge. In other words, while the novel uses examples of sexual and racial oppression to confront the inequities of housing and of the capitalist economy overall, the plot of the novel yields to a gendered and raced violence that ignores the exclusion of the young black male.

This exclusion is brought into relief by the accurate representation of the social reality of the time: having migrated north, African American men found themselves displaced in the labor hierarchy that had once prioritized the sweat of slavery even while dehumanizing the body of that sweat's producer. Then, suddenly liberated to compete with other ethnicities for jobs, black men in the North were shuffled to the back of the employment line. Petry alludes to this micro history of capitalism through the excuse given for Lutie's betrayal by her husband. It all went back to "the men [not getting] jobs and the men [getting] bored and [pulling] out and the kids [being] left without proper homes because there was nobody around to put a heart into it," Petry writes (206). Here,

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joblessness rationalizes idleness, adultery, and family abdication. It also explains how the black economy becomes raced: "The men who didn't work at all—the ones who never had and never would—stood in front of [the Junto] in the morning. As the day slid toward afternoon, they were joined by numbers runners…" (142). This act of standing in place signifies the fixity of African American men as laborers and the criminalization of unemployment that occurs because of proximity, a representation that remains relevant. Moreover, the depiction of black men as passively watching Bub as he is carted off indicates their perception of the "stuckness" of material relations at play, which seem only to be cast in black and white:

> Finally the men leaned their weight against the building; other men resumed their lounging on the stoops. And each one was left with an uneasy sense of loss, of defeat. It made them break off suddenly in the midst of a sentence to look in the direction the car had taken. Even after it was dark, they kept staring up the street, disturbed by the memory of the boy between the two white men. (384)

The novel reflects that the spatial and economic racialization of the twentieth century is an affective construct whose violence can disrupt the memory and foreclose the imagination. In the protest novel era and well into the eighties, the image of young black men seemed firmly stamped into place, their denouement already written; it was an image of a future leading to one of three places: jail, unemployment, or the lynching tree. In this passage, Petry's men are held hostage by their inability to help Bub even through an act of optimism. In some ways, contemporary literary criticism has reified this stagnation.

Postmodern sociology and contemporary political protests, particularly in accounts of educational disparities and the criminalization of the justice system, have vigilantly redirected the interpretation of twentieth century discourses so that it is nearly impossible to read and write about raced groups without attention to the nuances of on the ground realities. Literary criticism seems

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slower to do so, particularly when it comes to interrogating canonized interpretations. The blues

hero and blues matron continue to be the go to archetypes for explication of black people's access

to economic and political power. Lindon Barrett claims that this is "neither casual nor gratuitous.

By means of the singing voice, African Americans find an Other's means of presencing, or

presenting themselves in a verbal, legal, political, and economic order that primarily distorts and

excludes their speech" (218). While this may have been true of the twentieth century, it is clear that

the singing voice of the twenty-first century no longer carries the same signification. Or rather, now

that so many black singers have achieved public and monetary status, the signification of the voice is

fractal, at once maintaining the syncretistic nature of black culture while at the same time colluding

in its exploitation. Moreover, Bub is not a blues hero. Within the novel, he doesn't even hum. This

means another paradigm is required to interpret his future. Rather than focus on Lutie's failure as a

singing subject then, as Barrett does, I want to look for another opening in the novel's end.

Although we are constantly reminded of the fate of single black women and young black

boys, the structure of the novel precludes a final determination. Petry never actually renders Lutie's

or Bub's ending destination. Instead, we get a narrative "vanishing point." Akin to its function in

art, the last descriptions of both characters—the men staring off into the dark after Bub's arrest,

Lutie's staring out the window as she departs by train—focus the imagination on what is "seen"

while suggesting something that cannot be seen: the future, a space outside of the text. Wolfgang

Iser's seminal text, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, postulates that the function of

reader-response theory is to draw our attention to such narrative "blanks," "gaps" are they are called

in narrative theory. Gaps are structured moments in the text which force the reader to construct an

image or information that is not provided as a given. "What is said only appears to take on

significance as a reference to what is not said," argues Iser; "It is the implications and not the

statements that give shape and weight to the meaning" (168). This is almost a version of

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deconstruction on Iser's part. Resonant of the claims of Jacque Derrida,[70] Iser indicates that there is

a text beneath the text that is created apart from the initial creation by the reader's intervention.

This intervention is necessarily cultural, but it is also subjective. In recuperating a future for Bub

(and tangentially, Lutie), we would have to acknowledge that Bub is more metonymic of the

"everyday black man" than the blues hero, meaning that rather than controlling some form of

representation, he is instead represented and has been re-presented by a history of public policy that

suggests the future is limited for him, at the very least, constrained.   But we might also fill the

novel's narrative gap with the reminder that Bub is not an adult yet and is a very sheltered but

precocious child. To reread Bub's character would be to make the political choice to insert a

counter-narrative into the opening of Petry's text. Maybe he finds a mentor in an older boy who

sees him through the detention system. Or maybe Mrs. Hedges rescues him.

On the basis of our acceptance that space is constructed, ambivalent, paradoxical, and

sometimes serendipitous, we might read Bub's story in relationship to other "juvenile delinquent"

novels, such as Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land (1965),* or *Monster (1999)* by Walter

Dean Myers, or Myers' own memoir, even *The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise (2003).* These

texts show that even "without proper homes" (Petry 206), there are young men who do navigate

public housing projects, the criminal justice system, and the odds of the American education

machine and successfully make it out. Granted the personages of these texts *would* qualify as blues

heroes because of their access to the literary sphere and an audience; however, their struggles in and

out of the streets and reform centers before advancing to their chosen careers are useful to illustrate

alternative narratives to the black male's pathology. They are useful to illustrate that spaces like "the

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[70] In "Differance,"for example, Derrida argues, graphic difference itself vanishes into the night, can never be sensed as a full term, but rather extends an invisible relationship, the mark of an inapparent relationship between two spectacles. What the men imagine will happen to Bub and the possibility of what actually is happening are both events outside of the graphic appearance of Petry's text; yet, they hang as paired spectacles in the air.

Street" don't have to be terminal, and they promote thinking about what types of spaces within abject spaces might cultivate more exceptions. In other words, the triangulation of other discourses might make it possible to read into the protest novel the prospect of hope for Bub.

Hope is important because it provides the single answer to determinism, a willingness to believe that spaces fixed in the cultural imagination can be recast discursively and, first of all, exposed for their susceptibility to racial ideologies that influence how we interpret what is possible within those spaces. But secondly, hope has the potential to re-center the imagination on the imagination, to recognize that "narrative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes," which means "[they order] ways of proceeding and constraints, they regulate change in spaces or *moves from one place to another*" (de Certeau 115). Namely, narrative opens the imagination to choices in imagining different routes just as space offers the imagination choices in mobility, in creating one's own narrative. This is certainly not to minimize the enormous challenges that would face young Bub or others in his position; it is simply to inject the hope that in the absence of a determined ending, literary discussions could provide an opening for multiple endings. In order not to give in to fatalism that there is no future for Bub, and by extension the novel's other men who seem stuck in place, the conscious critic would have to hope for Bub's eventual triumph over this particular bent of the sociological imagination even as she advocates for the change that would enable it.

A Phenomenological Perspective, Take Three: Native Sons, Native Problems

If we are considering how to resist the determinism of liberalism and re-see the fatalism of the protest genre, it is only fitting to end this chapter with what seems the most intractable of the three novels I have chosen to focus on. Even the familiarity of the plot adds to the challenge of a proposed re-reading. In *Native Son,* Wright's acclaimed novel told in three parts, Bigger Thomas—a twenty year old from Chicago's South Side—struggles with his station in life as an uneducated

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inhabitant of the Black Belt; who, even after he has been given a chauffeur job and the prospect of night school, remains so alienated from society that his seeming only path to self-determination is through a double-murder. Reacting to the presumption that he will be accused anyway, Bigger unwittingly suffocates the daughter of his wealthy white employer and subsequently beheads and burns her body to hide the evidence. Depicted as his first act of freedom from the constraints of society, Bigger then tries to capitalize on the murder through a fake kidnapping scheme, but during its botching, winds up killing his black girlfriend, Bessie, as well. In the section titled, "Fate," the analysis and sentencing for Bigger's crimes become the premise of Wright's ending treatise on race relations in twentieth century America. *Native Son* is the protest novel par excellence.[71]

Written to explicitly denounce the systemic ghettoization of African Americans, *Native Son* brings into focus paradoxes of genre, race, and space with which critics continue to grapple. To confront the systems of white supremacy and capitalism as they conjoin in the ills of American housing, Wright creates an anti-messiah out of Bigger. Born in the manger of the kitchenette's death trap, Bigger—through his acceptance of the violent acts that the novel positions as predestined—serves as a substitute for collective expiation, and correspondingly, is sentenced to death by state execution. Wright's portrayal of Bigger, based on a variation of a prototype,[72] allows for sympathy with Bigger's character as he faces death but not redemption, as even his benevolent lawyer Max eventually recoils from the monstrosity twentieth century racism has created. Wright

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[71] Influenced by realist and naturalist writers such as Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, Wright's readers are exposed to the varying shades of white supremacy through the discourses of newspapers, inquests, and real estate regimes but disallowed the reserve of realism due to Wright's use of a gritty, graphic naturalism bordering on the gothic. The text extends the classic ideal of realism and its *classist* verisimilitude by creating a psychic distance so close to the protagonist, the typical middle class conservatism of realism is rejected. Moreover, readers, especially white readers of Wright's day, were given a peek into the psychology of the figure representing their greatest fear (the black male rapist), satisfying the desire for voyeurism (and the sociological premise) of studying the unknowable urban subject (Tanner 132; O'Reilly 46).

[72] In his essay "How Bigger Was Born" (1940), Wright himself argued that Bigger was metonymic of an entire race of men and even a global condition, claiming "there was not just one Bigger, but many of them, more than I could count and more than you suspect" (Wright 434). "I made the discovery that Bigger Thomas was not black all the time; he was white, too, and there were literally millions of him, everywhere," he writes (441).

heightens the contradictions of the realist genre by placing the anti-hero of naturalism at its center;

he therefore lays partial blame at the foot of both so-called objective discourses, and by doing so, he

somewhat shakes the foundations of both genres. Additionally, parallel to what we can observe in

The Street and Trumbull Park, Native Son also exhibits a lack of control over the paradoxes of

representational space.[73] Despite the novel's determination to show that the straightjacket of racial

determinism only ever dehumanizes the subject, it also illustrates Bigger's development of a

personhood intimately tied to the spaces he inhabits, which leads to a necessary reexamination of the

protest genre's purpose, and our understanding of it.

     Native Son encodes similar ironic reversals of spatial designations as the two novels already

discussed. In Book One, the black/white spatial binary that characterizes the South Side and the

Dalton's home is undone by the very adjectives the environment calls for in order to be described as

object. Wright's dichotomy is obvious: both the Daltons' white hair and white cat, and the

Thomas's portrayal as "blackly naked" indicate two conceptions of alterity (247). The South Side's

abandoned buildings, which wealthy whites used to occupy, now have "black windows" that "[gape]

blackly, like the eye-sockets of empty skulls" (231).[74] Yet they are also "high, white" and "empty"

(181). Drexel Boulevard is perceived by Bigger to be "a cold and distant world…of white secrets"

(44); however, when he comes to stand before the Dalton's "black, iron picket fence," Bigger seems

as intimidated by it as he does the other objects in the Dalton's home (44). The point I am making

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[73] In the Introduction, I cite Henri Lefebvre's formulation that "representational space" is lived space, in the sense that our relationship to labor stratifications, for instance, may cause us to experience our housing spaces as classed (Lefebvre 56). I think he is saying that certain property values, sizes, and neighborhood resources can indicate or symbolize status, not that middle class homes necessarily 'feel' differently than lower class homes.

[74] This is a subtle contrast to the empty "Communist" building that Mary runs into, which Wright describes in parallel, though not equally loaded, terms: "He looked at the building into which she had gone; it was old and unpainted; there were no lights in the windows or doorway… All he could recall having heard about Communists was associated in his mind with *darkness*, old houses, people speaking in whispers and trade unions on strike" (66, 67).

is that language itself interrupts Wright's imposed phenomenology (the black/white world) and interjects an objective reality that exposes the arbitrariness of spatial racialization. As further case in point, in Book Two, Bigger's flight lands him cordoned off in the "black" part of town which is discursively "whitened" through the search for him:

> He looked at the paper and saw a black-and-white map of the South Side, around the borders of which was a shaded portion an inch deep…Shaded portion shows area already covered by police and vigilantes in search for Negro rapist and murderer. White portion shows area yet to be searched…Empty buildings would serve *only as long as he stayed within the white portion* of the map, and the white portion was shrinking rapidly. (246)[75]

The inversion of the black-and-white map underscores the willed belief in the power-knowledge of racial assignation; the space could be black or white. Additionally, Bigger's hiding out in the space of the South Side that is culturally thought of as black but rewritten as white by the newspaper's labeling of it as "unsearched," renders Bigger visible only through his own insertion of discourse: "He was there on that map, in that white spot, standing in a room waiting for them to come" (256). Normally, Bigger would blend in as just another black body, but his fugitive status make this sociological erasure impossible since his absence from the Dalton home is what has 'appeared' his presence as an object in the white world.

Another reversal of racial designators that cancels or erases racial difference in the text occurs through the metaphor of blindness. On page 106, Bigger condemns his family for their blindness: "He felt that they wanted and yearned to see life in a certain way; they needed a certain picture of the world; there was one way of living they preferred above all others; and they were blind

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[75] This is also an irony of the Black Belt expanding and, therefore, intimates the title of Book Two, "Flight," could be read as a parallel with white "flight."

to what did not fit. They did not want to see what others were doing if that doing did not feed their

own desires." However, the same could be said and, in fact, is condemned in the white characters,

as we are also told, "Jan was blind. Mary had been blind. Mr. Dalton was blind. And Mrs. Dalton

was blind; yes, blind in more ways than one" (107). If everyone is blind, then no one's point of

orientation is reliable. If maps can be rewritten or layered over by different geographical narratives,

then it is clear that racial boundaries have always been porous, invisible markers of cultural

mediation, and that race has to be kept in sight for us to believe that there is no other way to see.

Gibson warned critics in 1975 of this analytical blindness, implicating the reader: "The

difficulty most critics have who write about Richard Wright Native Son is that they do not see

Bigger Thomas. They see him with their outer eyes, but not with the inner eyes… Most critics of

Wright's novel see only the outer covering of Bigger Thomas, the blackness of his skin and his

resulting social role. The final meaning of the book, as a matter of fact, depends upon the awareness

on the part of the reader of Bigger's individuality" (35). While certainly early reviews of *Native Son*

were prejudiced in their reception of Wright's vision of race, later studies have evolved in their focus

to highlight use of language, Wright's political and educational influences, and the manipulation of

the black woman as sexual object. [76] Rather than rehearse the full body of criticism here, I want to

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[76] To get a sense of its initial mixed reception, consider the opposing reviews of *The Nation* and *The Washington Post*, both published in March 1940: The *Nation* reviewer calls it "bookish" and "melodramatic" while the *Post* reviewer declares it "the finest novel as yet written by an American Negro," comparable to *The Grapes of Wrath*. Of course, James Baldwin's critical responses are canonical, as is Irving Howe's attempt at revival, and Ralph Ellison's rejoinder (See "Many Thousands Gone" (1955), "Black Boys and Native Sons" (1963), and "The World and the Jug" (1963) respectively). Critics such as Sylvia H. Keady in her article "Richard Wright's Women Characters and Inequality" have contested Wright's representation of women in the novel. Michael Fabre and Carla Capetti both discuss the relationship between Wright's work and sociology. In "The Figurative Web of Native Son," Joyce Ann Joyce tries to show the cohesiveness between Bigger's voice and the narrative voice, "the connection between Wright's characterization of Bigger and his unique use of sentence structure and figurative language." Whereas Tanner tries to divide the narrative structure into a binary opposition, a juxtaposition of two mutually exclusive strands of language, Joyce finds "a linguistically complex network of sentences and images that reflect the opposing or contradictory aspects of Bigger's psyche and thus synthesize the interrelationship between Wright's subject matter and his expression of it" (171). While Joyce recognizes that the power of the narrative is generated by the fierce battle Bigger wages against racist society, she cogently shows that the impact of the tragedy on the reader comes directly from Wright's complex narrative strategy. Finally, Henry Louis Gates' *Critical Perspectives of*

draw attention to illuminations from several scholars that inform my central reading and interjection. Houston Baker insists that the plane scene in *Native Son* (and *Invisible Man*) forms a type of narrative lithograph of the disenfranchisement of blacks from participation in the American Dream. In this formulation, the American Dream would symbolize the techno-industrial age enabled by the mobility and property ownership of whites, which automatically disqualified blacks from establishing geographic and political territory *or* complete class consciousness due to an impaired biopower resulted from the Middle Passage.[77] Baker reads the intrusion of signs such as the airplane's writing and the parody of Uncle Sam in the visage of the State's Attorney as delimiters of the modern regulation of space and, therefore, indication that the ground Bigger occupies is placeless (87). His reading, however, is based on his interpretation that the only way to enter "the Western mechanical dream" is through the conversion of the black collective body from free labor into paid labor (Baker 97).[78] Unfortunately, this history cannot account for the body of Bigger Thomas whose abjection is not directly due to the brutality of slavery nor to the routinization of 1940s Taylorism. Wright represents the "first-born of the city tenements"[79] but as a disaffected, frequently unemployed black male who does not find solace in the collectivity of the working class, nor the fragility of folk culture meant to relieve the instability of his position. Bigger is metonymic of "the nigger kept running" with no place to go but the streets.

Richard Wright: Past and Present and Robert J. Butler's *Critical Response to Richard Wright* provide historical groundings in critical concerns.

[77] I am paraphrasing Baker's reading on p.86.

[78] In this conception, as Baker points out, Wright relies on the ideology of a Negro nationalism and a race-conscious Marxism to write African Americans into the history of industrialization as workers. The communist vision of the relationship to capital is seen as the great leveler of social inequality. Obviously, however, as many studies have documented, and as *Native Son* alludes to, the Communist Party would not serve as the utopic race solution that Richard Wright first thought in the early thirties. Though the discussion lies beyond the purview of this chapter, William Maxwell's *New Negro, Old Left (1999)* and Earl Hutchinson's *Blacks and Reds (1995)* are important works that capture the evolution of the involvement of African Americans in Communism.

[79] (Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* 142).

Cynthia Tolentino reads the plane scene as Wright's contestation of the suggestion that the reason for the lag in the progress of the American Negro was economic inactivity. Citing the scene "when Bigger insists to Gus, 'I could fly a plane if I had a chance,' and "Gus retorts, 'If you wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane" (Wright 20), Tolentino remarks that "By giving voice to the racial privilege that undergirds narratives of modernity, this scene challenges the egalitarianism traditionally associated with representations of national progress" (384). Whereas Tolentino reads Gus and Bigger's performativity of whiteness in this scene as insertion of black subjectivity, she agrees with Baker that "it also demonstrates the absence of self-possession, agency, and racial consciousness in Bigger" (384). Unlike Baker who reads Wright as codifying a distinct folk culture that Bigger does not have access to, Tolentino claims that Bigger's subjectivity *"does not* revolve around the establishment of racial distinctiveness" but rather an oppositional class position (399). Whereas the parameters of my project are contoured differently than those of these scholars, I share their critical stakes in trying to articulate sites of empowerment within the disempowerment that accompanies an unquestioning investment in liberalism and, under our current context, neoliberalism. For Baker, that site is the site of culture; for Tolentino, the site of black masculinity as a response to social reform.[80] For me, as it pertains to this chapter, my site is representations of the built environment whose depictions have typically been complicit in defining how we look at race, culture, and black masculinity, and by

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[80] Aimé Ellis' article "Boys in the Hood: Black Male Community in Richard Wright's *Native Son*" is equally helpful in thinking through spaces (and behavior) normalized as negative but which enable a counter-reading of Wright's text. She too considers the plane scene with Bigger and Gus, but instead of focusing on the construction of these spaces as subordinate to the illusions of American wealth, Ellis draws our attention to the young men's appropriation of white male authority through mimesis and hyper-masculinity. She argues that these anxieties "operate at the core of black male community and often manifest in destructive behaviors, they are also simultaneously a part of a broader homosocial network of enabling, nurturing, and self-affirming practices" (195). Since this form of masculinity defines itself against Jim Crow, Ellis finds it a way for black men to maintain some semblance of humanity (191). The subjectivity she outlines is both timely and necessary since, as she warns, there are likely more Bigger Thomases to be expected in the new millennium (196).

extension, housing politics. But where I specifically diverge from the above approaches is in reexamining the terms by which these sites are constituted.

I am privileging phenomenology as a close reading approach because, as a philosophy, it appeals to the imagination by basing its inferences on a different empiricism than blanket social reality. Objectification through a true phenomenological account is not foremost filtered through the lens of race, sex, or class but the "I" who seeks to establish the essential features of description through a process of individuation. While the plane scene in *Native Son,* for example, is typically read in terms of its construction of the social limitations of Bigger's world, an additional reading is possible. Note how the first description in the passage is sensorial:

> They leaned their backs against the red brick wall of a building, smoking…To the east, Bigger saw the sun burning a dazzling yellow. In the sky above him a few big white clouds drifted. He puffed silently, his mind pleasantly vacant of purpose. Every slight movement in the street evoked a casual curiosity in him. Automatically, his eyes followed each car as it whirred over the smooth black asphalt. A woman came by and he watched the gentle sway of her body until she disappeared into a doorway.
>
> …
>
> His eyes moistened. He blinked and the world grew hard again, mechanical, distinct. A weaving motion of the sky made him turn his eyes upward; he saw a slender streak of billowing white blooming against the deep blue. A plane was writing high up in the sky.
>
> …
>
> "Looks like a little bird," Bigger breathed with childlike wonder.
>
> *…*

Noiselessly, the tiny plane looped and veered, vanishing and appearing, leaving

behind it a long trail of white plumage, like coils of fluffy paste being squeezed from

a tube….The plane wrote another word: SPEED….'I could fly one of them things if

I had the chance,' Bigger mumbled reflectively, as though talking to himself. (15-17)

I have quoted this passage at length to provide a *détente* in the routine of our practice of reading.[81] If

we bracketed off the socio-cultural ramifications, I would say the essential or universal features of

this experience described are 1) *Motion*, which catches the attention of the eye and draws its organ

towards an object; 2) *Judgment of distance* between the object and the self provides an assessment of

threat or safety, thereby allowing the self to remain 'casually curious'; 3) apperception occurs in

which *comparison* is made between the object in view and other objects/ideas familiar to the subject

(e.g., the bird); and 4) we might say the lifting of the eyes to the heavens indicates *ascension*, a

dreamscape, or escape/refuge, a separation between one's body planted on the earth and highest

possibility of being. The first thing we should notice is that the two boys' bodies are in contact with

a wall. Bigger lazily gazes at objects; he watches a woman without apparent aggression. The eye is

drawn upward to the sky which opens another visual plane, a world of possibility. He apprehends

language and is able to categorize its meaning without it immediately interpolating him as "black."

At first the plane is simply a metal object, then a simile, and finally, a carrier of all the signification of

commodification and the state.   Under the supposed rules of the protest novel, this last signification

is the most appropriate reading since it illustrates how white racism suppresses the black personality

through such factors as environmental injustice.[82] However, such a construction is only preeminent

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[81] See Chapter One for a discussion of this term.

[82] Reading race first means Gus and Bigger can only exist in a placeless point on a map in a white world. Reading gender first in this passage would be to give primacy to Bigger's objectification of the woman who walks by and to draw attention to the hierarchy of patriarchy: if Bigger and Gus have little chance to fly a plane, at this time period, poor black women would have even less of a chance, not barring the exceptionality of a Bessie Coleman.

if we decide that it is. A spatial-phenomenological reading, on the contrary, can hold Bigger's

relation to the material, cultural, socio-economic and visual landscapes apart. It creates a pause that

acknowledges that one's position in relation to space changes the 'angle' of perception, depending

on which discourse one chooses to participate in.

From this respect, the cultural presumptions about place and space in protest fiction are as

Manichean as the conventions of the genre itself. The stereotypical characters and spatial

boundaries that make up Harriet Beecher Stowe and Richard Wright's literary worlds comforted the

readers of their day because it reassured them that such dichotomies were the way of the world, that

there existed a naturalized order to either be sustained *or* rebelled against, whether or not actual

social reality confirmed this. James Baldwin, in "Everybody's Protest Novel," castigates this will to

ignorance but can also find no way to read beyond what he sees as the genre's "rejection of life [and]

the human being" (23). I would assert that more keen attention to Bigger's orientation to space is

one alternative to relegating the genre to mere dehumanization. By attending to space and how even

spatial inequalities due to race can be subordinated, we can shift the grounds of analysis from being

focused on the trope of racial inferiority as the basis of categorization of this novel, which only

serves to keep us locked in the "wasness" of race. But, "*protest* literature….is ideologically designed

more for the reaffirmation of the reader's position," JanMohamed reminds us (41). This description

affirms, as Baldwin was actually, that audience plays a huge part in our interpretation of *Native Son*.

If we want to treat *Native Son* as a classic artifact of the modern era (and I do), we do have to

acknowledge shifts and diversity within readership over time. On the other hand, I would disagree

with critics who dismiss *Native Son's* determinism because of the historically raced space he

occupied.[83] It is not space but the phenomenological identifications we assume within space that

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[83] Isabel Soto, for example, argues that space in the novel is based on power relations that inescapably limit Bigger's agency" (26).

limits our agency. When it comes to *Native Son*, I would not say that Wright's problem is "immunity to the lure of a peculiarly materialist historiography" (Baker 101). Instead, the protagonist's interactions with the built environment provide an ample spatial history that permits the risk of de-emphasizing social constructions while still maintaining the novel's goal. Interestingly, we can look to the spaces of some of the novel's most raced spaces (the street below the plane, the kitchenette, the courtroom) to spy strategies of identification that are "inter-versal" and may offer a way out of Bigger's dehumanization.

In the final section of the novel, it is apparent that Bigger's fate will be determined by how he is seen by the judge, media, and railing crowds he walks through. However, accepting Mohamed's premise, a ringing question is how does Bigger appear to the reader? And furthermore, where do we as readers find ourselves? In the jail cell when Bigger is surrounded by his family, Max, Jan, and the Daltons, his self-awareness is heightened. He partially identifies with his family; he sees himself as the "object" of whiteness (symbolized by the shame of poverty and the crime of alleged rape), but he also sees himself as apart from that symbolization—"He was lost" (298). It is clear from this scene and related ones (the inquest, the visit to Mary's room with the reporters, and the trial) that Bigger himself does not "appear" for his white spectators, but rather, the idea of "the black man," mythical in its dangerous proportions. That Bigger refuses this identification illustrates that we can refuse identifications too. Similar to a photograph of a trial setting, in which facial expressions and body language may be caught registering a range of responses from validation to confusion, the end of the novel highlights that there are numerous subject positions to occupy.

But what position does the reader choose? What are the probable or ethical stances, if there are such? I think that the protest novel affirms binary thinking on the one hand, but by being fiction, it also contests that rigidity through the invitation of shifting perspectives. Politically, this could be bad because it allows for psychic distance: we can simply take the position of non-

commitment. However, a phenomenological lens may help with this refusal by drawing attention to moments of inter-versality in a given text—as a border that allows room for difference and sameness, a compromise with the downfalls of more biased forms of universal humanism—even in the protest novel. Several passages support the repositioning I am proposing.

At the very beginning of the novel, for example, the mimesis of the alarm clock in the opening paragraph injects a phenomenology before the race of the characters is identified, creating a time that occurs outside of narration. For just a moment, before we can truly locate the first voice of the dialogue or its vernacular ("Bigger, shut that thing off!"), we are left to the senses of our ears and whatever perception the imagination may call forth. "*Brrrrriiiiiiiinnng!*" the alarm clock sounds (3). "A bed spring creak[s]… A surly grunt sound[s] above the tinny ring of metal" (3). We are only given to imagine "naked feet," feet that could belong to any race before "Light flood[s] the room and reveal[s] a black boy standing in a narrow space between two iron beds" (3). The possibility of shifting identification here provides a lapse before the raced objects of the narrative appear (Bigger and the Thomas family's stigmatized kitchenette on the South Side). By keeping him behind the line—the racial barrier created from redlining, restricted covenants, and white supremacist violence—the novel explicitly argues that Bigger's spatial containment is largely the culprit for his eventual commission of murder. (Starting with the appearance and analogy of the fearsome, squealing rat, Wright spares no detail to make the apartment take the hue of the ominous darkness the characters first wake up to.) Furthermore, its exorbitant rent levy is referred to repetitively in the novel as proof that the Thomas family does not control their apartment as property or its boundaries. But while the Thomas kitchenette may seem *placeless* within a racial and capitalist paradigm, there are key moments in which the kitchenette offers rest and refuge to Bigger, and through the narrative technique of temporal suspense, endows the space with value.

After the robbery plot is foiled, for example, we are told Bigger "went home and sat in a chair by the window, looking out dreamily" (41). He sits there *for almost an hour* until the sun is setting and it is time to report to the Dalton's. While the authorial voice explains that most of his confused emotions are about his involuntary fear and actions to thwart the robbery, there is a textual ellipses after the lines, "That was the way he lived; he passed his days trying to defeat or gratify powerful impulses in a world he feared," a narrative gap (42). In this pause, the only sounds mentioned are the "rusty radiator hissing at the far end of the room" and "[his mother] rubbing clothes on the metal washboard" (42). The reader is privy to "the strange sea" of sounds that urban living permits (Bachelard 28), while "Outside [Bigger's] window he saw the sun dying over the roof-tops in the western sky and watched the first shade of dusk fall" (42). In this quiet moment, the text creates a space for Bigger in which any kind of thought might have passed through his mind. There is a similar pause in the text on page 97 when Bigger returns to the kitchenette after committing his first murder:

> He lay on his back, in bed, hearing and seeing nothing. Then, like an electric switch being clicked on, he was aware that the room was filled with pale daylight….He saw the room and saw snow falling past the window; but his mind formed no image of any of these. They simply existed, unrelated to each other; the snow and the daylight and the soft sound of breathing cast a strange spell upon him, a spell that waited for the wand of fear to touch it and endow it with reality and meaning. He lay in bed, only a few seconds from deep sleep…not yet in the land of the living.[84]

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[84] A similar moment occurs on page 59 and again on 359: "Back in his cell, Bigger stood in the middle of the floor, not moving. He was not stoop-shouldered now, nor were his muscles taut. He breathed softly, wondering about the cool breath of peace that hovered in his body. It was as though he were trying to listen to the beat of his own heart. All around him was darkness and there were no sounds. He could not remember when he had felt as relaxed

Although within the field of the narrative, Bigger is now a murderer and still another black man from the South Side lying in a cramped kitchenette, here, for just a moment he experiences a pre-consciousness in which his eye has not assimilated the world into a recognizable form. He is not yet captive to "the wand of fear" and, therefore—albeit not diegetically—he exists in a world that is unmarked. As Ahmed states, "The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the "here" of the body and the "where" of its dwelling" (8). In the passages I have outlined, the "here" and the "where" are suspended and yet create a space that requires the subject (either the reader or Bigger) to fix a location through the senses *before* perception of the text's object—and with it, the coloring of racial associations.

These daydream sequences in *Native Son* create the possibility for alternative interpretations if we allow that when the protagonist is in a dream-like state and, thus, inaccessible, it indicates that privacy is possible even in the starkly public space of a crowded kitchenette. Daydreams, like dreams, are the site of the unconscious and proof of the mind's deeper level of processing (Jung 4). Bigger's capacity for daydreaming demonstrates that there *can* be a separation between the effects of racist housing strictures and the literal effects on the formation of subjectivity. That these dreamlike moments (unmarked spaces within the raced space of the Black Belt) are wedged between acts of violence dependent on racial injustice and the brutalization of women is not to be ignored. But in bracketing the world through a phenomenological perspective, these moments point to an intimate politics of personhood that Bigger establishes in his kitchenette, in his room in the Dalton's home, and even later in an abandoned apartment.[85] Bigger's *social* relation to his imaginary of Chicago exists because the genre of the protest novel demands resignation to his racial and economic

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as this before…it was not until after Max had gone that he discovered that he had spoken to Max he had never spoken to anyone in his life; not even to himself."

[85] I am defining "intimate" here as the dimension of space constructed out of one's private (not always psychological) relations with the built environment.

exclusion. However, the novel's portrayal of his *private* relation to the world around him is much more complex.

Bigger's private interior is akin to the thirdspace Fanon alludes to when he writes, "I was unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world. I existed in triple: I was taking up room" (92). Bigger's 'tripled' self could be read as presenting the same dialectic Fanon confronts between the body's location in space/time and an imposed racial schema (Fanon 90-91). From Fanon, we are given to understand that a racial tautology cannot capture being in total because blackness is lived in relation to whiteness (90). But this pre- or third consciousness refers to the core essence of being, or *Dassein*. Though Wright's objective is to portray the inescapability of the white world, effectively racializing space, to write/represent space is to write an encounter with material objects that gets at the heart of who we are. This truth has important implications for the twenty-first century reader and the opportunities for identification(s) relative to text. If I simply look at you, you stay an object. But if I fully identify with you, then I take your position and the object becomes our shared experience; it attunes our perception to the joint possibility of recollection and recognition, a readymade human interchange, an inter-versal pause. This encounter could allow for empathy or even a change in point of view.

This is what Max attempts to inspire in Bigger when he tells him to look at the Chicago skyline. He asks Bigger to re-envision the buildings of Chicago's downtown loop and to picture them as more than "the vast white world that sprawled and towered in the sun" (427). By arguing that Bigger's ability to decipher this urban space ties him to other men, Max—and by extension, the novel—intimates that perception of a shared spatial imaginary is possible, even for someone despised. He encourages Bigger to think about the dreams and the conflicts that hold the city's buildings together. Since "[Bigger] lived in one of them once," the conversation implies a transformation has taken place either in the population of the buildings or, if thinking abstractly, in

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Max's optimism (427), but the picture Max is trying to paint for Bigger is obscured. Max says, "A few men are squeezing those buildings tightly in their hands, the buildings can't unfold" (427). It's unclear whether the men "on the inside of those buildings" or the "men [like Bigger] who get angry and fight to re-enter those buildings" are black or white, but there is the suggestion that the constraints of determinism reaches beyond the ghetto (427). Because Bigger is ultimately unable to shift his identifications relative to the idea of race-neutral space, a socialist vision of the built environment (meaning equality without hierarchy) is compromised.

What I have been discussing are phenomenological profiles, orientations to buildings and objects, which can change for the individual, even when historical material and social relations stay in place. Young avers that through the phenomenological attitude, "images are seen as only one possible set of an infinite number of silhouettes of reality" (77). To acknowledge an infinite range of alternative perceptions requires expansive thinking and the acknowledgement that our cognition is playing a part in our determination. This attitude calls for both subjectivity, starting with the "I" and a movement towards the other. As mentioned above, a successful phenomenology would compel both a shared experience and the integration of difference. Thus, if we pay attention to the shared space created between ourselves and the object, it might become easier to identify with others as complete psychic beings. This also explains how Bigger's profile of the rat at the beginning of the novel differs so much from his view of the rat at the ending. The frying pan scene in which he kills the rat is now canonized, but by the time Bigger is in jail, a rat's ability to run to his hole is the enviable action. The vicious threat to his homespace has become another "being" with which he can identify through his differential relationship to it vis-à-vis the space. That the protest novel could permit this, and a number of other readings, is a reason to keep reading a genre whose plot usually focuses on the finite.

Buggy, Bub, and Bigger—if only for a moment—transform their positions in the racial economy into private and potentially liberating landscapes through their interaction with space. It is only a temporally bound spatial politics that ignores the simultaneity of their spatial agency within their racial oppression. Indeed, as foregrounded in the previous chapter and the above discussions of *Trumbull Park* and *The Street*, the fallout of the American apartheid era stretching over so many years is that the racialization of space becomes so ingrained, and alternative visions must fight through the constraints of discourse to institute new rhetoric. Unsafe and adverse housing conditions such as overcrowding, rodent infestation, race riots, and crime contribute to the perception that where we live is deterministic of fate and mediates our imagination of certain spaces. These are the "native sons" of African American literature and the protest genre; they are endemic to a society in which racial hierarchies and capitalist hierarchies have walked hand in hand. Keeping an eye on the indeterminacy of the built environment, therefore, helps in refuting claims of cultural pathology that often get displaced onto racial groups, particularly black men. In *Trumbull Park,* Buggy Martin's experience of a new domestic sphere helps him realize the artificiality of raced space. Utilizing blues discourse, he becomes the Civil Rights Movement's ideal primogenitor. In *The Street*, Bub is not old enough to access cultural, political, or economic spheres, but his youthful negotiation of space is actually what preserves a potentiality for him. And finally, in spite of Bigger's violence, victimization, criminalization, and ultimate death, he finally learns to dwell in the space he occupies, and this is what inscribes his potential as a subject—and those who identify with him.

These novels illustrate that separating the protest genre's racialization of space from its spatial metaphors might lead to different points of identification and interpretation. While the judgment of the twentieth century ventriloquized through Baldwin is that "the failure of the protest novel lies in its…categorization" (23), my reading of this genre returns us to the canon in order to confront the weakness of categorization as a means of overcoming it. The African American protest

novel does concern itself with responding to segregation of a particular time period, but it also intervenes "by way of architecture" to expose the ongoing dynamics that a segregation aesthetic obscures. Rather than merely confirm ideas of racial realism and social determinism, the protest novel brings to bear an ambivalent look at fallacies within these discourses. It creates new openings for analysis of African American culture, such as intertextuality with housing architecture and the historical unconscious implied by objects. This is how literature participates in and promotes the possibility of social change, by generating new spaces for discussion. The realities of race are a part of the story of urban housing but they don't tell the whole of it.

Invisibility Blues: Black Men and Housing in the Fiction of Gloria Naylor

> *I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me."*
>
> Prologue, *Invisible Man*

In a much cited scene in Gloria Naylor's *Women of Brewster Place (1982)*, the residents come together for the first meeting of the Brewster Place Block Association, led by Kiswana Browne—the middle class black female activist "slumming it" to better serve her people. This is the scene in which Sophie (who represents repressive heterosexism in the black community) will quite caustically *out* the black lesbian, Lorraine. In terms of the structure of the novel and its seven focal women, this scene suggests a competition between discourses, those of race, class, and sexuality. Just before this contest, however, is another competition that takes place between the male character Roscoe and another female resident, Betina. When the character Lorraine walks into the room, Betina is about to punch Roscoe in the mouth (Naylor 143). When Lorraine asks what's wrong, Ben the Super assures her, it's "just nigger mess" (143). In fact, Roscoe and Betina both desire the position of secretary for the association, which leads them to try and disqualify each other on the basis of who hasn't paid rent (a reasonable enough criterion for an officer). But perhaps because they are minor characters and only ancillary to Sophie's homo phobic rant, critical discussion has overlooked the significance of the "short light-skinned man" wrangling for the role of historicizing Brewster Place's housing activism and for, essentially, the power to tell the Block Association's story. In this novel, both struggling black men and black women make distinctive claims to agency and literacy, yet the conventions of black feminist discourse at the time and contemporary literary criticism today

compel us to ignore the parity of these two narratives, as if their coexistence might cancel each other out.

To dismiss this moment is to cosign with the text's representation of it as unworthy to interpret, as "just nigger mess." On the contrary, reading the space of housing in Naylor's novels from a phenomenological perspective, rather than a purely gendered or raced one, illuminates this reduction of individuality and repositions the invisibility of black men as a crucible for African American community formation. In Chapter Two, I articulated my main problematic as the deterministic racialization of space, arguing that *Trumbull Park, The Street*, and *Native Son* (traditional protest novels) each show the ideological paradox of taking for granted the rhetoric that marks the ghetto as "black," which causes us to miss the potential of a universalism premised apart from the African American protagonist's access to cultural and political spheres. In this chapter, attention to space helps to problematize the notion of black collectivity, by exposing the ways in which the range of lower class black male identities get overlooked or limited to common stereotypes in critical discourse. Partially in response to determinism, I believe, criticism in African American literary studies, like the larger African American political culture, reflects a concerted anxiety over definitions of "black community"; and some forms of masculinity and space are imagined to pose a threat to this ideal. Gloria Naylor's companion novels—*The Women of Brewster Place (1982), The Men of Brewster Place (1998),* and *Linden Hills (1985),* in particular—focus on women trapped within a geography that reflects the institutionalization and internalization of white racism and "black" racialization, yet it is the men of these novels who contest the effects of dehumanization through their transgressive domesticities.

Naylor's fiction highlights a dialectic that has plagued black men for half a century. At the same time that the African American male in the ghetto gained hyper-visibility as a "menace to society" (roughly the 1940s through the 1990s), he was also relegated to the margins as an agential

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subject in major African American works and criticism as black writers and literary critics attacked the fallouts of Jim Crow and the Black Power Movement: namely, the continuing issues of white racism, patriarchy, and black male sexism. Hazel Carby trumpets in her prolific study *Race Men* (2000) that twentieth century affirmations of black masculinity worked in concert with racialization to produce a race-based patriarchy that limited the recognition of black female intellectuals. While categorically true, I would add the parallel argument that this construction of masculinity, hinged as it was on black middle class values and a reactionary literary establishment, also narrowed the representation of non-elite black men and their stake in the intellectual tradition. Naylor herself confessed her belief that the black man's story "couldn't be written" until 1996 ("Conversation" 150). By accepting this limit, however, Naylor and her critics who repeat this deduction fall into a pattern that is only observed when we step outside of the conventions for reading raced and feminine space. Naylor's representation of men within low income housing illustrates a need for a phenomenological lens added to close reading in order to widen the possibilities for critics' interpellation of the black male subject. If we look more closely, these novels show that it is through navigation of abject spaces that some men are able to illuminate a counter-cultural domestic project that may prove useful to the black literary tradition and future community building.

Iconic in the field of black women's writing and African American literature as a whole, Gloria Naylor's fiction is significant in its representation of housing as a critical space and its representation of affirmative—though sometimes one-sided—community relations. The built environment in Naylor's fiction, just as in the protest novel and *Invisible Man*, serves as a primary force against which her characters struggle. Personified as a broken mother in the *Brewster Place* book ends and as a misaimed spit wad in *Linden Hills*, the setting of these novels reflect effects of twentieth century urbanization that many blacks have had to face: geographic isolation, the efflux of a black middle class economy, urban renewal, and gentrification. Naylor's genius is in dramatizing

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the character of the built environment alongside her human characters: at the end of each novel, the dreams of the protagonist as well as the exterior of the central homespace metaphorically (and in *Linden Hills*, literally) go up in flames. Housing architecture and spatial divisions impose themselves daily on the lives of every resident; Naylor's "affective kernel" is rich (Lefebvre 42). However, criticism of Naylor's fiction tends to take the racialization and femininity of the neighborhoods she represents as "natural" and primary, and subsequently, to reproduce the conventions of how such spaces are discussed.[86] For example, Barbara Christian points out, "Race is naturalized within [Naylor's] environment. Her neighborhoods are *already* black" (108). But because the residents of Naylor's novels cannot hold onto a singular cultural identity while appreciating individual difference, Christian judges the possibilities of black female collectivity a failure. (Black male collectivity is not even considered.) Where I diverge with Christian and more contemporary critics of Naylor's fiction is in my assessment that the inability of Naylor's women to leverage the strengths of culture is due more so to critical interpretations of how collectivity is formed than collectivity's absence in Naylor's narrative structure; and for a more nuanced vision of collectivity, the relationships of Naylor's men to housing spaces and their resultant alternative domesticities is one place we might begin to search.

The inability of the narrator in *Invisible Man* to occupy racially constructed spaces presents a case study for drawing out the spatial possibilities of Naylor's fiction. As the narrator moves from the comfort of a black college dormitory to a men's hostel to a boarding house to a "corporate" apartment to his hole, he is continuously objectified and not seen for who he is. All of the characters he encounters impose their own imagination of his identity on him (from the treacherous

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[86] There are four notable studies on Naylor's canon: Gloria Naylor: Critical Perspectives Past and Present (1993), edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah; Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary (1996), by Virginia Fowler; The Critical Response to Gloria Naylor (1997), edited by Sharon Felton and Michelle Loris; and Gloria Naylor's Early Novels (1999), edited by Margot Anne Kelley. See also Tracy Butt's critical bibliography published in *Callaloo* 23.4 (2000).

Bledsoe to the insincere Brotherhood to the white femme fatale and the black Madonna, Mary).[87]

Consequently, the invisible narrator questions the authority of any racial or sexual construction by

questioning the way he is constructed by others and the way he constructs them. As the novel

proceeds, the narrator's response is to retreat from the community but in order to regroup and

formulate his own homespace and philosophy. Unfortunately, the novel ends before we might test

whether his philosophy (or hibernation period) has been productive.

     Invisible Man introduces to the reader a modern subject that we continue to 'not see' today, or

rather to only see when crisis is threatened.   In 1990, Michele Wallace's cultural studies manifesto,

Invisibility Blues, labeled this problematic an existential dilemma for the black *woman*. Wallace's

contention was that Western education and mass media, combined with black male reactions to

black feminism, are the perpetrators responsible for the marginalization of black women in society.

The resulting lack of discursive presence, particularly in the publishing world, negates the black

woman's sense of being.[88] In the text, she describes her position as a type of "homelessness,"

finding commonality with veterans, the mentally ill, runaways, the unemployed, and any "people

who 'don't have it all together'" (62). She also includes poor black women in this category. Poor

black men, on the other hand, seem to get lumped in with the sexist black male intellectuals Wallace

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[87] The novel presents women through a male consciousness only to reify stereotypical roles. They are sexualized in relation to the narrator and home spaces as well: the young Mary Lou abused in the shanty; the seductive white housewife in her empty Harlem apartment; and the mothering figure Mary in relation to her boarding house. Despite his being appointed to speak on "The Woman Question," the female characters seem to exert more power over the narrator through their adoption of stereotypical rhetoric. Shelly Jarenski reads this as an inversion of abjection (88). See "Invisibility Embraced: The Abject as a Site of Agency in Ellison's *Invisible Man*."

[88] Wallace's early essays were largely concerned with the ways in which the representation of blacks in the media, film, and academic discourse circulate the "myth of the black superwoman and macho male" to the disadvantage of "real black women." Although more known for bringing black visual art into the fore of critical discussion, in *Invisibility Blues,* Wallace mourns the fact that black women do so little critical writing because of link to social problems that may weigh more personally and heavily: illiteracy, drop out and homicide rate, violence in the community, etc.

accuses of getting all the air time (61-3). They do not get a space of their own. So even though poor black men might be experiencing similar struggles for survival as black women, the subtext beneath Wallace's invisibility blues seems to be "their blues ain't like mine."[89]

What Ellison's *Invisible Man* provides that Wallace's *Invisibility Blues* elides is a "pause" to discern the textual and spatial placelessness of black men in relationship to discourses around housing. Wallace argues that *Invisible Man* erases the black women of its text, as a function of the Eurocentric fixation on the sexual taboo between white women and black men (210). I would argue that the novel's characterization of women is intentionally shadowy to illustrate the narrator's immaturity and lack of relationship to the opposite sex. Furthermore, one aim of the novel is to expose the flaws in racial and cultural projections of society, and I believe that the voice of Ellison's reminiscent narrator is sardonic enough and horrified enough to model how the reader should view such stereotypical figuration. However, we're not certain how to view the invisible narrator, and precisely because of his invisibility. The novel introduces a different visual paradigm for thinking about the black male body other than "blackness" by implying the narrator's inability to occupy predetermined subject positions. He can be neither black nor white. This rejection eventually becomes a refusal on his part. Thus, *Invisible Man* represents a liminality that is placeless in the sense that its position allows the narrator a vantage point from which to critique the historically and symbolically constructed world around him. He is both above it all and yet physically below it (indeed, subterranean). Having negotiated his social reality unsuccessfully, he is able to withdraw to the outside of its regulations and yet retain his recognition of the difference between racial subjectivity and personal identity. It is space which permits this psychic distance.

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[89] Phrase borrowed from Bebe Moore Campbell's 1992 novel title.

To be invisible: a state of being, contingent not so much on the physical impossibility of being seen but on the physical, psychological, racial, sexual, cultural, and economic barriers that prevent recognition. Invisibility is not, as Houston Baker claims, "an end-of-ideology" (33), but a representational matrix that makes reading the presence of certain people difficult or illegible within modern understandings of sociability and social participation. Although coming from two different literary perspectives, Ellison's narrator—similar to Wright's Bigger—points to the twentieth and twenty-first century corner the poor black male in America is often painted into, frequently due to the effect of the ways in which space around him is constructed. Black men are subject to being unrecognized or misrecognized as legitimate occupiers of whatever space they happen to be in. Refusals of recognition take place along a wide range, but most dangerously through racial profiling and criminalization in residential neighborhoods.[90] For my purposes, invisibility is a theoretical tool that indicates embodiment, mobility, and space-making. It can be an opener for critique of Naylor's novels if we examine the ways that black men eke out a homespace for themselves.

Even though critics note the multiple levels of psychological, social, and economic injustice enacted against all genders and the resultant pressure on gender relations, very few who write about Naylor's trilogy go beyond a flat critique of its men to argue for the possibilities of a spectrum of black male subjectivity. In "Saga of Female Bonding," Kumar and Jha neglect to mention that Kiswana, the socially conscious outsider in *Women of Brewster Place*, organizes both women *and men*

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[90] As case in point, George Zimmerman, the neighborhood watchman who shot and killed African American Trayvon Martin, was acquitted during my composition of this chapter. The incident and case garnered national attention because of the inappropriate actions of the Sanford, Florida police department and the fact that racial overtones of the encounter ended in the seventeen-year-old's death. 911 calls and the court proceedings corroborate that Zimmerman went against the advice of authorities and pursued Martin as a possible robbery suspect. In fact, Martin was walking towards a family friend's home. From my perspective, the scuffle that ensued originated from it being assumed that Trayvon did not, could not, *belong* to the neighborhood because of how he was dressed and his race. And while the evidence may not have supported an intent to murder nor excused Martin from his physical violence, the trial highlighted the racial imbalances of the legal justice system and the disparities between black and white male sentencing in this country.

"under the banner of the Tenants' Association where they may come up with their problems and fight for their cause" (118). In "The Walled World of Brewster Place," Cabrera and Tally devotes a brief discussion to the characters of Ben and C.C. Baker, the novel's drunk and rapist; the scholars' reading of Ben, however, never moves beyond summary, and her analysis of C.C. stops at his condemnation as a "cornered, hopeless…vicious specimen of humanity" (94). Lewis, in "Constructing Black Masculinity through the Fiction of Gloria Naylor," chooses to focus only on the male characters most in need of "atonement" and so in one paragraph reduces Abshu Ben-Jamal, one of the most positive and politicized male characters in the trilogy, to a brother with a foot fetish (49).[91] In analyzing the limits of Kiswana class understandings, Karen Walker might have pointed to Abshu's indirect influence on Kiswana's developing community building, since it is his production in the park that permits Kiswana to connect with the wayward Cora Lee and, thus, gives them both the tiniest glimpse of personal change.[92] However, Walker's conceptualization of Naylor's definition of community follows the same trope of previous female-centered and female-insulated critiques, with men held off at the margins as agents of social oppression—a troubling lack of nuance in the year 2012.

These omissions help make visible a cogent mode of black men's invisibility. When taken as a collective, black men coalesce into "shadows" in *The Women of Brewster Place*, which—without the ironic purview of *Invisible Man*—confirms a present absence in the same field of representation that ought to make their distinction apparent. That is, enough work has been done on the domestic sphere, domesticity, and women's homemaking by this time such that any difference in these

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[91] Also overlooked is the character Bruce, a queer man who appears in the Eugene chapter of *The Men of Brewster Place* and who introduces Eugene to the Bull and Roses Bar. Bruce is described as ultra-manly as a supervisor and on the basketball court. And he is equally sure of himself within the permissible ambiguity of a gay bar.

[92] See "Autonomous but Not Alone; the Reappropriation of Female Community in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Housekeeping*" in Contemporary Women's Writing, volume 6.

formations should be obvious. Maxine Montgomery points out that *The Women of Brewster Place* fits within the overarching housing vernacular of African American literature in its depiction of the rundown housing project and its "deliberate use of architectural space…in which African Americans in general and black women in particular fashion safe spaces that hold at bay…white authority" (9). Montgomery is the rare critic who gives attention to space in Naylor's fiction as the actual built environment, but she too gives short shrift to the way in which the men inhabit and create it. In the Prologue, we are told that Brewster Place gives birth to both women and men; but in the novel, the sexes interact with her differently. I argue that the men of Brewster Place inhabit and create homespaces through their physical occupation and inversion of exteriors and interiors. That these domestic transgressions have remained invisible to critics is a signal that traditional notions of homemaking constrain their depiction, and tangentially, shade our looking.

Domesticity is typically understood as "a regulative norm that refigures conceptions of the family from a largely temporal organization of kinship into a spatially manifest entity" (George 3). Feminist studies of nineteenth and twentieth century domesticity rightfully show a concern with the relationship of women to the domestic in resistance to the long legacies of patriarchy and imperial/colonial conquest. Great attention has been given to overturning the traditional views of women as wives, mothers, and vessels of sexual pleasure, even to the intra-domestic relations between women and their maids. Less attention has been paid to domesticity's production of masculinity outside of ossified constructs of men as fathers or sexual aggressors. However, Melvin Dixon, in his insightful book, *Ride Out the Wilderness: Geography and Identity in Afro-American Literature (1987),* suggests a completely oppositional reading to the dominant interpretation of black men in domestic spaces: "Like no other organization of space, the house (the apartment, the tenement, the barracks—wheresoever black men uncover [their secrets]) exteriorizes the elemental structures of black masculine consciousness according to the spatially reproducible taxonomies of race, gender,

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and sex …and their exponentiation in the architectonics of speech and silence" (124). First of all, Dixon allows for multiple genres of space to be domestic: owned homes, apartment units, even military housing. Secondly, he formulates the domestic as that which provides a space for interiority, even if the exteriorization of this interiority takes the form of a reproduction of societal hierarchies and ultimately, leads to silence. This intersectional critique gives men room to be themselves whether in conformity to traditional masculine roles, or not. Much like Bachelard, Dixon argues that housing is a special container for one's self, except he makes this an expressly masculine formulation. He even goes so far to say that the materiality of housing is only a guise to guard "the invisible space of interiority" of *man's* soul (119). If we were to apply this to *The Women of Brewster Place,* our attention would be drawn to the physical setting and men's manipulation or negotiation of it. To look at the basements, alleys, corners, and shadows where the Brewster men loiter as the site of their domesticity is a critical revision of the homespace as we know it. It is not the same as saying that these places are examples of "'street culture'" as Valerie Prince names them, "[developed as] antithetical to the maintenance of home and family" (20). Rather, these visible places constitute the invisible space where men maintain a sense of family and shelter, and self.

The downtrodden super, Ben, is the most prominent example of this type of invisible domesticity. Ben is the street's oldest black resident who, revising *The Street*, Naylor portrays as a passive, sexless drunk. The material conditions of Ben's basement apartment suggest the disrepair of his spirit, but they also invite this subaltern space and subject to be read in multiple ways, most pertinently as a site of masculine domesticity or male domestic subjectivity, and one that provides refuge to the triply castigated subject, the black lesbian. It is to Ben's apartment that Lorraine escapes after being persecuted at the tenant's meeting by the homophobic Sophie, and on the exterior, his apartment is nothing to look at. The front door has a dirty, broken screen. It is "damp" and lit by only a "single light bulb" (Naylor, *The Women* 147). It is also infested with

roaches. Yet, Lorraine notes, "this is the only place [where she found] some peace" (*The Women* 165). And we are told "Ben's face lit up the walls of the dingy basement," indicating the possibility that a masculine presence can transform a home space (*The Women* 149). Ben's use of his apartment offers a site of nurture and dialogue for Lorraine, just as Mattie's apartment does for Etta and Ciel. Ben offers Lorraine tea and the comfort of companionship, and we can infer from her later description to her lover—the present tense exclamation, "We talk, Theresa—we really, really talk"— that this companionship is recurring (*The Women* 160). On the other hand, Ben's apartment can also be read as the exteriorization of his hidden guilt that he failed to act on behalf of his daughter after realizing that she had been molested. Thus, the brokenness of the screen and dim lighting can also symbolize his rotting sense of self or an incomplete self-forgiveness; the scrambling roaches, an analogy to his personal demons. However, the explicit foil between Ben's relationship to his estranged daughter and his relationship to Lorraine sheds light on a third possible reading. In spite of its slovenly conditions, Ben's apartment also becomes a space of healing by serving as a space of confession and communion.

The novel seems to make the argument that male domesticity might permit less permissible subjects the freedom to reveal themselves as well as help us to recode familiar abject spaces. We see this through Ben's acceptance of Lorraine as well as through his interaction with the character Eugene. Negatively characterized elsewhere in the novel, Eugene is just slightly redeemed in the scene with Ben just before his daughter's funeral. At the beginning of the "Lucelia Louise Turner" chapter, before Ciel and Eugene's relationship is fully portrayed, Eugene discloses some measure of emotion over his daughter's accidental death. While his dialogue is clearly laced with a condemnatory sexism, it is also framed by the conflict between Eugene's sense of obligation and a constrained version of masculinity:

Yeah, well, damn, I took it bad. It was my kid, too, ya know.   But Mattie, that fat,

black bitch, just standin' in the hospital hall sayin' to me—to me, now, 'Whatcha

want?' Like I was a fuckin' germ or something. Man I just turned and left. You

gotta be treated with respect, ya know?...I should be there today with my woman in

the limo and all, sittin' up there, doin' it right. But how you gonna be a man with

them ball-busters tellin' everybody it was my fault? (*The Women* 90)

Eugene, like other men in the book, bears the stigma of leading on and abandoning the black

woman. He does not stand up to the pressure of his commitment, and thus, fulfills the curse of

familiar dissolution implied in Daniel Moynihan's famed report.[93] On the day of the funeral, Eugene

comes across Ben, sitting at a familiar post: on top of a trash can along the wall where he finishes his

breakfast. That Eugene hurries over upon seeing Ben indicates both his hesitation to confront the

funeral and his relief at the presence of the well-known, masculine figure. True enough, their

exchange is marked by a depressed performance of how exactly "a man's gotta be a man," but rather

than condemn Eugene further, Ben offers him a dialogue of commiseration (*The Women* 90). Rather

than shut him down, a space is created for Eugene's return; and, in fact, it's apparent that this is not

the first time he and Ben have talked in such a way. The men's mutual recognition allows them both

to be vulnerable about their feelings toward the protocol for mourning, as well as toward the

pressures of masculinity. This suggests that some form of male community does exist within the

confines of Brewster Place, and along the very wall which seems to constrict the women. I am

further suggesting that the irony of Ben being identified with the most excluded characters and

spaces and serving as the novel's scapegoat through his inadvertent murder builds into the plot a

moralistic feature of this male domesticity. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, invisibility is marked by an

almost theological inversion of abject space – the alley can, for example, symbolizes both altar and

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[93] See *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action (1965).*

cross, not because of its gendering but because of its function. It is the place of expiation for

Eugene and Ben. So although the men are relegated to the margins in the plot, the physical spaces

they occupy suggest a psychic centrality to the book.

Naylor gives Ben ownership of a trash can, not as a symbol of his trashiness, but as the

fixture from which he records (albeit drunkenly) the comings and goings of the neighborhood.

Phenomenologically, what looks like garbage to some could also be read as the site of the ancestor

who retains knowledge for the community. How the shifts in Brewster's demographics have

occurred, how residents approach their homes, and even how to "build a good trash fire…to keep

warm" are all examples of practical wisdom that Ben absent-mindedly retains (*The Women* 89). This

is not an attempt to glorify the character's alcoholism or his dangerous passivity, but to suggest that

perhaps there is nuance to the spaces old poor men inhabit, huddled around winter fires or

slouching on broken stoops. Rather than read this space and male presence there as the effect of

expulsion from the home where 'street life' is exalted, we might also read them as an intentional

counter-space to conventional homespace in which a man is expected to assume the established

roles of husband, father, or elder. Ben's post on the trash can at the very least offers male characters

the option of accepting *or* rejecting these forms of traditional domesticity and yet still maintaining a

domestic concern.

Other abject spaces in the novel that ask for alternative interpretations are the drug-riddled

park and Cora Lee's apartment bathroom. When Cora complains to Kiswana that the park is full of

drug addicts and, thus, threatening to her children, Kiswana counters, "…there's a lot of good things

that go on in the park too" (*The Women* 119). Conventional readings have seen the park as a space in

which blackness is affirmed through the transposition of Western language codes. Per Peter

Erickson, the park allows for race integration and promotes language mastery as a vehicle for

transformation.[94] There is a sociological aspect to this space as well. Under the auspices of the

1980s War on Drugs, parks near public housing projects became doubly penalized locations for

crimes like drug dealing and marijuana possession. These policies target young black men on an

incredibly imbalanced scale, thus, we can read into the park space in *Women of Brewster* the subtexts of

surveillance and criminalization. This makes the character Abshu, who receives little textual space in

the novel, that much more important. If we read the park as an extension of the community center

where Abshu presides, the space of the park, typically read as containing the possibility of class

exchange between two women, is also heavily weighted with a masculine presence. From the later

novel, *The Men of Brewster Place,* we know that Abshu serves as a mentor for Cora Lee's son, Sammy,

and is the one responsible for his appropriation and street usage of Shakespearean syntax.

Therefore, though it is situated within a female's chapter, looking at this space past its sociological

abjection reveals the invisible presence of a paternal force influential on the formation of the young

men in the novel, and one attempting to de-escalate potential police intervention. But the park also

frees the black man to be an artist, a playwright in the case of Abshu, and a budding poet, in the case

of Sammy.[95]

The space of the family bathroom represents a third site that invites an interpretation that

inverts the abject while reinstating the potential for male empowerment, avoidance of the penal

system, and artistry. Upon leaving the production in the park, Cora reflects on her perhaps

inappropriate beating of Sammy for writing poetry on the bathroom walls at home (*The Women* 127).

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[94] See, for example, Peter Erickson's article, "Shakespeare's Naylor, Naylor's Shakespeare: Shakespearean Allu-sion as Appropriation in Gloria Naylor's Quartet." Literary Influence and African- American Writers. Ed. Tracy Mishkin. New York: Garland, 1996. 325-57.
[95] Though Abshu's adaptation of *Midsummer Night's Dream* is an afrocentric version, i.e., raced, the injection of another literary or imaginative text invokes Abshu's subjectivity as a creator. I am relying on the warrant here that to create is to exhibit power as a subject as well as some universals of artistry, e.g., the trained eye, "an ear" for language, etc.

Albeit only a one-line mention, it is clear that young Sammy relates differently than his mother to the architecture of the bathroom. From a gendered perspective, the bathroom could be viewed as feminine space for the dispensing of motherly duties and self-care. Sammy's infraction is a disruption to the maintenance of the home's cleanliness, but the fact that he is writing poetry and not just scribbling, injects a textual pause. This space becomes more than a domestic domain, more than a site for waste. Sammy literally inserts aesthetics into the bathroom and provides the basis for a poetics of, well, the toilet. Bachelard does not theorize this space in his treatise, but it must be acknowledged that for many the bathroom represents a private getaway; a refuge from family duties; a space for reading, writing, and dreaming; a biological exodus and a potentially sacrosanct commune; use of "the toilet" is often the excuse to escape there.

One could say that the lack of discussion of the men's use of these under-read spaces (the trash, the park, and the bathroom wall) underscores a similar textual rejection of the voices of men at all. Michael Awkward cites Elaine Showalter's essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" in which she revises Edward Said to assert that women's texts must think through both their female *and* male predecessors. Awkward does so to argue that *Women of Brewster Place* signifies on Jean Toomer's *Cane* and thus forms a unity of narrative disruption of the Western canon with the male author. These essays help us think through the "holes in discourse" where the silences of muted groups are revealed (Showalter 193). To be sure, Showalter is clearing space for women writers and women's criticism, but to think about how Western culture has informed traditions of writing is to think about how writing back to this tradition necessarily creates an efflux of voices in competition. A critical phenomenological perspective of *The Women in Brewster Place* equalizes the perception of male and female presence because it acknowledges that both sexes are in the room. Men occupy bodied spaces in the novel but are consigned to the placelessness of shadows. Take, for example, the culminating section of the novel, "The Block Party," when men charm and dance with focal

characters and work together to protect equipment from the rain. As Cora becomes fascinated by the idea of Lorraine and Ben's blood on the wall, it is a man who carries her previously missing daughter to shelter from the storm (*The Women* 185). While the women commence what Montgomery calls a new world order apocalypse, "All of *the men and children* [stand] huddled in the doorways" (*The Women* 185). Given that these are the men that Brewster women "badgered, worshiped, and shared" and that at least some of them have participated in Brewster's emerging housing justice campaign (*The Women* 5), it seems likely that at least one of them would have also had a hand in tearing bricks from the wall. However, the tearing down of the wall is woman's work since it occurs within Mattie's dream. Narratively, in the last novel, men actually attempt to save the wall by protesting Brewster's gentrification. Naylor's positioning of them in the first novel vis-à-vis the wall takes the form of suspended or fixed action, invisible, though her choice to leave them with the children could be read as a child caring role and thus, a subtle counterargument to Eugene's stereotypical neglect.

Montgomery writes, "By sublimating the block party in Mattie's dream-nightmare, Naylor forestalls the End of the World" (51). [96] If reading this trilogy as an apocalyptic argument about the social reality of the eighties and nineties, then the real threat is clear. While Reagonomics enabled a jump in income for blacks who made it into the upper middle class, the number of poor black children under eighteen in female-headed families rose to 3.3 million in 1982, and by 1984, more than half of all black children under the age of eighteen lived in poverty, a vast number in housing projects (Taylor 108). These years saw the numbers of black on black crime and black youth arrests shoot up, accounting for more than half of the nation's arrests in 1984 (Taylor 114). The time period also represents a crisis point in housing history. Twenty years after *Dorothy Gautreaux v.*

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[96] Eva Miklovody writes, "being black in a racist society is in itself an apocalyptic experience" (305). She defines apocalypse as *"*sense of a state of crisis and chaos, both in a physical and moral sense, which can best define the temporal reality of a given socio-historical situation" (300).

Chicago Housing Authority had exposed the local and federal practice of segregating public housing

residents by design, only a small percentage of high rise residents had been able to take advantage of

Section 8 leases in the more integrated suburbs,[97] and others didn't want to. According to Alex

Polikoff, first chair of the famous case, "the ghettos were experiencing great increases in their

populations of young blacks with no education beyond high school….The result was to strand ever

growing numbers of unemployed, increasingly employable, young blacks in [the] job poor, inner-

city" (341). Moreover, an expanding black middle class' access to more expensive housing

construction spurred black flight from inner city centers just as it had for the white middle class in

the 1960s and 70s (Farley and Frey 30).

Meanwhile, media presentations of black men became synonymous with "the ominous

criminal predator" so that in 1987, "the public generally associated violent street *crime* with *Blacks,"*

even though the decade saw a jump in all adult crime and *largely concentrated within urban areas* (Hawkins

cited in Welch 277). The War on Drugs' disproportionate directing the access to crack (the cheaper

and inexpensive form of cocaine) to poor black neighborhoods, and then penalizing it, played a huge

part in this. Consequently, the pendulum on the black cultural metronome swung irregularly

between images of black boys as gang banging crack dealers and images of black men as super stars,

a là Jackson and Jordan and other prosperous baby boomers. Indeed, the cover of the August 1987

issue of *Ebony* magazine is a powerful illustration: on it, a black power couple in conservative navy

suits marches confidently but woodenly into the foreground, the urban setting a blur behind them.

The caption reads, "The New Black Middle Class: Who's In It and Who's Not." So while Polikoff

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[97] To secure a lease, not only do residents have to pass credit and criminal background checks and be able to afford the rent, they also have to have transportation to and within the suburbs, in addition to possibly facing hostility from neighbors. In fact, "As of 1998, only 7, 100 of families of the 40,000 Section 8 applicants had moved from Chicago's ghettoized public housing to suburban housing" (Keating). The numbers were undoubtedly less in 1986-88.

judged *Gautreaux* a success and later supported Chicago's *Plan for Transformation* (281), clearly, economic, policy, and cultural shifts during this time had helped to reify a widening gap between perceived good black spaces and bad black spaces, deepening the fractures within what was assumed to be a monolithic black community before the eighties.

The End of the World for Naylor then signifies an end to the black collective, which previously though not exclusively had been guaranteed by the *perception* of a stable geography. It is not until her second novel *Linden Hills,* that the warrants behind this assumption become clear. In *Linden Hills*, the middle child of her trilogy, the fictionalization of the architecture and geography of a black community externalizes the pressure between social class and social shifts, and by doing so, brings into view the slipperiness of the paired constructs of race and class in the first place. *Linden Hills* is the story of the disintegrating domestic and social relations between residents in a wealthy "black" suburb. Told through several narratives that unfold over the six days before Christmas, the novel has been called a kind of "de-creation myth" about the perils of being overambitious.[98] Naylor analogizes this suburban space to Dante's Inferno to indicate that there can only be a deeper and deeper hell for those in the black middle class who sacrifice community and their humanity for the empty promise of success. Although this novel also heavily focuses on the struggles of its women, men in this text occupy a different form of invisibility than in *The Women of Brewster Place*. The protagonist is a male—a Dantean character named Willie who serves as the novel's poet and its conscience—and, therefore, we cannot say that men, though represented by hyper-visible stereotypes, are textually placeless as they are in *Women of Brewster*. Rather, the primary mode of invisibility in *Linden Hills* imitates the invisibility trope of *Invisible Man*: it serves as a providential critical position for the protagonist—a liminality that allows him a space for critique not completely dependent on his social identity.

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[98] Miklovody, 305.

However, just as in criticism of *The Women of Brewster Place*, criticism of *Linden Hills* reifies

notions of raced and gendered space. Jill L. Matus in "Reading in Black and White: Space and Race

in *Linden Hills*" states, "Linden Hills is *the* black space par excellence" and accordingly depicts a

wealthy, secluded black middle class, independent of the intrusion of white characters but not

independent of the intrusion of so called "white" values (140). Though Matus draws attention to

how Naylor troubles the essentialist notions of "black" and "white" through class distinctions, he

also naturalizes the idea that a collective is the ultimate ideal of black space and that its lack of

cohesion is only due to the degree to which white culture has been rejected. Notably, Matus does

treat the geography of Linden Hills in spatial terms; however, like later critics, he mentions but

accords little attention to the actual descriptions of the built environment in the novel. Maxine

Montgomery goes further in her discussion of housing, and in particular, the "house-home

dichotomy," but she is mainly concerned with showing how the construct of the home space

illuminates possibilities of resistance for the novel's women (24). She argues that if it weren't for the

alignment of Willie and Willa—the deliberate play on names, their parallel journeys to the depths of

Linden Hills—the feminine would have little room in an otherwise masculine space (24).[99] Where I

would depart from these critics is in giving attention to the architecture in the novel and the

construction of the built environment in order to argue that spatial logic has a greater effect on the

protagonist's growing consciousness as opposed to race or gender. It is Willie's movement through

different housing environments that enables him to maintain a critical perspective towards the lure

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[99] In this sense, Montgomery is right. The impotence of black male leadership in *Linden Hills* does not usher in a collective of women to lead as it does in *The Women of Brewster Place*. The voices of Grandma Tilson and Lauren Dumont's grandmother, Roberta, are the only two that provide any oppositional reasoning, and their voices are suppressed by death and the portals of memory. Even Willa, Luther Nedeed's wife, who achieves a measure of self-consciousness through the discovery of her female predecessors, ends up martyred in the arms of her husband.

of wealth and power, and it is this mobility that enables him to question the notions of blackness

and black community (or their problems, as it were).

The architecture of Linden Hills and its surrounding neighborhoods externalizes the

pressure between social classes, and by doing so brings into Willie's view the slipperiness of the

constructs of race and community. From the beginning, Luther Nedeed's vision of space

corresponds to a physical/material/architectural world: "He walked through Linden Hills as it

> would be—along smooth curved roads, up long sloping lawns and manicured meridians. He
>
> stood under the door fronts of imitation Swiss chalets, British Tudors, and Georgian town
>
> houses, flanked by arbors choked with morning glories, wisteria, and honeysuckle.
>
> Driveways were lined with mimosas, and gazebos sat in the shadow of elms and tulip oaks
>
> while lavender and marigolds outlined the bases of marble fountains and aviaries…" (*Linden*
>
> *Hills* 10)

This architectural description places the setting within a Euro-western landscape tradition and is one

of the ways in which the novel alludes to the black middle class' emulation of the dominant society.

The original Luther Nedeed intends this parallel to be "a beautiful, black wad of spit right in the

white eye of America" (*Linden Hills* 9); however, his namesake ends up mourning the presumption

that racial pride can be sustained if subordinated to the pursuit of material things. Therefore,

because within the novel's argument, material achievements and objects are ultimately associated

with whiteness, housing is one of the modes through which Naylor "undermine[s] the absolute

'blackness' of Linden Hills" (Matus 144). Willie learns through close up perception and comparison

that the stock Linden Hills residents place in their homes is unable to secure their desired identities,

and, in fact undoes those identities once they are interrogated. When Willie visits his best friend

Lester's house, he is made uncomfortable by the delicacy of their furniture and Lester's family's

concern with social climbing. They have only attained housing on First Crescent Drive because of

the formidable Grandma Tilson's refusal to accept a Nedeed lease. Lester's mother's preoccupation with the color green and Lester's decorating with black nationalist posters show two conflicting ideologies of what it means to be a successful black: either through emulation of the supposed values of capitalism (associated with white people) or through a total rejection and separation from those values (epitomized by allusions to Malcolm X and Garvey). All of the Tilsons fall short of internalizing these ideologies in more than a superficial manner. Race for them is an elusive concept translatable only through their relationships to things.

When Lester's use of "blackness" causes him to disparage his sister and to equate being black with the badge of living poorly, Willie schools him on what having it hard really means and gives him a more grounded definition of "home." "When we came out here on Wayne Avenue and had four rooms and a tree in front of our building, we thought that was moving up in the world," he tells a chagrined Lester (*Linden Hills* 58). He further predicts, "I don't think you'd trade this big bedroom for the third of a studio couch I had…[Linden Hills] is your *home*" (58). In short, Willie argues that the things you have in your home do not make you black or white, but they do make up your world. Hence, his admiration of the couple Norman and Ruth who only own three pieces of furniture but have created a home through the care they take with them and each other. Later, Willie is comforted by "the books, the poster, the television" in Lester's room that keep "the world he understood…intact" (*Linden Hills* 61). This orientation to objects is more in line with Heidegger's phenomenological perspective of dwelling, which he bases on man's ability to maintain a notion of safeguarding the self in relationship to things.[100] In short, Willie's experience in different

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[100] Dwelling "is a staying with things," Heidegger argues (353), that is, a co-existence with objects that both reminds us who we are but also what those things are in relationship to us.

home environments allows him to see past the constructed attachment of specific raced, gendered, and sexed identities to homespace. Home is where you are able to create a space for yourself.

This phenomenological understanding of space does not prevent Willie from perceiving the inequities that may be encoded into the architecture of housing through the overlay of racial and cultural ideas, myths, and stereotypes. It becomes obvious through his discomfort in Xavier Donnell's house that space does work phenomenologically to support assumptions of superiority. When Xavier, the conflicted corporate climber, introduces Willie and Lester to his work associate, Maxwell, a phenomenological description of the space reveals a class difference at work in addition to a Jim Crow logic: Maxwell makes the trite platitude that "poverty leads to industry" and "Willie [has] the strange feeling that [Maxwell's] words weren't really meant to reach across the kitchen towards them. His eyes seemed to stop at the green tiles on the floor in front of their feet. Why, it was the same feeling that you got talking to some white people. He suddenly felt very invisible to this tall, impeccable man" (*Linden Hills* 113). From a class perspective, Willie and Maxwell are on opposite sides of the cultural spectrum of imagery confining black men, Mawell the light-skinned jet setter, Willie the dark-skinned laborer prone to criminalization. The space has also been classed through the carpeting Willie's feet are too dirty to cross (*Linden Hills* 116). But in the exchange with Maxwell, race overlaps with class and creates a plantation hierarchy, in which one shade of blackness trumps another and compounds Willie's position within the dominant society, producing an effect of projected placelessness and *intra-racial* invisibility. However, Willie does not accept this social invisibility as erasure. He speaks back to Maxwell "to hear his own voice to prove that he was in the kitchen" (*Linden Hills* 113). By speaking out in spite of the feeling of being invisible, Willie exercises invisibility as a spatial positionality that turns his outsider status into a subjectivity to be listened to.

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Furthermore, this position, through inserting a subjective relationship to what is around him, allows us to parse out when notions of collectivity can be discursively oppressive. At the end of the passage, the men debate a *Penthouse* centerfold that features a black woman enchained. While Lester repeats a racist view that puts down the black collective ("black people still belong in the jungle"), Maxwell parodies the equally problematic view that the key to the black collective's success is to subject the white man to a similar enslavement (*Linden Hills* 115). Even beyond that, Willie suspects that another type of collectivity is being implied:

> And suddenly he wanted to be invisible to this man again; it had felt much more
> comfortable. But still something had happened in the last five minutes that seemed
> to bring the four of them together over more than a magazine…*As Willie climbed back
> up the narrow basement steps*, it came to him why that photograph had troubled him, and
> it was more than just the heavy, iron chains. With her dark face, full lips, and high
> cheekbones, that woman was a dead ringer for his baby sister. (116, emphasis mine)

Part of what brings the men together in this moment, and which Willie is resisting, is not only their objectification of the black woman's body as metonymy for the race but an unspoken sexualization of her as well. The stereotypical masculine gaze with its oppressive subtexts lurks, and Willie is the only one to think of the woman in the picture as a person, as connoting a more intimate relation than black nationhood or voyeurism. This discovery of personal family semblance comes while Willie is moving through the house. What associations from the environment lead to this discovery would only be conjecture, but it can be said that he gains this sensitivity to women's vulnerability to sexual oppression in the wake of spatial distance from the others.

Willie signifies on the invisible narrator as an invisible man by serving as the eyes and conscience of the novel and by showing us an alternative to the view that Linden Hills is a "[stage]

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primarily for male protagonists to resolve dilemmas associated with their ability to assume responsibilities to race, culture, and family" (Dixon 82). Masculine space in the novel is far from ideal. As in *Invisible Man,* black male leadership roles in *Linden Hills* are exposed as hollow containers for self-interest and even self-hatred. Willie's 'invisible' position as a day laborer enables him to discover that behind the motivation of Luther Nedeed's community building is a distorted race consciousness rooted in an 'anti-white' patriarchy. His overhearing of Nedeed's role in the potential housing projects and his witnessing of Lauren Dumont's death reveals that Nedeed's leadership – one based on a classist self-empowerment model—manipulates the rhetoric of race to advance capitalist aims. Therefore, Linden Hills can only offer the external appearance of a black community. This is confirmed by Willie's disappointment with Braithwaite, the self-appointed historian of Linden Hills. Rather than Braithwaite fulfilling the role of the ancestor or even maintaining the significance of the African American oral tradition (the function of which is to pass on knowledge for community prosperity), Braithwaite sits on his knowledge, canonizing it purely for his own recognition and interest. The pressure to bear the responsibility of community building constricts the men in this novel, notably the silence imposed on the gay lovers, David and Winston. However, the impotence of black male leadership in the novel does not usher in a collective of women to lead as it does in *The Women of Brewster Place.* Given that men and women are consigned to loveless, empty lives in exchange for capitalist gain, it is clear the atmosphere in *Linden Hills* is repressive to both sexes. Reading space in Naylor's fiction for "resolved" racial or masculine dilemmas seems to make for a future that is ultimately bleak.

Willie's invisibility allows him a critical view of a race politics built around a capitalist ideology. This type of racial politics posits community advancement for the purposes of acquiring material wealth because it sees economic attainment as the equivalence of racial equality. Willie's invisibility though is premised on his not belonging to the novel's construction of black community.

His orientation to what is around him is that of "the stranger."[101] He is not so much a newcomer to

the urban as a newcomer to black middle class suburbs in the 1980s. Willie's upbringing in the

lower economic setting of Putney Wayne differentiates him from the rest of Linden Hills' residents

and gives him the outsider status. On the other hand, because of his racial identification as a black

man and his assumption that this "inside" affiliation should mean something, the two different

statuses come into conflict. The novel shows him, along with Ruth and Norman, as lonely in this

ability to see this conflict because of a different relation to space. Willie sees, for example, that an

alternative history of Linden Hills might have been written simply by looking through a different

window at Braithwaite's house. He reflects, "There was no sign of life in or around [Nedeed's

house]…Closing the drape, [he] wondered if Braithwaite would have gotten a much different picture

all these years by keeping his desk up against this window" (*Linden Hills* 266).[102] The

phenomenology of invisibility permits Willie to see that the environment *can* be deterministic if one

falls for a hegemonic production of race, gender, and class ideology. However, through his ability to

remain removed from the corrupting influences of *Linden Hills,* Naylor shows that this is not the

only fate possible.

At the end of the novel, Willie ends up not wanting any part of the black people in Linden

Hills, yet he returns to his old neighborhood to contemplate a new future, one within a racial

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[101] In *The Metropolis and the Mental Life,* Simmel theorizes that the urban experience creates a new type of man, who lives both inside and outside of a spatial group (namely, city dwellers) (2). Farah Jasmine Griffin extends this to the African American migration experience specifically, arguing that blacks as newcomers to the urban North were bound by the commonality of the slavery experience as well as segregation de jure.
[102] The first part of Sara Ahmed's book is dedicated to revising Husserl's position at/positioning of from his desk. She wants to think through those objects that are foreclosed from view based on the orientation of one's body as well as those objects that come into view through a queer positioning. The application here if translated to race and community suggests that by Braithwaite's desk, and therefore his point of observation, being faced towards Linden Hills and not Luther Nedeed, he could only see the object (the black housing community) from its function as a historical production.

framework and yet independent of racialized space: "Wake up man. This is the twentieth century, and that's Putney Wayne outside your window. You're free, black, and twenty. And that's the way you're gonna stay. Free to move anywhere in this neighborhood, or in this world that your pocket change allows you. Free to stay black as you are today unless you decide to fill your bathtub with Chlorox. The only thing that's gonna change is your age" (*Linden Hills* 273). The presumed spatial boundaries of class, i.e., where Willie lives, suddenly open up; and in spite of a belief in the ideal of black community and even race leadership, Naylor suggests through free and indirect discourse that one's adherence to race and class may have a self-willed expiration. Realizing this presents Willie with a freedom most of the other men in Naylor's novels never achieve. Montgomery reads this freedom at the end of the novel through a gendered lens: "[Willie] and Lester then scale the fence circumscribing Linden Hills, hand-in-hand, in a symbolic gesture of male bonding that brings to mind the ending of [*Women of Brewster Place*] with its representation of an exclusively female group gathered in order to dismantle the brick wall" (*Linden Hills* 24). The two men's scaling of the fence alludes to the open future that is still available to them. However, Willie and Lester's hopping the fence recalls not only the women of Brewster Place, but the men of Brewster Place as well. The lower class Willie, by imagining the flexibility of his geographic (and social) fixity, symbolizes hope for Naylor's apocalypse.

Given the promising conclusion of Linden Hills, the last book in Naylor's trilogy, *The Men of Brewster Place,* narrowly rises to the occasion as a finale. Told through ten chapters with first person male narrators, the book brings back six minor characters from the original novel and introduces two new. But the old characters do little more than retell events to rationalize their earlier behaviors and frustrations. The new characters, subordinate to the setting in which Naylor sets them (a Barbershop) simply rehearse well-worn ideas of how hard it is to be a man. The book starts with an apologia from a "resurrected" Ben about the integral place of men in the black home and

community, which is an obvious response to criticism Naylor received about the imbalanced representation of men in *The Women of Brewster Place*. For every woman "leaning over them windowsills, calling for somebody to fetch a dollar's worth of cheese or a loaf of bread from the store, it was most likely a He who got up from the stop or from a game of dominoes to rattle around in his pocket," Ben says (*The Men* 3). He later attests, "*There's nothing wrong with [a man's] mouth, he can speak for himself*" (*The Men* 68). The entire book seems to serve as a space clearing gesture for men's speech, since there is not the same attention to narrative and scene as in the first book, but rather long sweeps of monologue. Naylor gives a stage to the black man's voice similar to the book's rhetorical backdrop, the 1995 Million Man March. But rather than fulfill the open future that Willie's choice prophesies, the culmination of *The Men of Brewster Place* falls flat. Relying on a string of stock representations, Naylor's final book leaves us with an imbalanced spatial and masculine imaginary and, ultimately, with invisibility's blues.

The architecture of Brewster Place itself plays less of a primary role in the last book, although the novel does dramatize the cultural and political shifts of the nineties, which touched everything from music to legislation but significantly affected black men's relationship to housing. For many, the 1990s seemed culturally and politically hopeful. Hip-hop had exploded, extending a cultural dominance over the airwaves to mostly black males from underprivileged settings. By 1993, the number of black public officials had increased nationwide. In spite of these strides, black men did not gain more voice over their housing conditions. In 1996, a Republican-led Congress and President Bill Clinton agreed to legislation that would change the landscape of America, announcing the Hope VI bill that supported the demolition of 57,000 public housing units across the U.S and creating a Section 8 voucher crisis. This plan has since displaced hundreds of thousands of women and children—and tangentially, whether on the lease or not, their male relatives. In the world of the second novel, Brewster Place is also a low income development marked for demolition. Naylor

writes, "[It] was slated to be condemned and the whole area rebuilt as middle-income housing—condos as a matter of fact" (*The Men* 135). While not an explicit allusion to one of the strategies of Hope VI, the novel underscores the idealism attached to that particular rhetoric; this subtext creates the central conflict of the book and subtly alludes to the adjective "distressed" in HUD legislation, which policymakers used to deem housing units unworthy of organizing to save.

Descriptions of Brewster Place in the *The Men of Brewster Place* figuratively and literally signify on the personification of Brewster Place in *The Women*, although not to the same effect. The following is a passage that appears in the original text on page 191 and that is repeated later, epigraph-like, in the sequel:

> Brewster Place watched its last generation of children torn away from it by court orders and eviction notices, and it had become too tired and sick to help them. Those who had spawned Brewster Place, countless twilights ago, now mandated that it was to be condemned. With no heat or electricity, the water pipes froze in the winter, and arthritic cold would not leave the buildings until well into the Spring. Hallways were blind holes, and plaster crumbled into snaggled gaps. Vermin bred in uncollected garbage and spread through the walls. Brewster had given what it could—all it could—to its "Afric" children, and there was just no more. So it had to watch as they packed up the remnants of their dreams and left. (*The Men* 171)

Brewster Place is characterized as a helpless mother who has lost the battle against the physical deterioration of the 'benign neglect' epitomizing so many of such spaces. But we don't have the rich attention to its nooks and crannies in this novel or the men signifying alternative uses for the abject. In the bookend, Brewster Place is elegized as if its disappearance is inevitable and its function as

space for dwelling is subordinated to focus on the potential function of the men themselves in the community.

The preservation of community is still a key exigence for Naylor in *The Men of Brewster Place,* albeit hinged on the premise of a masculine imaginary that seems unsure of itself. The novel attempts to imitate the theme and symbolization of the Million Man March, but without its spatial visualization, lacks the catharsis to actually induct a new vision for male community formation. The Million Man March was meant to spark a national conversation about the state of black men in America and symbolize black men's acceptance of responsibility for the conditions of their neighborhoods and homes. Coming in the wake of the cultural takeover of gangsta rap and violent, ghetto films in the nineties, Farakkhan called for men to prove their commitment to turning their communities around by traveling to Washington, DC, and pledging to be active in the steps of atonement. Finally, the March added to the cultural imaginary of the moment by visually presenting a million faces of black collectivity, suggesting that black men could not only be seen as criminals and savages in the umbra of so many different figurations of black masculinity. Naylor attempts this same effect but fails, partly because the book does not extend the image of black collectivity outside of conventional understandings of it and partly because the book's structure does not allow an enfolding of the unconventional or transgressive masculinities it takes the risk to include.

In an allusion to the Million Man March, the character Abshu muses, "If he had brought five thousand to City Hall instead of fifty….If a million men had descended on that building, would it have made a difference? Could he have saved this street? And the next one over…and over…? He thinks not" (*The Men* 172). In another scene after the neighborhood vagrant has cut his own throat, the third person plural narrator of the Barbershop chapter laments, "If for all the times we had called him brother, if we had really meant it, somehow Greasy should be alive" (*The Men* 167). The

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novel ends with the idea that "One tired warrior [was] the best that Brewster Place has to offer the world. But one man standing is all that's needed—one manchild for the millennium" (*The Men* 173). What these quotes suggest is that fifteen years later and there are still not enough men present for community work in Naylor's imaginary, and unlike women's community, which is presumed at the invocation of "sister," men don't really mean what they say. Furthermore, the repetition of "if" and use of the verb "should" instead of "would" suggest uncertainty or ambiguity about the effectiveness of men's collectivity, even though the final argument of the book is that men, and in particular *race men*, are what we need. Naylor's framing of black community in these instances falls back on historic articulations of black community that base collectivity on the progress and output of numbers and deemphasize the variance in those numbers in favor of the singularity or unity of a collective voice, usually framed behind a race leader. This rhetoric ironically also calls into question the sincerity or authenticity of black male collectivity even while insisting on the imperative of its action.

Therefore, in *The Men of Brewster Place,* Naylor's representation of black collectivity is constrained by her representation of black men—not so much by how the white gaze objectifies black men (as faced by the Million Man March) but by how the black gaze objectifies black men, or rather, from a phenomenological perspective, needs for them to "appear." Despite a point to portray at least two characters that don't fit within the traditional construct of black masculinity (that of heterosexuality and either aspiring to or running from race/family leadership), most of Naylor's characters recycle stock images: the ineffectual father, the prodigal son, the spiritually bankrupt preacher, the activist-intellectual, and the seeming last guard of the community, owner of the black barbershop. Critics don't even pay attention to the burgeoning sexual liberation Eugene achieves within a trans/queer community space, dismissing it as "at odds with a novel purportedly inspired…by the staging of the Million Man March" (Lewis 60). Therefore, Eugene's self-

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martyrdom casts him outside of the black family construct and only serves to further the affective

schema of atonement through his expression of remorse about choosing his sexuality over his

children. Lindon Lewis' criticism of Naylor's version of masculinity is hence accurate but also

revealing that criticism of her fiction seems to be governed by the same external pressures as the

narratives. Lewis' critique is that Naylor's novel neglects an in-depth concern with the signifiers of

black male discourse and therefore is not very helpful in unpacking black masculinity (65-66). He

argues,

> The subject of masculinity explored in this novel cries out for a fresh and alternative
>
> genealogy that is more appropriate to black men's lives at the close of twentieth-
>
> century America, the period in which this novel is set…these men demonstrate little
>
> anger at the system in which they live out their existences. Their lived experiences
>
> seem to exhaust themselves within the confines of Brewster Place. They seem
>
> generally unconcerned with the political economy of their environment, and offer
>
> very little reflection on the society in which they live. Both issues of rage and race
>
> are essentially muted in this novel. (66)

Lewis essentially expresses disappointment in Naylor's lack of imagination, implying by the

statement the men only "*seem* to exhaust themselves within the confines of Brewster Place" that

perhaps there were other options or outcomes to expect from the character. Earlier in his essay,

Lewis also laments that Naylor did not include more conventional markers of black masculinity:

"there is no mention of national sports of any kind, which is highly unusual in [black

barbershops]…This is a place where masculinity is measured by the yarn, and 'trash talking' is the

currency of masculine discourse" (65). That Lewis expects Naylor to include athletics, "folklore,"

"race and rage" in a novel about black men reflects the conventions of the discourse in which both

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he and Naylor are writing. In addition to affirming that black men desire to be fathers, heads of households, pro-male, and pro-black, the understanding of black masculinity prevalent in African American letters also ties these markers to a rational view of public space.

From a rational perspective, public spaces such as the Barbershop or the church or the Washington Mall are intended to provide a forum in which guidelines for acceptable speech and already exist. They are historical locations attached to cultural and moral imperatives, rules about "what should" take place there. In an abstract sense, the "black community" functions as a rhetorical space in which members take part and move about freely within as long as they abide by longstanding discursive rules mostly having to do with affirming some version of black nationalism as well as positive forms of community-making such as music, family reunions, or political organizing. Stephen Best traces this rationalist framework back to black people's investment in Enlightenment ideals and the codes of propriety that accompanied access to democratic freedom (Standard English, etc.). Best argues that this paradigm involuntarily creates a binary that looks for authorized black "revolutions" and "revolutionaries" to disrupt the "prevailing discursive structure" (120); in other words, there are only certain laws and certain people considered worthy to transgress. So although associated with a controversial figurehead, I believe the Million Man March, for example, succeeded in its affirmation of black masculinity where *The Men of Brewster Place* does not, largely because it followed the formula (borrowed specifically from the Civil Rights Movement) of the rational public sphere. It disrupted the discursive structure of the nineties just long and loud enough to 'represent,' and its representation was notably one of order, positivity, and affirmation of black collectivity. *The Men of Brewster Place*, on the other hand, constrained by the same framework, can't sustain either the black public space or black collectivity ideal because it seems stuck between the rules of how we should read certain men and spaces.

In trying to render Brewster Place and the character of C.C. Baker legible within a rationalist view of space and liberal democracy, Naylor doesn't go far enough in characterizing them sympathetically; consequently, both objects of the text languish as aberrations to black collectivity rather than serving as possible galvanizing forces. As mentioned above, this last novel in Naylor's trilogy doesn't focus on portraying Brewster Place as a homespace outside of its political fate. The depiction more so confirms Brewster Place as a "small community riddled by social dysfunction," ripe for demolition and hard to defend (Lewis 66). Because it is situated within the context of Hope VI, it's not difficult to imagine it following the same path of ruin as other housing projects at the time: devolving into urban poverty traps with hallways and unregulated entry points permitting open air drug and prostitution markets to form. It's not difficult to imagine that the setting in which Naylor's most nefarious character grew up is unreservedly grim. Brewster Place and C.C. Baker reflect crisis points for black collectivity because neither one follows the rules. Brewster Place, like a lot of public or voucher housing in the nineties, could not be easily pointed to as a representation of order and positivity affirming black families. C.C. is not a model of masculinity worthy to imitate.

The problems this setting and this character create for black community formation are ones of synthesis and assimilation. How do we integrate a space or person seemingly beyond the discourse of acceptable representation? Should they simply be swept behind the curtain and their sociological tenor ignored? Lewis believes, "It would have been useful if Naylor had provided the reader with a clearer sense of the kind of social, cultural, and political forces that acted upon C.C.'s environment to cause him to be the person he became and how others in similar circumstances had chosen different exit strategies or at least explored alternatives to the life of crime, hedonism, and despair that C.C. seem to have embraced" (63). I would actually argue that Abshu as C.C.'s foil does present an alternative path: both come from overcrowded, broken homes marked by physical and alcohol abuse; however, clearly Abshu is able to translate his adolescent hardship into more

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productive ends. C.C., on the other hand, is the combination of our collective fears: he is the quintessential hoodlum untouched by the foundations of civil society and a symbol of the worst metonymic picture of what the black community may "look like" to outside eyes. In *The Women of Brewster Place,* he literalizes the refusal of non-heterosexual ideals through his vicious rape of the black lesbian, Lorraine. In *The Men of Brewster Place*, he enacts the destruction of the black family by killing his own brother, a rival gang member, thereby—ironically—killing off another community predator, someone like himself. C.C.'s total lack of morality in an otherwise moral text collapses the meaning we want to make of black masculinity, and moreover, black collectivity. By exhibiting only a blind self-interest, C.C. positions himself outside of the expectations of the ideal black community and threatens its identity, which promotes itself as just, cohesive, and loyal. His is the subjectivity that refuses to stay invisible that we wish we could negate.

If we only look at them as gendered subjects, men like C.C. are misogynist, rapists. If we look at them as raced subjects, they are neither race-leaders nor race-conscious. They are cultureless, godless, and lawless. This is troubling to the ideology of black collectivity that historically, in service of social justice, has operated a vigorous village ethic to protect even those questionable subjects from instances of systemic racism and inequality. How could we, therefore, shift the grounds to offer such subjects theoretical understanding without the sometimes blind cover of sex and race? To stop at the fiction's description of C.C.'s education, for instance, tells us that he has a ninth grade education and fifty-word vocabulary; but this also pegs him as a victim of an unequal education system; and while it does condemn structural racism in K-12 schools, it also leaves him as food for those who justify prison budgets based on black educational attainment. To go by C.C.'s cultural fascinations, which Naylor tells us are influenced by fashion and Blaxploitation films,[103] is to accept

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[103] According to Naylor, C.C. does function in a collective, a gang that is highly influenced by media: "Tight jeans, suede sneakers, and tinted sunglasses imaged nearby proved that they were alive. <u>And if there was life, there</u>

that mass media effects have the last say in identity construction, and I simply want to give the notion of personal agency more credit than that. So say that we considered space as a lens for understanding C.C., that we don't "assume that our 'gender' and 'race' exist *prior* to the scene" (Cunningham 140). It might impose another visual economy outside of the skin, making it more helpful to ask not *where* men like C.C. live, but *how*. What is home for them?

Naylor's bookend texts provide subtle clues. The beats that issue from "their portable cassette players" convey investment in the hip hop of the decade but also signal a desire to "at least be heard" as they saunter the streets and "claim their share of the sidewalks" (*The Men* 124). This could indicate a reliance on sound and objects to participate in public space, a way of asserting oneself and ownership of property; it could also convey a different understanding of private and public spheres. C.C.'s six foot wide alley that children are warned away from could be read as Foucault's heterotopia, and therefore its norms only become legible or visible in opposition to communal ones. What conventions do we uphold that discourage poor young black men from occupying more normative space? What spatialities do they hide that may need to be affirmed? I don't intend these questions as trite or as excuse. I am looking for a space that allows such subjects to dwell and acknowledges their *Dasein*. Who they are as individuals. Only then can they begin to be comprehended as subjects.

The characters of the Brewster Place trilogy indicate that spatial transformation is possible and individual for men usually dismissed as sociological types. While C.C.'s assertion of domesticity is certainly less visible than the others', a critical phenomenology suggests that we try to read his invisibility from multiple directions. Not only can spatial positions lend the distance for reflection and critique, it can also expose where further observation is needed.

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could be dreams of that miracle that would one day propel them into the heaven populated by their gods—Shaft and Superfly" (*The Women of Brewster Place* 161).

This is the blues of Gloria Naylor's men, the phenomenology of invisibility, and the difficulty of singing an intersectional song. Subjects below or hyper-visible on the radar are hard to read fairly within the representational tug of war of race, sex, and class. The pressure of societal constructions often obscures personal identity and a spatial ethos. Urban "characters" and low income areas remain locked in a discursive knot that places them both at the center of African American cultural study and sociology and yet last in line for consideration of self-representation, of spatiality apart from the collective view. The articulation of the problem I am attempting in this chapter is not simply a rejoinder to the community issues stemming from black unemployment, uneven educational opportunities, neighborhood disinvestment, and "black on black crime." Part of the problem of wanting to but not being able to see subjects and spaces associated with the abject might be the reliance on constraining forms of discourse to address them. That is, the rhetorical demands of black scholarship, the pathology of the ghetto, and liberal definitions of collectivity are all invested in a Habermasian public sphere whose composition primarily comes from access to the proper *language*. But invisible men/invisible people may not get opportunities to express literacy, and thus remain unrecognized, even though their spatiality may offer productive alternative constructs of home, collectivity, and identity. As Maurice Wallace states, "it is by an abiding bankruptcy of vision that black male bodies in public spheres go phantasmatically misrecognized" (32-33). This bankruptcy, however, is not only attributable to a white racial hierarchy as Wallace implies. It is attributable to a black racial hierarchy as well, in which a middle class vision of appropriateness reveals an incredible anxiety towards unassimilated black men.

Complicatedly, the tensions inherent to the ideology of liberalism are doubled when it comes to African American community building. Within our liberal democracy, African Americans' claim to representation and recognition before the law has been based on both sameness in terms of

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humanity but difference in terms of claims to rights protection.[104] To secure minority rights for all

black people, African Americans must continually organize into a collective and, essentially, suppress

the divergent individualism that the rest of the American body politic assumes. This suppression is

maintained through the rhetoric of family and nationhood but also internal policing. It sets up a

politics of respectability as well as mythological-proportioned oppositions between, for example,

single mothers and "absent" fathers, the conscious black middle class intellectual versus those

"trying to be white," victims versus thugs.

Naylor fictionalizes this struggle in her trilogy through the metaphor of facelessness. In *The*
Women of Brewster Place, the alcoholic Ben is misrecognized by Lorraine after her rape and hit with a

brick, rendering him the "faceless" scapegoat for the all of the women's oppression in the book. In

Linden Hills, Willie dreams a recurring nightmare that he is faceless, which by echoing the horror of

the smashed in face of Lauren Dumont's corpse, underscores the increasing alienation from the self

that is happening in the black suburb. In *The Men of Brewster Place*, C.C. shoots his brother Hakim in

the face – rendering him uneasily identified. Naylor's iteration of facelessness indicates the inability

of any character to escape the ramifications of a breakdown in community. Her violent and tragic

depictions are meant to disturb and disrupt, as Willie is disturbed, because the implication is that

what is happening in her novels is happening everywhere. Naylor turns the figures of the raped

female body and the dead male body, and the conditions of madness and apathy, into the crucibles

that mark the disintegration of black communal values. Per Kristeva, these specters of blood,

cadavers, grief, and cannibalism represent that which threatens the community's claim to wholeness.

But from a Levinasian perspective, we might also read the erasure of the face as the

possibility of a refusal of responsibility to the Other. This threat and denial is a constant worry in

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[104] See Wendy Brown's *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton University Press, 1995)
for a helpful discussion of the paradoxes of minority rights.

the discourse of African American letters that consequently supposes a heavy emotional toll on its adherents. The fear of the loss of the concept of black responsibility is an affective paradigm that governs both recognition and misrecognition of subjects. Different from critical invisibility in this sense, facelessness can be described as a form of abjection "[that fails] to recognize its kin" (Kristeva 4). The racial imperative of the black community's "We" necessitates a tension at the appearance of the "I" that refuses to cooperate. Subjects like C.C. and spaces like housing projects are the Other that puts the "We" into social, psychological, and historical jeopardy. As victims of larger, structural injustices, these subjects and spaces do not remain sublimated as the abject should do. They take on their own life, assert their own codes, which may or may not fit within the greater collective's memory of itself. Therefore, they signify an incredible self-interest that all humans are guilty of but, to admit to the desire to be unattached to the black collective is a cultural no-no in African American culture. Why? Because it means rejecting the shared history of black struggle and ignoring the privileges of that struggle's victories. It also means the community "We" can never acknowledge that reckless self-interest, or a freeing lack of interest, might be the true ends of liberation.

This crisis comes to the fore in housing issues because here the loyalties of the collective are blatantly split along lines of class and comfort. Home ownership is such a hegemonic idea within American ideology that black renters, particularly renters of subsidized housing, are constantly under duress to be moving closer to the dream and away from suspicion of state dependency or community degeneration. Aberrant subjects and spaces highlight class difference emotionally while obscuring racial difference visually. Mary Patillo confirms this in her ethnography, *Black on the Block*: *The Politics of Race and Class in the City,* pointing to the differential politics that come into play concerning black gentrification which can be coded as both a "racial uplift project" and the intermediary for white growth regimes (301). She argues that the black middle class in mixed

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income communities continue to identify with the poor because of racial discrimination; however, they may also protest or actively work against programs like Section 8 out of fear of diminished property values. In other words, black collectivity may weaken when it comes to housing issues because of the self-interest that arises to protect one's material interests and status. Black people may be the first to call other black people out with the old (racist) saying, 'There goes the neighborhood.'

The Women of Brewster Place, *Linden Hills* and *The Men of Brewster Place* trilogy reflects these ongoing tensions, providing a fictional narrative of their history and bringing them to the point of an uncertain future. Ironically, these novels show that the lynch pin in these tensions is often a man relegated to the shadows whose presence (productive or disruptive) has been sublimated out of more prevalent interest in black female community, black race collectivity, and even symbolic African American male discourse. An examination of Naylor's fiction and its surrounding context, however, exposes stagnation in the interpretations of men in her novels and how homespace is configured due to the influence of African American literary studies' conventions of reading. Male characters and their subjectivity simply remain more or less invisible. I have tried to read this invisibility as a theoretical opening to illustrate the possibilities of reading men as 'spaced' and abjection as productive and affective for thinking through the construct of black responsibility, arguing that a more spatialized focus in our reading of Naylor can help parse when ideals of community-formation become attenuated or oppressive. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, the unlikely character Ben and the less prominent character Abshu exert a powerful influence as community elders through their inhabitation and transformation of spaces, such as garbage cans and drug-riddled parks. They are mentors whose protégés leave signs that African American male community through alternative practices of domesticity is not as invisible as it seems, if we look for it to take different forms before categorizing it as street culture. In *Linden Hills*, the character Willie reminds

us that invisibility can also work in black men's favor if a psychic and spatial distance is maintained from more capitalist or neoliberal points of view that pit the African American middle and lower classes against one another. Although committed to the notions of blackness and community, Willie achieves freedom through his realization of his independence from them, in other words, his individuality; and it is navigation through the built environment that allows this. Contrarily, because of the lack of emphasis on the built environment as a possible transformative space, depictions of community, masculinity, and responsibility fall short in *The Men of Brewster Place*. Still, in spite of being left with a disheartening memory of Brewster Place as blind, crumbled, and snaggled and an uncomfortable gap in C.C.'s psychological makeup, the novel's silences signal an ever growing need to discuss whether attention to homespace is a part of our viability assessment. Does it make a difference?

Here again, *Invisible Man* is instructive. In the Epilogue, the narrator discusses how integral living in the cellar has been to his coming into being:

> Indeed, the world is just as concrete, ornery, vile and sublimely wonderful as before, only now I better understand my relation to it and it to me. I've come a long way from those days when, full of illusion, I lived a public life and attempted to function under the assumption that the world was solid and all the relationships therein. Now I know men are different and that all life is divided and that only in division is there true health. (576)

The narrator's hibernation in a built space, his camping out in the personal and quotidian for a while in lieu of bouncing around in the social and political imperatives of his day, has led to a much more nuanced understanding of the world around him. He also muses that "to lose your direction is to lose your face" but that it is possible to "live without direction" (579). The invisible narrator implies

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that a blind adherence to collectivity might be mediated by interjecting a phenomenological

emphasis on space to our close reading. This is to suggest that a detour through irrationality,

irresponsibility, and "nigger mess" might be necessary. Since home is one of the major themes of

African American literature, its literary tradition stands to contribute insight from its readings of

homespace, although this may call for shifting the angle from a racialized, strictly rationalist view to

one that is more encompassing of 'difficult to assimilate subjects' and 'difficult to talk' about places.

Thinking about home as a focus for collectivity in Gloria Naylor's fiction is one way to reinsert the

discursive presence of those we have tended to overlook. It would be a rebalancing of the

imbalance that has used race, class, or patriarchy as the measure of appropriate forms of domesticity

and black public space. Rather than asserting the non-existence of black men's homemaking

because critics have not focused on it, Naylor's invisibility blues recall how home and space can be

constructed on a collective *and* individual basis in any decade. It stands as an invitation to make our

readings less home-less by making our readings more nuanced. Focused on place, her novels require

fresh attention to that very thing.

CHAPTER FOUR

Invisible Men: Space, Race, and Masculinity in Public Housing Activism

Figure 13. Cabrini Rowhomes, Chicago, 2012

I didn't really want my project to go down. Not really, I didn't want it to go down.

'Cause I loved where I was. That was where I come from.

It was actually a good neighborhood.

Jevon McIntosh, Former Cabrini Green Resident

In the previous chapter, I suggested that literary criticism's silencing by omission of the character Roscoe in *The Women of Brewster Place* functions as a silencing of the low income male's claim to telling the housing association's story. By pointing to this well-known passage as the emergence of women's voices while neglecting the presence of the men in the room, black feminist and African American literary criticism has reified a conception of black gender relations that emphasizes women's formation of the domestic sphere and de-emphasizes men's contribution to home as "a site of resistance" (hooks 47). Like the Naylor scene, the history of public housing can make black men seem invisible within its narrative beyond their roles as gang members and hustlers, which may render any alternative actions unimportant for theorizing and critique. Many scholars allude to the participation of men in their studies, but there has yet to be an account of black male activism in housing apart from what we know of community work by black liberation groups such as the Black Panthers.[105] Most public housing ethnographies focus on women as a means of overturning representations that render female public housing tenants as hyper-sexual, welfare-addicted, and passive. However, the public housing living room has served as a communal and organizing space for men as well as women, meaning in however small or fleeting the moments, men have moved in, out, and through this space in equally domestic and agential ways. In this chapter, I shed light on the significance of black men to the housing struggle by highlighting the perspectives of several Chicago activists who allowed me to interview and—for a time—work alongside them. My study does not do justice to the power of the lives unfolded in brief here. In fact, black men's housing activism is one place African American literary studies might look to reimagine understandings of space: by refusing cultural and sociological determinism and forging their own unique spatial relationships to what's left of Cabrini Green, black male housing activists in Chicago demonstrate the possibility of preserving a sense of history, black collectivity, and a critique of racialization all the while asserting new ways of reading or interacting with the built environment.

In 2008, I was privileged to win a fellowship through the Midwest Council for Human Rights (MCHR) which placed me as an intern in the Cabrini Rowhouses working on a campaign against Chicago's

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[105] See, for example, *Showdown in Desire*.

Plan for Transformation, changed to *The Plan at Ten* and, in 2013, *The Plan Forward.* There, I was amazed and charmed by male activists who passed in and out of the office, who seemed not only to take direction from the older female activists holding tenant council positions but also to be constantly staging their own resistances in and around Cabrini and Chicago. Describing my response with as naïve and strong an adjective as "amazed" is intentional. As Patricia Hill Collins points out, the representations of black men we are used to seeing in American media are hinged on a spectrum that only depicts black masculinity in terms of liability, in which "lack of education, employment patterns, and criminal records relegate them to inferior social spaces" (75). Representations of the pathology of low income housing environments inscribe African American men in Manichean, often reductive ways, particularly when it comes to male figures we associate with certain class strata. For a dedicated summer, I watched and was mentored by seven men whose appearance might be considered stereotypical and belie their social consciousness. In dreadlocks, in sagging jeans, in jerseys and white tees, hanging from the window of a black Chevy Suburban, the men of Cabrini organized tours for officials of the United Nations, raised poignant questions in meetings with the alderman and HUD, blocked illegal evictions through civil disobedience, and planned housing and environmental justice strategies on a global scale. They are a key inspiration for this study and dissertation.

In this, my final chapter, the biggest intervention I hope can be gleaned is that the voices of African American male housing activists are critical to our perception of low income housing spaces. The preceding spatial, visual, and literary analyses are all shored up by this conclusion. In spite of being an avid student of African American literature, it seemed vital to seek beyond the historical literary imagination to make an argument about the ways black men understand their environment. The addition of qualitative research seemed appropriate to this endeavor since, according to Bogdan and Taylor, qualitative research is concerned with the meanings people attach to their lives and implies some empathy or identification on the part of the researcher (7). Literature obviously aims for such empathy too, but unlike ethnography, the narrative is completely controlled by the author. In a way, the points of identification are predetermined. So a disruption to my normalized points of identification seemed critical to this project about cultural space because of my own middle class upbringing and reading paradigms. Thus, although this is the final chapter of my

dissertation, it is really the beginning. Even if my subjects' representations of themselves are still representations, I wanted my research to proceed from "grounded theory" up.

The research design of this study and the organization of its account are based on traditional methods and models from modern ethnography. Specifically, for my research I interviewed six different activists through the use of a semi-structured question set for 30 minutes to two hours a piece. Since my rapport building with this group of men began in 2008, and over the period of these six years, I have maintained a consistent formal and informal relationship with them as a graduate student and teacher. I have volunteered with them, shadowed them, created speaking opportunities for them, and even given them rides home. These ongoing conversations and experiences constitute what Karen O'Reilly terms "ethnographic interviewing…guided conversations…[that] take place in the field as part of the ongoing development of trustful, ethical, sensitive relationships" (127). While not the full immersion of traditional anthropology or ethnography, this type of interviewing is still "engaged, reflexive, collaborative, and time-consuming," she argues (127). Relatedly, the interviews summarized in this chapter are supported by a form of participant-observation detailed below. Combining these mixed qualitative methods allowed me to filter the men's personal interpretations of their activism and space through my own observations.

Organizationally, I first review important texts in the body of low income and public housing ethnography, noting in particular which of these highlight the significance of the presence of black men and how these studies influence the theoretical framework I work within throughout the dissertation. I then outline the contours of my participant observation and the challenges I faced as a researcher. Finally, I introduce the six men who participated in my study, providing excerpts of their reflections about themselves, their work, housing justice, and black masculinity. Because important ethnographies in the field of public housing literature such as Rhonda Williams' *The Politics of Public Housing* acknowledge the names or existence of male activists but focus on theorizing women's relationship to politics and housing, I wanted to find out how black male housing activists think about their relationship to the housing struggle and the specific strategies they engage in to inscribe and counter perceptions of their built environment. Does housing

activism, which has increasingly relied on the rhetoric of human rights rather than Black Power since the 1990s (at least, in public discourse), mean that these activists are able to see space as racially unmarked and themselves as universal subjects? And since we're talking about the space of home as a major site of the construction of gender identity, what does men's activism in and around homes—particularly stigmatized homes—tell us about formations of black masculinity? What are the possibilities for more liberating images of masculinity, and what are the narratives that continue to resist change? In the concluding discussion section, I try to answer these questions but as a means of bridging the dialogue between African American literary studies, masculinity studies, and scholarship on public housing.

To think through how people construct their world by creatively or intuitively gathering information through the use of mixed methods goes back to Glaser and Strauss in 1967, and even further, to the ethnographic methods of The Chicago School. These schools of thought, as with most qualitative research, stress context, symbolic interaction, and social constructivism. In essence then, the methodological approaches behind qualitative research are inherently phenomenological. They are intended to decenter the researcher's structured or overarching narrative to allow for other perspectives of 'seeing' to come through. If everyone is considered an equal social actor, then we are all equally capable of interpreting the social. Albeit the power balance is not perfect when it comes to the transcript (if it is not true co-authorship), qualitative research focuses on the voice of the research subject and defines the researcher as just another participant in the conversation. This is an extension of my use of the phenomenological method in my other three chapters but here, I draw attention to the six activists' navigation of space and their demarking of housing (and property) features that distinguish space's universal elements and its particular racialization. At times, they speak of feeling spatially limited by race and at times they speak of being liberated because of their ability to negotiate racial nuances associated with their spatiality. The totality of their reflections supports my corollary claim that acknowledging the subjective relationship we each have to space widens our perspective of how to read it.

Images of public housing circulated in the media and public policy, like the imagery of the ghetto in so many novels, have hindered our thinking of this space as productive and viable, or rather, they have displaced the necessary critique of structural inequities onto the built environment itself, as well as the people who inhabit it. This problem is well documented.[106] Even studies with good intentions have been easily trapped within the web of sticky identity constructions, whose ensuing rhetoric exposes underlying racism, classicism, and patriarchy in American culture and politics. Kenneth Clark's classic text, *Dark Ghetto (1967)*, is exemplary of this slippery slope:

> The most concrete fact of the ghetto is its physical ugliness—the dirt, the filth, the neglect. In many stores walls are unpainted, windows are unwashed, service is poor…The parks are seedy with lack of care. The streets are crowded with the people and the refuse. In all of Harlem there is no museum, no art gallery, no art school, no sustained "little theater" group…The only constant characteristic is a sense of inadequacy. People seem to have given up on the little things that are so often the symbol of the larger things. (27)

Although interpreting signs of obvious *structural neglect*—the rundown landscape and social service—Clark attaches his analysis to a diagnosis of a psychological state, which he deems "a sense of inadequacy." The non-existence of, or perhaps, non-recognized presence of art, drama, and community education symbolizes for Clark the lack of the bourgeoisie's dream of a viable neighborhood when in fact he has only dealt with the missing appearance of it. Not that the paradoxes of hope and despair, and of resilience from peer-exploitation, are not an unfortunate part of the picture. The reality of the twentieth century geographic concentration of African Americans substantiates a fair amount of social science's ethnographic and quantitative information on poverty's effects. However, from the 1930s to the 1950s, American anthropologists and sociologists focused largely on theses meant to unpack whether these effects made the black ghetto unique; the result in a way backfired: policymakers could then use these studies to fund or starve

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[106] William Julius Wilson's introduction to Kenneth Clark's *Dark Ghetto* lays out this problem going back at least as far as the 60s and Daniel Moynihan's now famous report, but its effects and side effects are also evident in Wilson's rhetoric of defense of his own work on structural racism, *The Truly Disadvantaged.*

social programs designed to address ills that ethnographers identified as endemic (Wilson, "Introduction," p. xv).

The next two decades of media coverage and research on public housing would revolve around demonizing spatial metaphors: the "vertical ghetto"; the notorious "invisible wall"; and Garbarino, Kostelny, and Dubrow's "war zone."[107] These metaphors indulge the image of low income housing environments as impermeable, as a blank space to be inscribed upon, or, on the contrary, as so chaotic and deadly that the only solution posed to end the social isolation of residents has been to tear down their homes and start again. From the slash of the federal public housing budget in 1987 to the approval of Hope VI in 1992, residents of public housing and spaces in which this housing is located have been under attack through a deliberate neoliberal turn of governance. (Hope VI is the offspring of the National Commission on Severely distressed Public Housing, with a platform focused on the physical rehabilitation of the buildings, housing choice programs and partnerships with private developers.) Relying on the paternalistic rhetoric of "Moving to Work" and "Moving to Opportunity," housing policy in this country has steadfastly denigrated the idea that housing projects might be considered communities with potential. This affront through the withdrawal of infrastructural support on one hand and the penalization of resulting social responses on the other is why public housing activism rose to the fore in the early nineties in the first place. Across the country, from New York to Louisiana, thousands of tenants have leveled civic resistance against housing authorities and their respective cities while volleying for inclusion at the decision-making table for the future of public housing. Yet, in countering the unevenness of public housing metaphors, most public housing literature recreates another uneven representation—the marked absence of black men.

In the nineties, the major studies on public housing life and activism posited black women as the primary actors not just because they make up the largest percentage of public housing heads of households but because their contributions readily refuted the construction of women on welfare as passive and

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[107] See *No Place to Be a Child: Growing Up in a War Zone,* by James Garbarino, Kathleen Kostelny, and Nancy Dubrow, for an example of a comparative analysis between Chicago's inner city projects and Cambodia, Nicaragua, and Mozambique.

dependent. Jacqueline Leavitt's book *From Abandonment to Hope: Community-Households in Harlem* (1990),

Patricia O'Brien's *Impact of a Stay in a Battered Women's Shelter* (1994), and Breitbert and Pader's article,

"Establishing Ground: Gender and Race in a Mixed Housing Development" (1995) each highlight the

specific struggles of women in public housing to achieve security, agency, and inclusion. In Williams' study

of female public housing residents in Baltimore, she describes her intervention as the attempt to ask

different questions about black working women to make visible the narratives of low income black women

specifically within the larger history of black women's liberation and reformist movements (7). Her desire to

"help recast the prevailing view that public housing was an unmitigated failure" is noble (8), and as a model,

Williams does acknowledge that "Black men also played a critical role in urban tenant politics" and even lists

two gentleman by name (Anthony Henry and Jesse Gray) whose work led to the creation of the National

Tenants Organization (NTO) in 1969 (175). Otherwise, her study does not provide much space to male

activists in the housing struggle, particularly in a contemporary context.

Feldman and Stall's book, *The Dignity of Everyday Resistance,* provides an explanation for a similar

absence in their study on women in the Chicago housing development, Wentworth Gardens. In a section

labeled "Where Are the Men Activists," which rounds out the introduction to their 2004 book*,* they claim,

> Through the early 1970s there were men who volunteered and served as leaders in the
>
> Resident Council and in other community efforts; in fact, two of the husbands of the older-
>
> generation activists we interviewed were volunteers. By the later 1970s, [however] with the
>
> increased absence of men as husbands and engaged fathers in public housing, this pattern
>
> changed. The reasons for the absence of adult male role models and activists in lower-
>
> income communities like Wentworth are numerous and interrelated. (18)

They then go on to explain how increased rates in unemployment and decreased rates of high school

graduation, two conditions which often leave their affected in a vulnerable housing status, also account for

the minimal presence of black men (20). Elliot Liebow acknowledged these shifts in households and labor in

the sixties and seventies, but his groundbreaking book, *Tally's Corner: A Study on Negro Streetcorner Men (1967),*

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more so describes this 'absence' as invisibility to the social policy and research interests of the time period. Liebow argues, "Neglect of the adult male as a subject of research into lower-class life is…furthered by middle-class concerns with delinquency and dependency" (3). Because women and children were emphasized as the primary victims of the poverty cycle, at least in cultural and social service rhetoric, women and children made the most pressing subjects for research to translate into policy agendas (Liebow 3). Thus, what Feldman and Stall seem to miss that Liebow points out is the influence that housing studies have had on the direction of the very same policies that have historically pushed men out of subsidized households.

Notably, Liebow's study did not take place within a strictly defined space such as the interior of a public housing development but rather on a community boundary—the corner. One thing public housing ethnographers might take into account in the move to incorporate more men in housing research is the same lesson learned from Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*: that is, that men may forge community and a version of domesticity in spaces outside of the physical location of the house. Indeed, the purpose of Liebow's study was to illustrate the complexity of a network of men ages 23 to 45 who saw themselves as an integral part of the community surrounding the pseudonymous Tally's Corner.[108] Liebow's major contribution continues to be his argument that this world of black men, the street corner, the alley, is merely a reflection of the fictions of American societal values and therefore "does not appear as a self-contained, self-generating, self-sustaining system or even subsystem with clear boundaries marking it off from the larger world around it" (209).[109] It shouldn't, or isn't, therefore, as alien and unfamiliar as twentieth century representations have tried to make it. Interestingly, as it was published in the same year as *Tally's Corner, Dark Ghetto* also starts with a chorus of men's voices expressing their self-identity, racial awareness, and political awareness, but this is not the focus of Clarke's tract. It is more so Ulf Hannerz's *Soulside (1967)* that provides

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[108] In 2011, the identity of Tally's Corner was actually revealed by The Washington Post: "1th and M streets NW in Shaw, a corner that had a carryout, liquor store, dry cleaner and shoe-repair shop" (Kelly).
[109] This is also argued by Black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins and other radical thinkers stemming back to the sixties. The table of contents reveals the multi-faceted way in which Liebow was looking at his subjects. Listed as "Men and Jobs," "Fathers without Children," "Husbands and Wives," "Lovers and Exploiters," "Friends and Networks," these chapter titles normalize low income black men and direct attention past the peculiarity of race to how the men understand masculinity and their relationships to others.

a companion portrait to Liebow's study with his emphasis on varying "life styles" and sex roles in the ghetto. Hannerz's chapter, "Growing Up Male," tries to confirm that we should be skeptical of any "ghetto-specific…psychopathology" (136).[110] Significantly, the representation of everyday men in Liebow and Hannerz contrasts with the more politicized images of the hyper-masculine black male made popular by the surveillance of the Black Panthers and the proliferation of Blaxploitation films like *Sweet Sweetback Badasssss Song (1971) and Super Fly (1972)*. In spite of these two illustrative studies, however, the lives of black men in low income housing outside of their associated stereotypes would continue to be neglected for decades.

> *Police will go to an all white neighborhood and think everybody's working, educated, and come here and assume the opposite. That everybody's selling drugs and in gangs, which is totally untrue. I mean, how many kids from over here getting in trouble 'cause they ain't got no friends? You don't here that talked about in the black community.*
>
> *—Travaughn Steele*

The next study that gives black men in low income housing significant attention would be Sudhir Venkatesh's award-winning *American Project* (2000) focused on the Robert Taylor Homes.[111] In the book, Venkatesh provides a nuanced discussion of the daily life and negotiations between residents, community center workers, and local gang members. Largely focused on the ongoing strategies generated in response to the negative aspects of public housing life, Venkatesh's intervention is his argument that the "habitability of public housing—or of any community for that matter—is best sought in the capacity of residents to resolve

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[110] Hannerz walks a tight rope between naturalizing the ghetto as a site that produces a particular culture and pointing towards commonalities between the poor families in his research site, and poor families or even mainstream black families located outside of inner city enclaves.

[111] I purposefully omit the bestselling book by Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here*, because while it provides a sensitive portrait of two youth from the Henry Horner housing project, it does not pretend to be a sociological study and add to theoretical understandings of the environment or its inhabitants. Instead, it is a must read for a view of the complex strategies that children undertake in order to survive and—contrary to Kotlowitz's thesis, I would say—in order to stay children.

problems and meet their personal and collective needs" (274). Highlighting the collective response of

residents to their systemic alienation from mainstream job, social, and civic opportunities, he at least

demonstrates the complexity of men in public housing: the fact that they can be predatory and activist; that

they can assume fatherhood roles and also disavow responsibility; that they can both work with and criticize

each other. Venkatesh's emphasis is on the social roles men played in the fabric of Robert Taylor, particularly

in brokering informal economies in and around the project. His work emphasizes the developing conflict

between men and women in the housing development as it seems the women advocated more for protection

in the community and the men advocated more for economic livelihood.

Building on Liebow, Feldman and Stall, and Venkatesh, my study illuminates the critical presence of

men in low income housing and their use and fight to preserve the home space.[112]   This presence is

important because it reminds us that the same image demonized or overlooked in culture might be the key to

rethinking biased research protocols and restrictive housing policies. Given that men of color are the largest

population of inmates, it is an interesting correlation that the rise in incarceration rates quadrupled between

1980 to 2008 just as public housing architecture and infrastructure was helping to exacerbate the drug trade,

and by extension, the unforgiving nature of one-strike lease policies ("Criminal Justice Fact Sheet"). The

confluence of media representations of these spaces marks black men as "unwanted traffic"; there are no

uncontested spaces wherein black men are not associated with violence and crime (Calmore 148). This is a

similar determinism that men (and literary characters) faced in the first half of the twentieth century under

Jim Crow while still cordoned within America's visual economy. Therefore, drawing attention to positive

identities and interrelations in these spaces amongst black housing activists is a step towards destabilizing this

determinism and opening the door to policies that slow rather than speed the criminalization cycle.

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[112] Other studies of interest that focus on poor black males include, *Black Corona* by Steven Gregory and published a year before Venkatesh; Elijah Anderson's *A Place on the Corner: A Study of Black Street Corner Men*, 2nd edition, and the collection of essays, *Against the Wall: Poor, Young, Black, and Male*. These studies follow men in a working class community but either focus on showing the diversity of black class identities, coping mechanisms in urban communities, or the generational gap between this generation and their Civil Rights predecessors.

My study of "invisible men" in this chapter continues in the theoretical framework established in earlier chapters in which I turn to phenomenology to express how low income spaces can be transformed from objecthood into subjecthood within a capitalist hierarchy of the abject. As hooks pointed to her grandmother's house, and in the tradition of black feminists' recuperation of the longstanding domestic labor of black women as caretakers of both black and white homes,[113] I insist on viewing the public housing high rise as an object of nostalgia and opposition, which may be constructed as racialized but may also be internalized as a homespace that is quite sacred to the identity of many men. Constructions of space are flexible, as Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault remind us. Lefebvre's theoretical premise is that space is produced in relationship to modes of production and that because of its representational and symbolic nature, space is always historical, cultural, and politicized. The building and demolition of public housing very markedly stakes itself in relationship to the political history of social welfare, post-war relations, and residential segregation in our country. Now that the country's high rises have been torn down, the visualization of their symbolic nature is no longer in our face. However, the current realities wherein mixed-income developments have gentrified the grounds of former public housing, engendering lucrative property zones and pushing out families of color who survive on minimum wage, suggests a continuation of the Jim Crow era in which spatial reminders of social hierarchy covertly and openly penalize racial groups based on privilege.[114] For example, visitors to the Cabrini Rowhomes (two-story duplex structures) describe being harassed and even ticketed for trespassing on property while visitors to the surrounding market-rate properties, even commuters who park on Cabrini's streets for convenience, traverse unmolested. The very fact that these men return for visits in spite of being discriminated against illustrates their commitment to neighborhood relationships and could also form the basis for resistance and a collectivity based on the right of belonging to a space—not just a race politics. From the interviews, it became clear that Chicago housing

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[113] bell hooks discusses the role of black domestics in her book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism (2014)*, tracing black women's oppression and societal function as household servants back to plantation life.

[114] Today, being that the bulk of public housing families are made of up African American households with multiple children, the mandated one-third ratio of public housing to market units and the small number of bedrooms in the redesigned buildings directly restrict many former tenants from returning to the area. This is by design so that regulations can be fulfilled and yet the right to return clause in public housing residents' bill of rights can be flouted at the same time.

activists, as former Cabrini residents, see themselves in relationship to their housing space as promoters of continued community formation, collective memory, and social justice. They point to the difficulties that black men in particular face in the Chicago housing market and believe that challenging the inequities in its logic is the key to a more just democracy.

> *Oh, you want to see some racism and some discrimination: let a young black guy apply for public housing. The rules are such that black men can hardly get into public housing. In Chicago, you can't get a unit if you're a young black male. Female yeah; black male, no.*
>
> —*Charles Price*

My participant observation in the Cabrini Rowhouses began somewhat before my official research. After a graduate course on Ethnographies of Urban Neighborhoods through the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I secured an internship from the Minnesota-based MCHR that placed me, serendipitously, with the Coalition to Protect Public Housing in Chicago. Because the internship was not a research position, it required no IRB training and, from my vantage point, was not an experience I wanted to over-analyze. I was there as a student-intern not a field researcher. Realizing quickly how little I understood at the time about the historical complexity of Chicago housing and its local politics, it was truly a three-month apprenticeship in grassroots organizing and resistance. I was there to learn. And yet, my position as an outsider to the space provided me an objective distance from which to reflect on the communication style and patterns of behavior that seemed endemic to the group, then visually[115] made up of two older women (Ms. Carol Steele and Ms. Joanne Hollie) and about eight men of various ages who moved in and out of the Rowhouse office.

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[115] I say visually because Steele and Hollie were officers of the Cabrini Green Local Advisory Council (Ms. Steele had been re-elected as Vice President as of the date of this dissertation); however, the two women were the primary ones who ran the LAC office, and therefore, were there on a consistent basis.

The start of my IRB-approved research began in fall of 2011. So the summer of 2008, I was just "Intern" or "Crys." For a while, the crew gave me a hard time, testing my sensitivity to "project living" by regaling me with stories about the violence of others that had occurred the night before or "right up the block." Every resident that came into the office asked someone else (within my hearing) if I were a spy. It seemed the planning always happened at night after I left, or over the phone or on the weekend. This constant negotiation of my role and identity as a non-spy with an informal role and informal agenda was uncomfortable most of the time, but it served as the rapport-building period that most ethnographic research starts with. Unless there was a meeting, and until the group learned that my strength was writing, the five or six hours I spent there every day were often filled with assignments I created myself. The Coalition and, particularly, the guys were feeling me out, so to speak.

Sadly, my shift from outsider status to insider-outsider occurred in the aftermath of the death of three-year-old Curtis Cooper. I found out what happened on my way into the office the next morning. I still remember the eerie quiet that sat over everything as I walked up Hudson Street from the #66 Chicago bus stop. The only sound that severed the air: the measured buzzing of hedge trimmers that belonged to the landscapers who had conveniently just showed up. Their blue-uniformed appearance seemed so foreign and mysterious, it alerted me. It was an obvious recuperation of the image of the shrubs that had gone untended for months, a blatant "picking up" for the reporters who would come. The irony of this would enrage many of us in the office for weeks and served to enfold me within the Coalition members' comradeship. For the next few meetings with the CHA or HUD that we attended, if I raised my hand to ask a question or suggested one for the guys to ask, they would amplify the gesture as a show of bravado, which they applauded: "Wait a minute, Crys, don't throw a chair at'em." From that point forward, I would say our rapport matured as my usefulness to them became more apparent and their availability as a resource to me became more forthcoming.

Since that summer up through 2014, I have participated in the activism of the Coalition to Protect Public Housing (CPPH) and its sister organizations, Common Ground and the Chicago Anti-Eviction

Campaign, in the following ways: assisted with grant applications and the creation of flyers for meetings; wrote a petition on behalf of an individual member against a school closing in his area; sought advice and mentorship from CPPH in order to coordinate a public housing protest in Champaign, Illinois; connected several of the male activists with professors, graduate organizations, and other activists wanting to work with them; wrote a letter to be read by a former Cabrini resident about the importance of discussing race relations in her new mixed-income community; attended two press releases and a protest; assisted with response letters to a bank threatening to evict an organization member; canvassed for eviction rights awareness on MLK day; led strategic planning meetings; drew up a college outreach plan for student residents and potential interns; hosted a civic engagement fair and panel that allowed several Cabrini male activists to speak and interact with my college faculty and students; provided one of my students as volunteer researcher to help with data analysis; and frequently, when nothing seemed to be happening, just showed up to spend time in the Cabrini Tenant Management Council's Office. Conducting research all the while building community in this way has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

However, in spite of being invited out to parties, out for drinks, or to "Chili Day" in the office, I would argue that my status still retained vestiges of the outsider at the time of this writing. I invited the gang to my in-town wedding reception but have never been invited into anyone's home. This could be due to the Rowhouse Office really serving as the heart of the group's organizing. It is where everyone makes an appearance if not daily, at least weekly, and, therefore, is as intimate as a living room. In fact, the office is situated in a refurbished Rowhouse apartment, and so the conference table sits in what would be the living room. (The memories there are as fond to me as those of my grandma's kitchen.) However, my anticipated invitation might also be delayed due to the nexus of class and gender relations that I still bring into the space. By this I mean, regardless of my acceptance within the community, there may be uncertainty about whether my education and privilege might lead to judgment or scrutiny if were admitted into more private places. Or, I have always mused, perhaps if I had been able to go on one of the Coalition or Anti-Eviction Campaign's frequent road trips to a national or international conference, our ensuing bonding might have encouraged this boundary to be crossed.

Although there have been a plethora of studies focused on Cabrini Green, it remains a fertile setting for research and activism for anyone interested in the effects of gentrification, displacement, mixed income development, and foreclosure on communities of color. In fact, it's ironic that the 2007 website home page of the Chicago Housing Authority once touted, "No other city is doing more…to ensure that everyone—regardless of income—share in its success." It claims today an 85 percent completion of the apartments designated for rehab or replacement under *The Plan for Transformation*. Now called the city's *Plan Forward*, from an independent resident relocation survey, one would think there was nothing to contest.[116] Neither the annual plans of the *Plan for Transformation* nor the proposal for *The Plan Forward* acknowledge the highly criticized eviction and relocation practices of the CHA, complaints of obscuring the right to return, or the lawsuits against resegregation and discrimination. To date, the Central Advisory Council, for example, remains skeptical of the CHA's good faith in bringing residents back to the half-refurbished Rowhomes. This geography then is metonymic of multiple spaces of uneven development and enforcement and a primary site in need of more social equality.

And yet, my participants Charles Price, Travaughn Steele, Willie J.R. Fleming and his two sons consider Cabrini home. They have each since moved away from the area but continue to return to organize collectively with the Local Advisory Council. Mr. Price and Steele are father and son, though Price and Steele's mother have not been in a domestic relationship for decades. While Ms. Steele runs the Local Advisory Council, and Mr. Price, in fact, now lives in the suburbs, his history as a former Cabrini and Robert Taylor resident brings him to Chicago frequently as a fellow strategist with both local and central housing councils. Travaughn Steele lived his entire childhood and adult life in the Cabrini Rowhomes until February of 2012 when his unit was scheduled to be

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[116] See Popkin, Susan J., Diane K. Levy, Larry Buron, Megan Gallagher, and David Price. 2010. "The CHA's Plan for Transformation: How Have Residents Fared?" Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

rehabilitated. He is still waiting on that section of the Rowhomes to be reopened to residents but for now travels in from Chicago's South Side to the LAC Office to coordinate with his mother on housing conferences. Willie J.R. Fleming, who now heads the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign, lived in what were considered the Cabrini "Reds" from 1977 to 1981, the Robert Taylor Homes from 1981 to 1984, and finally, the Cabrini "Whites" until 2007. Though he presently alternates living with a significant other on the north side of the city and family on the south side, his email nomenclature "iamcabrini" illustrates his geographic loyalty. Fleming's sons, Jevon and Jonathan, were also raised in Cabrini Green until their late teens when the *Plan for Transformation* forced them and their mother to find alternate housing. They do not return to the old neighborhood as often as their father but separately reported in their interviews that they preferred Cabrini to where they were currently living because at least they knew their neighbors. My last participant, Mr. Maurice Gray, never lived in Cabrini or public housing; however, he had recently started to organize with the men from Cabrini on community intervention initiatives when we met. Moreover, his description of his growing up alternately between the south and west sides of Chicago aligned with the Cabrini participants' experience of moving, return, and affiliation; in fact, he told me, in one area of the city, friends call him "Southside 'Reese" and in the other, friends call him "Westside Reese." Each of my participants exercise a form of what I established in Chapter Three as critical invisibility—a relationship to space and place that enables them to offer negative and productive critique. They are men of the world, urban cosmopolites, who carry on grassroots social activism as well as more institutionalized forms. As Feldman and Stall said of their subjects from the Chicago development Wentworth Gardens,   "Instead of offering generalizations about the experiences of all [Chicago] housing activists, [I] chose to focus our research on a core group of committed activists engaged in multiple and interconnected organizing efforts" (12).

The home base for my research was the Local Advisory Council Office in the Cabrini Rowhomes,

formerly the headquarters of the Coalition to Protect Public Housing. It was there that I initially met these

male activists or learned of their knowledge of each other. I interviewed three of the participants there. The

LAC Office served as a prime setting to fellowship with them and to observe their participation. From day to

day, the office helps residents of the Rowhomes with everything from bill assistance to legal and housing

advice. It also works on long-term strategies to provide affordable housing to all citizens. I also spent a brief

time shadowing an offshoot organization of the Coalition to Protect Public Housing, the Chicago Anti-

Eviction Campaign. Fleming founded the Campaign in 2009 with a PhD student from the University of

Chicago (Toussaint Losier). Combining the non-violent action of the Civil Rights Movement with the more

"emancipatory" responses of the South African Anti-Eviction movement[117], the Chicago branch intervenes

on behalf of women and children whose homes have been foreclosed on or who are living as homeless.

Along with attending eviction court and providing legal aid to foreclosure victims, the Chicago Anti-Eviction

Campaign also scouts abandoned properties to restore in order to house these families—and not always with

the bank's permission. Lastly, I should mention that while I did not observe Mr. Maurice Gray interacting

with the youth that he serves, the strategies he employs as founder of S.O.Y.L. (Saving Our Youth

Landscaping) are similar in philosophy to those of the Local Advisory Council and the Chicago Anti-Eviction

Campaign. S.O.Y.L. engages young men in Chicago from low income housing in developing their

neighborhoods through landscaping and construction. It also mentors youth to be active in demonstrating

for the rights of others. Having known three of the participants for years and having stumbled upon the

others in the midst of their activism, I was graciously allowed to interview them and follow up with them for

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[117] The Anti-Eviction Campaign is a trans-global movement with roots stemming back to Black Power and Anti-Apartheid. An example of its emancipatory style of "taking back the land" is demonstrated by the following quote that appeared in an April 20, 2009 article of *The Nation:* "When government cuts off our electricity, we put it back on. In 2001, we were able to get the City of Cape Town to declare a two-month moratorium on evictions. We break the government's law in order not to break our own (moral) laws. We oppose the authorities because we never gave them the authority to steal, buy and sell our land in the first place" (The Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign).

this project.[118]   They range in age, education, and experience within public or low income housing, but their beliefs all reflected the necessity of viewing housing as a key lens for understanding social space.

Introductions and Findings

Although offered the option of pseudonyms, all of the participants willingly shared their names as well as less circumspect details of their past. Interestingly, though of different ages, the participants shared similar life experiences, particularly a type of "conversion" into a life of social consciousness as well as a significant matriarchal figure in their history who had somehow influenced their current activism. All of the participants (except for the youngest two) came across as well-versed in national and local politics and policies, a key aspect of their resistance.

Charles Price. If you met Mr. Price on any given day, you would be struck by his regal bearing and "cool" demeanor.   "A shade past sixty," well educated, and married to a wife with her PhD, I have never seen him outside of a three-piece suit, well-shined dress shoes or cowboy boots, and a small gold star, like a sheriff's badge, pinned to his lapel. In meetings, he would often lean back in whatever chair and wait for everyone else to speak before interjecting his opinion. His quiet reserve these days belie the quick temper he claims he used to have. He describes himself as "a troubled child in a lot of fights" but "smart in school…too smart":

> They couldn't figure out how I could have a high academic and high IQ, intelligence
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> quotient, but yet be so mean and vicious. I guess I was fighting, I was fighting myself. I was
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> fighting society. I don't know why. I was just fighting…You know, I kind of felt like I
>
> didn't belong because, religiously, I was very unhappy. I didn't have that, uh, spiritual

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[118]The data was recorded and transcribed for analysis of similar themes.

enlightenment, and the only thing that I could relate to was violence, was fighting. You know, I had a very loving family, but man, we fought…Even now, I'm still kind of "individualized."

Price describes one interaction with the law as a young teen when shooting dice landed him in front of a judge. Regaling me with the story, he said, "The judge said, since you guys like to shoot dice, you gone shoot dice for your time. Whatever you throw is how much time I'm going to give you." While Price's companions rolled nine and twelve and received those sentences respectively, a principal intervened and explained that Price was a straight A student and had never been an academic problem. Because of this, the judge decided to be lenient, and Price says, "It gave me the break I needed, and I've never looked back. It was at that point that I decided to start helping people, looking at issues [from different perspectives]: social, educational, economical. I said I'd only do it for a little while. It's been about, just about forty-five years."

Price has helped public housing residents in numerous ways. From 1986 to 2006, he served as a site manager of the Cabrini Green development, with brief stints as manager of Stateway Gardens and the Robert Taylor Homes. Being a resident and a manager put Price in the unique position to understand the pressures on both sides:

I would know things like a gang had taken over a young lady's apartment. Now the job says go in and put them out. Morally, she's a good person in a bad circumstance, so I need to remove the circumstance. But you kind of bend the law for the greater good. That caused a lot of anxiety…So now I had people coming in to see me. But because I had sat in the seat that they were sitting in, it gave me an advantage, see, because I know what it's like when the sink backs up and all of that is running down on the floor and then it gets into the furniture. So I knew how important it is to listen.

Price's experience as a resident gave him an insider view so that his job became more than a job for him, "it became a way of life." His activism as a resident includes organizing against key issues that disproportionately affect black males such as random drug screening; the one strike rule (which homeowners in the same mixed

income development are not subject to)[119]; and the eviction policy that penalizes families for allowing a non-lease holder to use their address, which in this day and age, Price calls "disingenuous." Price was also very instrumental in gang intervention in the mid-nineties. After a period where ten people were killed in one month, Price recounts being one of the activists who helped to orchestrate a ceasefire between rivals such as the Vice Lords and Gangster Disciples that lasted for approximately five years. He says of that time period, "Cabrini became the safest place in the city. And that's according to FBI records." Now, Price focuses on mentoring young men and assisting the Cabrini LAC and the Cabrini CDC (Community Development Corporation) with pushing fair housing policies and legislation.

Travaughn Steele. If he wants to, sitting next to one of his equally brawny brothers in support of his mother at a housing meeting, Steele can come across as quite intimidating. Most of the time, however, his cheeks are stretched into a hearty smile as his signature chipmunk laugh fills the air. Travaughn is an example of how the appearance and spatiality of black men can be misconstrued if reading them through the filter of cultural stereotypes and never looking further: his typical day wear is a sports jersey; he is bald with an earring, and drives a Suburban. When I interned with CPPH in 2008, I wondered if he and his brothers were employed because they were usually in the office during the nine to five hours I was and would spend hours reclining at the conference table sharing jokes and stories. In fact, Steele and one of his brothers worked nights and weekends and their younger brother was a college student. What looked like idleness was intentional availability. Family men, neighborhood mentors, and long-time activists, the Steele brothers had arranged their schedule to ensure their presence when it was most needed.

Steele was born and raised in the Cabrini Rowhomes in the household of a mother whose activism stretches back to the eighties and whose father (Price) was a resident manager and advocate. "We didn't know we were poor," he told me. "We had a nice little two-bedroom apartment. Me and my mother and my

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[119] The one strike rule has been a federal regulation imposed on housing since 1988 and mandates a zero-tolerance policy for tenants who are found to be engaging in criminal or drug activity. However, tenants can be evicted on suspicion or minor infractions such as marijuana use, which many feel is an unnecessarily punitive measure that does not truly make a difference in the gang and criminal activity it is designed to stem.

two brothers. Nice house, kept in good condition; kept clean." For Steele, living in Cabrini was "a nice time." He didn't and still doesn't fit the stereotype: "People used to say, you don't act like you're from Cabrini…you know, cause I don't gang bang, or got my hat tilted, or had a bad attitude. I was just was always positive, and I hung around people that was positive." He has best friends from his youth in Cabrini to this day. His description of his working class childhood is almost idyllic:

> We didn't know we were poor. Naw, cause I ate four-five times a day. My mother made sure we had food, something to drink. I always had clean clothes on my back. We took vacation. My mom took us to Wisconsin to the Dells. We went to Disney World. Atlanta. We just didn't know we were poor until people started saying, 'you're a poor person.'

This statement reflects the difference between internal and external perceptions of the public housing environment. Steele paints a picture of abundance, cleanliness, and leisure, thereby normalizing life in the projects and resituating how some might stereotype the underclass through the theme of his family's access to outside spaces.

At age forty-two, Steele's involvement in housing struggles start farther back than he can remember, "probably his late twenties," he told me. It began with him chauffeuring his mother and father to meetings and has evolved to him actively participating in direct actions against the Chicago Housing Authority as well as attending national housing conferences as a delegate. A short list of his activism includes helping to demonstrate and build temporary housing in New Orleans, protesting the 2012 Republican Convention in New York, and participating in any marches, rallies, and demolition or eviction blockades CPPH has coordinated over the years. Considering himself "the laid-back type," Steele emphasizes the relationship between his mentoring to neighborhood development: "I think my role is more, you know, giving the youth guidance, talking to them, getting them on the right path. You know, to stop doing all the negativity. I preach education to them. You know the ones more than likely just hanging around the street corners. *Do something positive in your neighborhood*," he stresses, "rather than, you know, selling drugs, fighting everywhere, and walking around with your pants hanging down." Steele's commitment to neighborhood barbecues and

softball games still held in the Cabrini area, although he now lives in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood, demonstrates his allegiance to his former homeplace and his belief that fostering community is integral to activism.

   Willie J.R. Fleming. A radical presence in Chicago housing and political circles, rarely is Fleming's name mentioned in a room without a visible reaction. In 2008, the shadow of his imposing figure would fall in a familiar outline: an oversized tee-shirt hanging over loose jeans; swinging, skinny dreadlocks; and his favorite megaphone. Seven years later, at forty, he is often seen in sweaters and dress shirts, his dreads neatly pulled back. Boisterous, fast-talking, and witty, the cadence of Fleming's speech has always been a third that of the hustler, a third that of the preacher, and a third, comedian. Though older, his energy hasn't changed. His phone constantly rings, and he will jump up from a conversation frequently to answer it, or to run across the room to hug an old friend, or to veer off into an impromptu speech on housing justice. He is both charming and militant, tempering his tone to fit the audience. I have heard him drop profanity from the mike as smoothly as he does statistics. Speaking to a lecture hall of Malcolm X College students in 2014, he expounded on housing and foreclosure law as fluently as a professor.

   Fleming, J.R., or Junior (as he is known to those in the LAC Office), was recruited into the housing justice movement by Carol Steele in the nineties. Ms. Steele, as she is known, is one of the founders of CPPH responsible for training residents on human rights discourse. Fleming claims that God used her to "trick him into the movement" by tempting him with the possibility of having more influence than he had at the time as a street hustler, selling imitation goods and other contraband around the city.

> I was making money. A lot of money. You name it, I was doing it with the exception of hardcore drugs...It was not black market. CDs and DVDs, [for example,] are not illegal according to US article 117 section 501A and B of the United States Copyright Act. Anyone who legally purchases a copy of any type of recorded material is allowed to back up copies for personal use. That's the law…I didn't sell it. I gave it to people free. I charged them for the service of replication.

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Fleming's ironic articulation of copyright law here reflects his oratory style. (Often, his rapid fire signification on legal statutes and cases are thrown out to gauge his audience's savvy or insider status.) Fleming also told me that he sold fake purses and jewelry: "I was trading with Malaysia and Singapore at the age of nineteen and twenty," he bragged, at one point, claiming to have made forty-thousand dollars selling memorabilia in Chicago's Grant Park. Whether exaggerated or true, his point was to emphasize how much he had sacrificed to join the movement.

But his duping or "conversion" to ideals of social justice over profiteering actually came after a violent encounter with the police. According to Fleming, he was at the height of his game:

> I had bags of money. Two pistols. I actually got in my first fight with the police over them scooters that was out in America. One hundred and fifty dollar scooters. I would sell anything. If I ain't got it, I can get it, you know what I'm saying? 'Cause there was a market. And it all came crumbling down. One fight with the police changed my whole life. They put hands on my ex-wife, who was my fiancé at the time, and yeah, I'll never forget. Officer with an open palm cupped her left breast and says move back, bitch. Prior to him doing that, he hit me six times. The third time he hit me, she jumped out of the van. *He ain't resisting, just lock him up.* While she had him distracted, I went in my pocket, pulled out the money. It was about three or four grand on me. Gave it to her and said, here's your child support, because I knew I was going to jail. If you get arrested in this motherfucking neighborhood, you might have went to jail with four thousand. By the time you get your inventory back, that shit might be three hundred…I was charged with felony assault of six police officers. Each term carried six to thirty years. Had it not been for her coming to my trial, my ass would've been in the penitentiary. Six to thirty times six. You know what that is? Thirty-six to a hundred and eight years, and all I did was whoop six cops. Like I whooped the whole district.

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Fleming was given a plea deal in exchange for good behavior. In Ms. Steele's version of the story, which I

had heard before, some guys from the neighborhood approached her about a loud-mouth on the street that

carried a lot of influence and who would be great for the movement. Fleming said Ms. Steele asked him, how

would he like to dedicate his time protesting CHA and the police? He says, "It was a turn on."

Since joining the Coalition to Protect Public Housing in the mid-nineties, Fleming has planned and

led marches to protest the *Plan for Transformation*; traveled to Venezuela and Geneva's World Social Forums to

speak about Cabrini Green and Chicago; coordinated the visit of two United Nations rapporteurs to Chicago

to investigate xenophobia and racist housing conditions; and blocked numerous evictions through either

court protests or sit in's. When I interviewed him in 2013 for this dissertation, he and the Anti-Eviction

Campaign members had already been interviewed by *The New York Times, The Chicago Tribune,* and *The*

Huffington Post. Initially, the Anti-Eviction Campaign evolved in response to the demolition of public housing

and the American foreclosure crisis. Borrowing strategies from the Occupy Movement, it not only presented

demands to Fannie Mae and banks such as a moratorium on all economically-motivated evictions, it also

scouted for vacant housing to take over. Documentation of this work can be found on Youtube.[120]

Campaign members will canvas neighbors around a targeted home and explain the unlucky family's situation

who they hope to move in. With the support of those neighbors, the group then refurbishes the home over a

period of weeks, much like Habitat for Humanity, and later holds a press conference stating their aims and

accomplishments. The hope is that once a family is housed and the bank or city sees the property being

maintained, a compromise on rent or a mortgage can be reached. The risks are, of course, clear. The banks

or the sheriff could call at any minute and the hapless family aided by the Anti-Eviction Campaign end up

homeless again. However, since 2009, the Campaign has housed more than twenty families, and now,

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[120] Two examples of the documentation videos of press conferences, rallies, and canvassing the group posts are
cited here:
"Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign 'Take Back the Land.' Online video clip. *YouTube*. Youtube, 30 Jun. 2011. Web.
31 Mar. 2015.
"Occupy Our Homes & Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign Successful Eviction Blockade." Online video clip. *YouTube*.
Youtube, 14 Mar. 2011. Web. 31 Mar. 2015.

Fleming told me, banks are coming to him to negotiate reasonable mortgages. The Campaign has evolved into a grant-funded organization that visits college campuses, hosts screenings of documentaries on the housing crisis, organizes petitions, and fundraises for housing assistance, in addition to its civil disobedience. Furthermore, Fleming also consults with local community development corporations on how to negotiate competitive mortgages.

Jevon and Jonathan McIntosh. The McIntosh brothers, twenty-three and twenty-one years old respectively, are J.R. Fleming's oldest children. I first encountered them during a protest against Freddie Mac in downtown Chicago. They were helping to direct protestors with megaphones and neon patrol vests. Both with the wily dreadlocks of their father's younger days, they were soft-spoken and straight forward during interviews. They grew up in Cabrini Green, living in the Reds and then the Whites until forced to move under the *Plan*. Although they had helped their father with marches and canvassing when Fleming worked with the Coalition to Protect Public Housing under Ms. Steele, both brothers reported spending time on and off in jail, which prevented them from participating in all of the organization's activities. Jevon describes a wakeup call that catalyzed his decision to participate more fully in the housing movement:

> One day I was asleep. I had a bad dream. I was in bed when some guys I was in school with came up on me and blew my head off. And it scared me. I jumped up, and it just made me change a little. In little ways. But then the second dream, my son was in. This other dream I had, I was locked up doing life in jail, and that really hurt me. Cause I hadn't seen my son in months because I was in jail. It changed my whole attitude.

Both Jevon and Jonathan are fathers. Jonathan has a one year old and a seven month old. While he does not attach his decision to change to a specific moment or experience, he did express a realization that his habits were not leading to a future he wanted for his children. "I said I don't want to go back down this road, going in and out of jail. I want to better myself, so my son can have a father figure. My father was [organizing] when I was such an age, so I want to show my son a role model." Jevon and Jonathan describe their activism as moving homeless women and children "back in." They help communicate about foreclosure homes and

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fight banks, as well as helping with the rehabilitation of abandoned properties. Both have learned carpentry skills as a result of their advocacy.

       Maurice Gray.[121] Gray is a fifty year old entrepreneur who looks much younger. His typical attire is casual: a pair of jeans, a plaid shirt or jersey, sometimes a wave cap. As with the other participants, his informal style of dress could be considered strategic image negotiation in order to remain relatable to those he works with. This informality belies the almost sermonic quality of his speech and his ease in front of large and small crowds. Gray was born in the Lawndale area of Chicago, a neighborhood historic for its architecture and as a base for the Civil Rights Movement when Martin Luther King came to Chicago to protest housing injustice.[122] Gray speaks of the founding of his youth organization in the area as a calling from God:

> I asked God that he would allow me to do something to help the young people, because that
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> year was a real rough year for the kids. They were getting shot down at about the same rate
>
> they're getting shot down now. So I asked God if he would allow me to do something,

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[121] There is one other activist I had hoped to interview for my study who shall remain nameless. He volunteered to be a participant and, in fact, until 2011 served as my primary liaison between both the LAC and the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign. I considered him a friend. Unfortunately, a series of miscommunications led to the discovery that this person had disseminated a rumor about a fictional romantic relationship between him and me, as well as had implicated me in several untruths. I discovered this unexpectedly in a conversation during a group meeting at the Local Advisory Council office, at which the potential volunteer participant was not present. I quickly dispelled this rumor and sought to salvage my reputation by emailing the subject to resolve the issue. However, he never responded. The possibility of confusion between subjects and researchers of opposite genders is well documented (Taylor and Bogdan 1998). This event did cause several months' delay in data collection due to my own fear that my integrity had been compromised with the other participants and members of the two research sites. The event actually worked to my favor. It further solidified my rapport with the participants, because I was considered "inside" the group enough to merit the friendly communication behavior of teasing. Beyond my own embarrassment, the situation did not pose the anticipated risk to gaining access to other participants and had no effect on continued snowballing. I continued to be invited to meetings and given access to information. Though I did endure some jokes in informal settings about my "fake relationship," during interviews the incident did not come up and all the participants gave straightforward and presumably uncompromised information.

[122] The North Lawndale neighborhood has a similar history of poverty concentration and demographics as Cabrini. In the 1950s, blacks began moving into the area due to urban renewal. By 1965, with overcrowding and little employment in the area, North Lawndale declined, spurring "white flight." Today, still suffering from disinvestment, Lawndale has one of the higher crime rates in the city.

make a difference, and help some of these young people. So, we put a meeting together, and…I said, God, what are you doing? Here you done gave me – my little ole raggedy self – an opportunity to collaborate with an organization like Chicago Public Schools…I didn't have a company name. I said, well you gotta give me a name. I went to sleep that night. And he woke me that morning; he gave me "SOYL." I said, SOIL? What does that have to do with saving our youth? He said, No, Stupid, it's S.O.Y.L. So that's how we came by SOYL.

Gray's non-profit, Saving Our Youth Landscaping, provides summer jobs for youth in the Lawndale area. Through partnerships with local businesses, the Chicago Housing Authority, and the public school system, he has been able to lead young men ages eleven to eighteen in for-profit activities: mowing lawns, snow removal, light carpentry and electric work. In return, his interns gain similar skills as Jevon and Jonathan McIntosh reported from their work with the Anti-Eviction Campaign. In fact, along with the same mission of providing Chicago youth entrepreneurial skills to steer them out of trouble, Gray and Fleming co-coordinated a "Hammers for Guns" day in 2014 in which young people of the Lawndale, Englewood, and other South Side neighborhoods were encouraged to turn in handguns at a central location and sign up for vocational workshops. As Gray puts it, "It's more than landscaping. Landscaping is just a vehicle that's being used…That goes into the next phase, which is problem youth, youth that have run into something. You know, if you've been in the penal system, it gives you a way to make some money, to turn you around from whatever you were doing to get you in the penal system. Or, if you just have a child on the way."

This concern to specifically address the troubles young men face stems from the second chance Gray feels he received not too long ago. He describes his past as partly ignoble: while he received good grades in school, and "all the teachers were crazy about [him]," he dropped out of high school and soon started selling drugs. Though involved with various scrapes with gang members, he managed to escape any encounters with the law until 2006 when he was pulled over and found with an unregistered pistol. Gray believes this night changed his life:

It was the first time where I had to stay in jail overnight. I don't know, maybe my bail got

held up. So I sat in there for 34 days. And those were the best 34 days of my life. When I

got out of there, God had changed me from a drug dealer into a bible reading man. I had

never read the Bible because I never understood it, and I had dealt with preachers. Some of

my best customers were preachers.

….

I'll never forget when I was leaving—and I'm talking about some gangers, these cats got up,

and they said, can we pray before you leave? Can you imagine that, Sister? It was touching.

That was something. I could say so much about God's grace, about where He brought me

from. He brought me from a situation for a crime worth twenty five years. So when I got

out, that night, I'll never forget, I looked back and the Spirit said, I hope you never go back

to it. So, needless to say, I'm seven years clean.

Resonant of Malcolm X's interaction with Bimbi in the Massachusetts state prison, Gray's narrative also

includes interaction with a figure who challenged his thinking about hustling and what being a productive

citizen means.

These self-accounts by the activists in this study leave the impression of men who are of and from

"the streets," and yet do not follow the pattern of typical representations. They are survivors of some of the

toughest years of public housing and violence in Chicago. They are working men but don't espouse nor

flaunt material trappings to illustrate middle class ambition. Their volunteerism, or activism, takes a more

specific form than just youth development or community service. What seems to link them is active

engagement with constructing and reconstructing neighborhood spaces and how they have politicized that

engagement to a praxis they believe develops black manhood. Given the cultural association of home with

women, the men's activism in and around homes (public housing, low income housing) suggest the need for

expanded theorizations about black male domesticity. In particular, similar to the evolution I pointed out in

Trumbull Park, Native Son, and Linden Hills, these men's specific conceptions of place and space seem informed

by their use of the home space, either as gathering places, platforms from which to point out class and racial difference, or renovation projects in service of social justice. Key themes that came up in all of the participants' interviews were the idea of public housing as diaspora, negotiation of raced and gendered spatial hierarchies, consciousness of image, the need for counter-surveillance to expand efforts, and concern over the disappearance of black men.

William Safran provides these features of diaspora in his article, "Diasporas in Modern Societies": "a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation [or a belief they are not accepted in the] "host" country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" (83-84). The continuance of this relationship to space (a retrospective idea of belonging) is what marks its significance.[123] When asked if he missed anything about Cabrini, Fleming replied, "Everything. The social network. Children playing. All of my family. I miss it all." The offices of the Central Advisory Council and SOYL are set in "homes." As aforementioned, the CAC is located in a Rowhome apartment. Its kitchen is used as the neighborhood candy store, and its conference table is where meals are often shared. I interviewed Maurice Gray in the upstairs conference area of one of the duplexes that he owns. It also had a kitchen stocked with wholesale candy boxes and an executive conference table. A large fish tank banked one of the walls in front of which a foosball table stood.

For these men, nostalgia for the old neighborhood is connected to the history of community in Cabrini Green and North Lawndale, not necessarily the built environment itself, although Fleming and Steele have hosted "poverty tours" for journalists to illustrate where buildings used to be. Exchanges in the CAC office often include "remember when" stories and tall tales before current information about upcoming actions are shared. Price recounts,

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[123] This diasporic affiliation extends to a national network of public housing residents. In addition to traveling to extra-local housing conferences, Steele says a part of his reading regimen includes staying connected through social media: "What I would do, if somebody posts something, I'll copy the link and read the story to it. Even small housing authorities, they'll post something, like Atlanta, the Shreveport Housing Authority…It ain't nothing but what they're trying to do in Chicago."

Just about everything I experienced for the first time in life I experienced [in Cabrini]. So it's like, this is, to me, what Italy is to the Italians. You know? This is my homeland since I don't have a traditional homeland. That's one of the things that sociologists can't understand about why people cling to Cabrini, why they cling to Robert Taylor. See, we don't have a homeland.

In a way, these sentiments expand the definition of diaspora and argue that the site of public housing constitutes a homeland. Though all of the participants maintain a different residence than the buildings of their childhood (or in the case of Gray, than his primary outreach site), each of them travel back and forth weekly, and sometimes daily to these spaces.

This maintenance of a "beforeness" of the space in memory and discourse constitutes a retrospective spatial negotiation.[124] It helps to rationalize the participants' continued presence in spite of living elsewhere. Not only do Cabrini and Lawndale represent a site of origins; they are also sites where the men feel "needed." Kinship networks are one pull of diaspora, but so is the reality of extended family's demands for resources. Price's family moved to West Humboldt Park when he went to college, but it didn't stop his allegiance to Cabrini:

I guess I moved back because once I graduated from school and came back, I was given a job here in Cabrini. Then I was given another job, but they always kept me in this area, because nobody wanted to work here. But I enjoyed it, you know. Immensely…We used to have something called Old School Mondays. You come here on Mondays, and I've seen people that I was in grammar school with. Everybody showed up on Mondays; it was two-three thousand people here. No stuff. None of that. Just people connected.

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[124] This is the same trait I point out in the character Buggy Martin and his family after their transition from the Gardener Building to Trumbull Homes.

The reunion Price mentions stopped occurring in 2010 because the size of the crowd required a permit. In fact, public housing "family" reunions have been taking place across the country since the dismantlement of high rise complexes under Hope VI. Picnics are held in parks nearby the empty lots or replacement housing. On Facebook, MySpace, and other online forums, former residents can be found reaching out to each other and commemorating the good old days. As the publisher of the *CHA*'s *Residents Journal* put it, "Robert Taylor Homes still exists—on the Internet" (Michaeli, para. 1). The participants are amongst many other residents who see past the mixed income development that has accompanied gentrification of the area. They still call Cabrini home.

A similar nostalgia for bygone times was expressed for a bygone manhood. Moreover, the concept of "homeland" seemed strongly tied to the participants' conception of manhood and masculinity. Fleming argues that black men need "a center" to work from. He and Gray seem to concur that putting men to work literally rebuilding their communities with their own hands and sweat is necessary to the formation of masculine identity. In one part of the interview, Gray mused,

> Arabs have a village. Greeks have a town. Jews have a town. Everybody got something but [black men]. There's no flower that can grow without roots. So [black men] need roots. The opportunity is here. You know, for example, they're tearing down our buildings in the Lawndale area. The mayor gave four million towards tearing down buildings, and most of those buildings that he's tearing down are in our communities, and that goes back to the men. Men can't stand up cause they on something else. They ain't even paying attention to this. It's being slid right past them.

Fleming also discussed the number of abandoned properties in Chicago and the potential for employment and vocational training they offered. However, in his formulation, helping black men to get on their feet through construction requires that those men be community-focused:

It's hard to tell a man stop selling dope, come help somebody, if he can't help himself, so now we're offering skill sets and trades to him, and a lot of brothers are coming around. Once a brother has proper training, he can do for himself. We got means. It's in us to have heart and courage, you know what I'm saying. But there's a lot of reprogramming that goes on with black men. First you have to get them out of the concept that it's about them. We was raised, it takes a community to raise a child, and we're the vanguard, as black men, of the black community. So a brother has to accept this role. And my thing is we don't help nobody if they ain't able to help nobody else. You gotta get some work in you.

To support this principle, Fleming shared an anecdote about a homeless male member of his organization who voted against a homeless woman in the group being housed before him. Fleming considered this a reflection of self-interest and misaligned priorities, but that it needed to be met with love and nurturing. "This brother had been led astray, bamboozled, hoodwinked, and taught to think in a European mentality of individualism. But I embraced him. I'm my brother's keeper. He's my cousin or my brother or in my blood because he's a black man. [The women in our group] explained that this mentality he had was damaging to the community; then they helped him occupy our eighth property. He's one of our top contractors now." The echoes of Malcolm X's language here is no accident. All of the participants expressed or articulated some influence from readings and ideals of Black Power or Black Liberation philosophies.[125] Examples of literature the participants reported reading include *The Art of War, The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* and documentaries on DuBois, Garvey, and the Black Panthers. The bridge between economic development, the construction of black families, and the dependence of the two on black manhood directly hail from these earlier philosophies.

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[125] Price and Gray also spoke of being influenced by Eastern teachings such as Daoism and Zen Buddhism, as well as Christianity. Price, for example, credited his Korean tai-kwon-do instructor with teaching him balance and how to connect history to spirituality.

Participants attached the symbolism of a "kingship" to these ideals as the ultimate expression of black masculinity. For instance, Gray stated rhetorically, "I asked God, I said God you didn't put me over here to be given kingship. You made me a king already. You brought me out here to the city—I don't even want to be over here—but since you got me here, give me a place I'm the king of. Because in order for me to be a man, I have to be king of my castle." Fleming made his views just as plain:

> A black man is just a brother who doesn't even exist. A black king is one who knows his rightful place is the throne and that he has a right to rule. I'm not arrogant when I say I'm a black king. I'm ruling right now. A vision is ruling, not me per se to dictate it. But a vision is ruling. A king sets forth a vision for his land. And the people embrace that vision and carry out that vision, with or without the king. Whether he's here or dead, that vision continues.

While some may be troubled by such an explicit version of patriarchy, this particular construction of identity has a history in the black community and appears productive for black male mentoring and esteem.[126] Participants never associated their definitions of masculinity with a need for deference of subservience from others, i.e., black women. In fact, absent of the sexism alleged of earlier black radicals, the participants each demonstrated a tangible respect for black women as forbearers and partners in the movement, as well as in business transactions. (For example, in meetings where both Price and Ms. Steele attended, Ms. Steele was more likely to be vocal during the conversation, but both would interject during decision making.) It seemed more so that participants associated black

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[126] Probably, the genealogy of using the terms King and Queen to refer to one another stems back to the reclamation of African origins in the late fifties, early sixties, but gained prominence in the late sixties and seventies. The rhetoric of the Nation of Islam, for example, reinforces this appellation as well as historical studies such as Cheikh Anta Diop's *The African Origin of Civilization*, published in 1974. Reminding black people of their relation to royalty (i.e., ancient pharaohs) was envisioned as key to instilling pride in the race.

masculinity with activism versus a domestic or sexual dominance. When asked to define a man, young Jonathan McIntosh replied without hesitation that "a black man is fighting for his people. He's fighting to help people to get where they are, like Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks."

This is not to suggest that gender relations in the participants' organizing are free from tension or hierarchies. At the time of our interview, Gray mentioned a dispute with his wife over how to negotiate a mortgage on one of their buildings and their different "systems": "My wife, I love her. But as long as I'm living in her castle, at some point, I can holler but I can't holler too loud." Steele observed the impact of gender and age on the housing struggle:

> Every time you see a meeting for housing, it's always older black women. Ain't no men out there to support. I think more men should step up. [Men] strike more fear into people. A lot of these guys round here are like, *Oh let Ms. Steele, you know, Ms. Steele will fight for us. She gone take care of it, her and Joanne, they gone take up for us. Let them fight.* But they're getting older. They need men to step up. If I was a person in charge of something and some old women came in and made some demands, how much of my attention do you really got? You pose no threat to me. I can outrun any one of you.

Steele was quick to add the caveat that men and women should work side by side, but his reflections reveal an implicit positioning of black men and women vis-à-vis an external "white" authority.

This gendered, racial tension came out in other instances during the research period. One time involved a discrepancy between two newspaper accounts of the founding of the Anti-Eviction Campaign. In the 2011and 2013 *New York Times* articles, Fleming is listed as the founder. But in a 2010 article that appeared in *The Chicago Reporter,* a white woman named Holly Krig is given credit as the founder of the Campaign. Fleming explains that the Campaign split into two camps shortly after its inception, partly because of Fleming's desired emphasis on housing black women and children *first* and partly because, according to him, during their first occupation of a property, "White folks didn't take no trash out or do shit." Another example of this conflict between gender and race occurred during one of the Common Ground coalition

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meetings I attended, which included a number of member organization in Chicago focused on public housing

rights. During the meeting, the executive director of the Chicago Housing Initiative (CHI), who happens to

be a young white woman, announced to the group that anyone who did not attend two dress rehearsals would

not be able to participate in an upcoming conference group the joint coalition was planning. This meant that

Shaw, an older black male and Local Advisory President of the former Robert Taylor Homes development,

would be left out because he had only come to one. Other members around the table protested this decision,

stating as a rationale that Central Advisory Council members were the only public housing constituents in the

coalition and, therefore, as subject matter experts didn't require a dress rehearsal. The discussion grew tense

when the CHI executive director claimed the decision was out of her hands, even though two voting

members of her organization—a black female and Latino male—were present and said they didn't mind.

Shaw was not allowed to participate because of the formality.

Hierarchies such as this seem counter-productive to furthering the progress of low income housing

movements, particularly when those most affected by housing injustice tend to affiliate with less formal

patterns of recognition and participation. While group members tend to be suspicious of a newcomer's

allegiance, whether black or white, male or female, a word of authentication from a veteran member serves to

quickly enfold the outsider. Generally, people unite around the common struggle. Problems arise when

cultural codes are imposed or transgressed because of the variance in class and sometimes political

understandings. Race and gender conflicts, particularly between black men and white women, have a long

history within social justice movements and can compound the intricacies of multicultural partnerships.[127]

The participants in my study see housing as an issue that primarily affects black people (or people of color).

That being the case, they reason that those voices should take primacy and "if you're white, leading the

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[127] These conflicts have their historic origin in the way black men and white women have been pitted against one another sexually, the black man as potential rapist if we interpolate lynching history, and the white woman as the ultra-feminine forbidden paramour per the cultural imagination in such texts as Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* and the 1975 film *Mandingo*. Literature such as Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman (1964)* dramatizes the violent struggle for power between a black man and white woman. However, black feminist essays might be most incisive in parsing out this gendered inter-racial tension. For example, see Frances Beale's "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in Toni Cade Bambara's anthology, *The Black Woman*. Beale points to white feminism's condemnation of male chauvinism, which they align black men with unequivocally. Black feminism tries to maintain a historical outlook to understand the effects and main victims of black male sexism.

organization that's dealing with black folk, you should be transitioning yourself out" so the people can lead themselves (Fleming). Fleming pointed back to his perception of the impact of this conflict on the participation of black men in these efforts, arguing that "it discourages black men from getting involved. A brother ain't gonna sit and listen to white folks for too long without having a lot of pent up animosity inside of him. And that's what's happening in the movement; there's so much division." Whether all division can be pinned to interracial and gender conflicts or whether it points more acutely to personal power struggles, how the conflicts are managed is more likely to impact the future involvement of parties of all races. Does who has the last word reflect who owns the space?

Rather than dwell on a complex about white female/male superiority, participants showed a consciousness of the politics and impact of their image construction in order to work with activists of different affiliations. Fleming's decision to change his attire from street gear to business casual is an example of image construction. Price acknowledged that he has two pair of glasses used for such ends:

> I got a pair of glasses that will make you think of Louis Farakkan—with the speckles. And
> that has one effect. But when I put on those dark sunglasses, it has a totally different effect
> on people in the room. Because they say, oh no, what the hell this militant want? Now, that
> doesn't mean I'm militant. But I just give them that image. I've even asked my friends who
> are psychologists, and they say yeah, white people—or any people—when they see black
> men with sunglasses on, they think of militancy in the sixties. The Malcolm X's, the H.
> Ralph Browns. So when I wear those glasses, it means I'm really pissed today, so I'm gone
> give you hell. But you've got to remember who you are and remember what you are.

Significantly, the participants discussed having to negotiate similar politics amongst different class levels of African Americans, criticizing the lack of middle class support for public housing in spite of some businessmen's desire to capitalize on what public housing CDCs have learned. "Niggers forget I'm still a nigger," Fleming warned, meaning his different dress did not alter his personality or political awareness. Instead, attire seemed to be used or recommended as a use to negotiate different audiences. Consequently,

citing the aftermath of the killing of Trayvon Martin, Price said he bagged all fifteen of his college-aged son's hoodies and put them in the basement.

This awareness of image extends to the participants' negotiation of the built environment. Fleming's discussion of the relationship of image to the built environment and to inequalities in social justice movements is worth quoting at length:

> If I take a hundred black men out there and say we're going to move somebody in a house, you're gonna have a SWAT team, a helicopter and everything else. But if I pepper that with some white faces, some Latinos young and old, then it's more acceptable now. So when we take over properties, it's good. We can actually get away with taking over properties in a black community. When [whites] tried to do it on the North Side of Chicago in a white community, they got arrested. Why are the blacks allowed to do it on the South Side? Nobody cares. You know what I'm saying? Nobody cares. But in [the white] community, you could see the different level of care. They were doing the same thing we were doing, taking over property that was abandoned for four years. But there is a certain level of how property is respected in a white community. We want to galvanize the people around and show how America is separate and not equal. Finally, for the first time—not the first time—finally, for something that don't happen that often, we have an opportunity to do something that white folks can't do. We can be the pioneers for something and lay the foundation for some.

Though here, Fleming speaks in racialized terms, it's important to distinguish the nuances in his rhetoric. His overall argument is that all property is equal; however, it is constrained to the symbolic value attached to it because of perceptions of *who* might be around it. He suggests that though the threat of blackness might accompany certain groups or numbers (i.e., a hundred black men), that threat can be lessened by the presence of those perceived as less black in comparison. Conversely, white groups may suggest the same threat as black men if they are engaging in activities coded as unacceptable in certain areas. Fleming uses the "look" of a multicultural group to conceal or recode blackness, while exposing a geographic or spatial inequity faced by

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black people in certain spaces. In concrete terms, the Take Back the Land or Occupy Homes Movement, which is an umbrella label for global and national organizing around eviction and foreclosure, argues that all land belongs to the people, and therefore, private property is an artificial assignation that merely distinguishes the caretaker not the owner. Banks rely on this logic when they kick homeowners out. Whether in Cleveland, Cape Town, or Chicago, I think what Fleming reminds us of is the visual economy that accompanies such a colonialist structure; race is still the overriding distinction apparent in spatial injustice. Pioneering a strategic use of race towards the ends of righting a form of racial injustice serves to ironize the truth.

> *First, the order is—I'm a human being, and secondly, I'm a black human being. And even if I wanted to forget that I was black, the world wouldn't let me forget.*
>
> *—Charles Price*

Outside of cultural pride, racial identity amongst participants seemed linked to a form of oppression externally imposed by a racist, capitalist social structure. When asked how important race is to the housing struggle, participants were emphatic. Race continues to be central to political economy in America, and access to housing key to economic mobility as well as power. The older three participants were convinced of a racial strategy to denigrate black men. They pointed to different housing and hiring application questions which some undocumented citizens can surpass but which homeless or formerly incarcerated black men cannot, for example, "have you been a felon?" Price told me about a meeting with HUD and Obama's Chief of Staff during a national housing conference during which he testified about the impact of federal housing programs:

We were arguing about a program called Section 3.[128] They asked me, why isn't

Section 3 enough? I said, well look at what we have to endure. Now, let's

say…when it comes to immigration, say you're not a citizen. When it comes to a

Section 3 job, they can't ask you if you're a citizen. You could be here illegally, but

you can still get that job. Black man go and he gets, *are you on the lease?* Well, wait a

minute, you didn't ask this one if he's a citizen but you want to know if I'm on the

lease. Now I may not be on no lease, but that might be my wife. *Oh, that don't count,*

so you're disqualified. They didn't understand that that's been happening, and it's going

to continue to happen. You see, because the thing is, in the pecking order, black

men are dead last.

This is just one example in which where one lives affects economic and political participation. In some cases,

not having an address can have more punitive ramifications than not having proof of citizenship. Fleming

equated this problem to a constitutional infraction:

We say black men are undocumented just like illegal immigrant. You can give

amnesty to illegal and undocumented immigrants who committed a crime to enter

this country, right? It's law. It is a felony to enter this country illegally. If you can

grant them amnesty for a felony, do you think black men should get amnesty for the

felonies they got? Are we a special protected class like them? Should we be a

special protected class? We have been undocumented in America since slavery

ended. We can't get jobs, we can't get houses. This is with or without a felony. A

high percentage of us don't have access to education, housing, health care. I don't

have health care. You know, I'm a two-time felon. I've got ten children. I've got

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[128] According to hud.gov, "Section 3 is a provision of the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act of 1968 that helps foster local economic development, neighborhood economic improvement, and individual self-sufficiency. The Section 3 program requires that recipients of certain HUD financial assistance, to the greatest extent feasible, provide job training, employment, and contracting opportunities for low- or very-low income residents in connection with projects and activities in their neighborhoods."

child support debt, you know what I'm saying, and they won't let me have a driver's license so I can get a job. So I face all of these barriers. Wouldn't amnesty suit me right? Won't my children benefit from my amnesty? I can become a more productive member of the community. But there's no program tailored to us.

Gray, who did obtain a Section 3 contract at one time, expressed concern that the "melting pot" construct of America would allow others to forget the injustices committed against black men without providing a balanced intervention. "Every other race identifies with their race; you have to," he said. He argued that gentrification was a part of a grand design employed by banks to benefit other races. Properties in neighborhoods such as his own (Lawndale) might go into foreclosure, and the bank allows it to sit unoccupied for years before "donating it at 100% to some other race's company" (Gray). In this scheme, the bank makes money back because its donation is deductible; the company is able to gain the property cheaply and attract renters; however, surrounding homeowners like Gray experience an inability to keep up with new property taxes due to the company's beautification of the area that *it* can afford. Grant described this as unfair competition: "It puts a struggle on me who has struggled through and still have my property, still have my mortgage on it. Now I got to compete with you; I got a 150,000 mortgage, you right next door to me with a $10,000 *investment*." Gray associated this with a racial strategy because the disinvestment-reinvestment process inordinately occurs in low income neighborhoods where the bulk of residents happen to be people of color. A part of all of the participants' activism included protesting for more minority contracts and subcontractors on housing-related projects, especially those orchestrated by HUD, and especially in those areas where public housing once stood.

The participants also engage in various forms of surveillance, and even counter-surveillance, as a means of enacting vigilance against economic competition and racial profiling, as well as in service of the occupation of abandoned properties. Gray, for example, traveled to a nearby Mexican neighborhood and videotaped Mexican street vendors pushing carts brimming with candy, *elote* (corn), drinks, and other goods along the street. Gray said he wanted to document the lack of an interruptive police presence to their

business, whereas he had experienced police harassment in the Lawndale neighborhood when selling candy alongside the young black men he employs. Price said he used to record traffic stops on his own time, noting the date, time, ethnicity, and the outcome of the stop. Unsurprisingly, his findings align with twenty-first century profiling statistics: "99.9% of the time, the person pulled over was not white. 90% of the people sitting there [in 26th and California—a county jail] are black. So we see a perpetuation of how, if we looked down or came from Mars, we would think that all black people are in traffic court, paternity court, and criminal court." Price is also helping to lead a petition against traffic and trespassing stops incurred by black men while visiting the occupied apartments of the Cabrini Rowhouse development, arguing that these stops also unequally target black men.

These examples of the participants' discoveries are not meant to be groundbreaking but rather a confirmation of an already-established pattern of unequally weighted police surveillance in black communities. It was the practice of the original group of the Coalition to Protect Public Housing, with whom I interned in 2008, to carry a video camera everywhere we went so they would always be prepared not only to document exchanges with police and government officials but also to record their own resistance tactics. Counter-surveillance is a resistance tactic. By collecting and accumulating one's own version of events or narrative, one authenticates experiences that never make it to or are suppressed by mainstream idea and governmental rhetoric.[129] My participants use this qualitative and quantitative data to mount strategic opposition in the legal, virtual, and economic realms.

Fleming speculates that these methods of observation have the potential to lead to more cross-cultural understanding. He speaks of increased global awareness after the market crashes in 2008 and 2009:

> Oppression happens in all three areas: it has a racial lens, it has a class lens, and it has a
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> privilege lens. After 2008, with the market crashes, I didn't want to limit our work just to

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[129] See, for example, *tellingourstory.org*, a website authored by the Central Advisory Council since 1998 as a counter-narrative to the Chicago Housing Authority's website advocacy for the *Plan for Transformation,* now *The Plan Forward*.

black folks, because that would push people away, because you had a lot of people suffering across the globe. It was an issue that needed to be led by black folks, don't get confused. But looking at it from a human rights perspective versus just for black rights, when [the U.N.] came here on housing, they had to look at all the sectors of housing. So being the chairperson, having to listen to all this testimony from different groups, I was like goddamn. Ms. Steele said that, "Me today, you tomorrow." She was a black woman. White folks once thought they was privileged—*Oh, this will never happen to me, they didn't red line my community, I didn't get hit with a predatory loan*—but their mortgages are under water. And they ain't black. Me today, you tomorrow, and tomorrow had come.

The Anti-Eviction Campaign continues to prioritize black women and children but also organizes on behalf of Latino families, the elderly, the disabled, and veterans. One of his lead volunteers is a self-identified middle class white male whose family lost their home in 2009. The strict competitiveness and high interest rates of the neoliberal age has made America what Fleming calls "an equal opportunity oppressor." While this volunteer's family had savings that helped them recover after their economic loss, most working class and low income families do not have such financial accrual and will be shuffled into the rental and Section 8 markets, or worse yet, not find permanent housing at all. This is what Price has labeled the "Jack Crow" effect, "Jim Crow's first cousin." It is a seeming dispersal of the economic effects of the discrimination that historically made African American men and women its primary targets. However, while there are no more Jim Crow signs and much has been publicized about the deep prejudice in institutional structures like lending and public housing at the same time that "moving to opportunity" and a marketplace-equality rhetoric have increased, black men disproportionately continue to be the greatest victims of race discrimination, largely because of the embedded nature of its practice but also because of the invisibility of the domino effects on their psychology and masculinity, outside of "black on black" crime. Participants seemed to suggest that sharing the common experience of houselessness might help others to empathize with the black man's plight while bringing greater nuance to his struggle.

While participants articulated the impact of their work in terms of its benefit to the entire community, an overarching theme that emerged was the grave concern for the disappearing of black men. Price calls black men "the New Vanishing America." The participle form of the words "disappear" and "vanish" convey what seemed to be an understood transitiveness or intentionality behind these verbs. In other words, several participants suggested that internal and external forces were amalgamating "to disappear" black men by design, both pointing to historical conditions of racial oppression but also to an impending crisis. "The black man don't have a role in this society," Fleming argued. Another participant expressed the worry that "it's bad right now, but it's only gone get worse if we don't do something." The example disparities participants used to support this thesis ranged from unemployment to education to incarceration. By no means a new argument, what seems particularly instructive is how participants envision that engaging men in taking ownership of the home environment—through landscaping, carpentry, and civil disobedience—is a way of multiplying the presence of "real" black men.

Discussion and Conclusions

Simon Duncan and Mike Savage point out that spaces don't themselves have inherent qualities of dominance (qtd in Forman 5). This is a direct tribute to Foucault's theories of discipline and power, which are—in a real sense—spatial. For Foucault, the panopticon is a spatial picture of state discipline because of its physical aggregation of bodies over which the state can exert surveillance and control (Foucault 206). The modern housing project high rise also fits this picture, sometimes reaching sixteen stories and concentrating the poor into overcrowded, isolated spaces, requiring an assemblage of social welfare forms, checkpoints, and tactics to keep this body under control. The high rise in conjunction with the American public aid system was an example par excellence of how the state accounts for and disciplines a collective of people and how its actions come to be embodied in a physical form. Residents, in turn, used word of mouth networks and the

structure of their buildings as a vantage point for counter-surveillance.[130] Despite the fact that the most

dilapidated high rises are no longer standing, the current system of housing vouchers and blue light cameras

that dot 'dangerous' urban neighborhoods accomplish a similar act of surveillance, and residents still push

back (and regulate each other) through sharing or withholding information, and cell phone footage of

criminal acts. So the ideas of how we should think about low income housing and even, by extension,

abandoned buildings, greatly depends on what discourse we are giving credence to. According to Forman,

space allows for the competition of discourses, "providing the basis for a system of relationships across

disparate fields" (14). Black men, and particularly black male housing activists, may construct very productive

and yet contradictory meanings of space as they filter their activism through actions of surveillance.

Apart from this potential, the current American context means that the impact of space on race and

gender often leads to a self-destructive formation of masculinity. Collins expresses this as the "strong men,

weak men" spectrum which subordinates black males to the dominant narrative of white masculinity, and in

doing so, creates scapegoat roles such as the mama's boy and irresponsible lover as responses to male-to-male

ineffectuality (74). Of course, "Others suggest that black men [develop] culturally specific forms of

behavior…to resist this racial oppression" (Major and Gordon qtd in Mutua xii). Behaviors such as idleness

on street corners and gang activity represent the extremes of surplus value and market competition within

one microcosm of our racist labor system. The resulting messages sent to black men and sent by them

confirm a conception of masculinity that rests on a heterosexual, tough guy paradigm. Although the males in

this study easily qualify as the "progressive black masculinities" that Mutua theorizes—"unique and

innovative performances…that…eschew and ethically and actively stand against social structures of

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[130] Neil Websdale points out in *Policing the Poor* that the numerous galleries obscured by chain linked fences and open air lobbies and walkways made it easy to spot law enforcement approaching the area and difficult to regulate drug and prostitution trades. So while this spatial reality was not necessarily to residents' benefit, it does show the neutrality of the architecture itself. Not that the architecture was absent of a structurally unsound design, but that its design could be used to police both residents and the actual police.

domination" (4)—they are also evidence that some more oppressive ideas of masculinity continue to be hegemonic.

The participation of black males in housing activism has only been captured marginally within the field of American sociology, and their representation within American literature lags further behind. Nelson Kofie's 1999 study, *Race, Class, and the Struggle for Neighborhood in Washington,* adopts some prioritization of men with its research question "What motivates and hinders community activism or collective action in a neighborhood of highly concentrated poverty?" In it, he demonstrates how the male members of the Fruit of Islam (FOI) were able to work with residents, housing authority managers, and policemen to negotiate relative stability from local drug dealers plaguing the Sun-Hope housing project. However, Kofie found that participants remained inconsistently motivated in overcoming their social marginalization. While my participant pool of six men is relatively small, they each coordinate with three to eight other male leaders to run their organizations and have sustained participation for over ten years (even under the constraint of considerable neighborhood change and displacement). In addition, they have all begun to motivate inter-generational collaboration amongst younger men. Their transformations into more conscious citizens provide testimonials similar to and, in some cases, in tandem to the conversion script of the Christian church and yet their religious and political identities mark them as liberal, and as perhaps more rhetorically compelling to the hip hop generation than other more conservative civil rights activists. Being insiders to their respective communities, with the benefit of simultaneously maintaining geo-socio-cultural ties elsewhere gives them the added vantage of being cultural and political intermediaries, or middle men. Traversing the urban space but with a geocentric focus on the home—or housing—their work is instructive in our understanding of spatial negotiation, black masculinity, and the use of racialization in the production of representations of the built environment.

As Feldman and Stall point out, "*Space appropriation* is a concept that has been used to explain the ways in which individuals or groups transform the physical environment into a meaningful and useful place, one that the individuals or groups consider their own, and in doing so, transform

themselves" (184). Renters, or the even the houseless, might "intentionally occupy [a]

setting…mark a setting with identifying signs, symbols, or activities; and/or simply represent a

setting in words or images (185). This type of spatial occupation is clear in the participants' daily

lives and how they interact in the neighborhoods of Cabrini and Lawndale, as well as their current

neighborhoods of residence. Their activism serves to mark public and low income housing as

diasporic territory. Through the creation of urban gardens, surveillance of territory encroachment

or competition, and literally taking over houses, these men demonstrate a belief in the universality or

public nature of space that expands the limits of what we might perceive as racialized built

environments like the "ghetto" that can only constrain its inhabitants. In fact, staying in the ghetto

and fighting for others' right to return is a counter-cultural logic that validates the space as a

legitimate, potentially liberating homespace worthy of fighting for. Moreover, Cabrini and Lawndale

activists' construction or reconstruction of space is enabled by a multiplicity of identities and

allegiances that they assume, which we might alternately code as nationalist, grassroots, domestic,

frontierism, and even somewhat feminist. They articulate a confidence in these identities and their

hybridity, acknowledging intellectual, spiritual, political,[131] and feminine influences. This, I believe,

somewhat extends Feldman and Stall's thesis of dignity in resistance. Seeing themselves as an

endangered species, as one participant calls black men, these activists continue to resist under the

threat of social death, operationalizing a dignity of *existence* that manifests alternately as a cool

resignation or dynamic vitality, depending on what the situation calls for.

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[131] Steele, for example, argued that he no longer votes his race. He votes his interests: "Just because [a person is]
Democrat, what if he don't want public housing? But your Republican is for low-income housing. That's who you
vote for. Don't go vote just because he black or a Democrat. Don't give your vote away. Make that person earn
your vote."

While the badman and "cool" black man tropes are promulgated throughout culture, I argue that these activists exhibit a more productive form of black masculinity that does more than enfold mythology and wish fulfillment into a rebel figure for a demographic that has experienced the particularly debilitating effects of white supremacy. My subjects' belief in and of display manhood is more in line with what Althea Mutua has coined "progressive black masculinities," masculinities that produce an ethical self to actively fight social tyranny (4). Mutua's version of masculinity has the following characteristics: 1) affirms black humanity as part of the human family 2) commits to the overall wellbeing of black people and the black community, spiritually and materially 3) are usually pro-black and often pro-feminist and antisexist 4) exhibits image-consciousness and manifests "intentional blackness" as part of an understood layered identity, real or imagined and 5) are committed to the political project of ending domination (Mutua 5-11). Progressive masculinities, therefore, stretch the representational spectrum of imagery of black men in American culture (Collins 85). In African American culture, the outlaw figure is a synonym for the badman or trickster figure whose toughness becomes the stuff of legends for others to emulate; in sociology, this figure is often a participant in an underground economy. In my study, participants functioned as outlaws in the Black Power and Civil Rights traditions. In other words, similar to Mutua's theorization, the men identified speaking against and resisting injustice as "intentional blackness," behaviors they associated with the historically constructed and imposed identity of being black in America. The toughness or narratives they affirmed did not seem for toughness' sake, however, or intended to build the African American folklore tradition, but specifically to support and motivate others to help block, shield, recuperate and rescue people and properties.

I found that the participants in my study took pride in being what I would call a Civil Outlaw, a performance or form of masculinity that enacts spatial transgressions in service of a humanitarian or community objective. Participants regaled me with feats of activism in which a

conflict with the law or some other external authority or societal boundary had been surmounted. Price, for example, recounted a pleasurable militancy in his choice of sunglasses to intimidate others during housing meetings. Steele suggested more young men were needed in the movement to "strike more fear into people." Gray told me a story in which he and other men in the community interrupted a church service and ran an exploitative preacher out of town. Fleming talked about blocking bulldozers and leading children to move furniture into bank lobbies to protest homelessness. These personal behavioral choices, convictions, and accompanying activism illustrate ties to the black radical doctrine of "by any means necessary" as well as familiarity with the "confrontational model of community organizing" ascribed to Saul Alinsky, which is "engaging in public sphere battles between those who have power and those who need to win power" (Feldman and Stall 221-2). The Civil Outlaw is highly aware and strategic in his rebellion. While not resorting to violence, he is comfortable making others uncomfortable (even afraid) for a higher end. As aforementioned, when my anger at the preventable property neglect that led to Curtis Cooper's death manifested in a more forceful manner at the HUD meeting, my show of aggression was commended. However, it should be noted that I don't think it was assumed that I was performing a masculine trait in the sense that I am formulating here.

While, of course, women take over spaces and may also revel in their own bravado or intimidation of others, what I am theorizing is a male trope, mainly because of my participants' self-conscious association of their performativity with maleness and because of their linking of certain outlaw behaviors to a trajectory of manhood. The masculine performance of the Civil Outlaw is different in definition from the "gender outlaw" discussed in Gender and Women, and even Cultural Studies. The gender outlaw is one who stretches the norms of conventional masculinity or femininity, but as a cultural performance in general "values daring, risk, rebelliousness, ingenuity, commitment, and sacrifice, as well as a flamboyant and edgy set of aesthetics" (Monto, Machalek, and Anderson). In that formulation, the concern seems to be for strategically expanding our understanding of gender. In the outlaw formulation my participants expressed,

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they seemed to uphold the catalogue of traditional masculine behaviors such as investment in patriarchy, shows of physical strength or restraint, and approval of aggression. In meetings, before reporters, and during our interviews, the participants always seemed conscious of how they might be perceived as men. For instance, their manner of storytelling often emphasized "manly" qualities in themselves or others.   However, the participants did not affirm gender bending. Their primary focus, as articulated to me, was expanding the societal representations and roles of *real* black men. Therefore, the construct of the Civil Outlaw is raced and gendered but in a way that links the development of one's identity to one's place in civil society. From the perspective of the activists I worked with, there would be little need for their outlaw behavior if they weren't coded and treated in certain ways due to their status as black men. For other outlaws, the relationship and ratio of identity to societal position might be different. Significantly, my subjects connected their outlaw performances to a longing for brotherhood as well as to a specific construct of men's political and social coming of age. Outlaw behavior seemed a primary expectation or necessity for men's progress, and furthermore, a way to redeem the arrest and incarceration rates that put black men on the wrong side of the law for reasons other than social justice.

The only way we're gonna change, like we tell brothers all the time, we have to break the law. [Bankers] broke the law, did they not? And they changed the law 'cause they broke the law, right? And so that's one thing we're gonna do. We're gonna break the law. We've been breaking the law. But for righteous reasons. Break it with a purpose. That's what we do.

--Willie J.R. Fleming

As Civil Outlaws, assuming an insider and/or outsider status when necessary, and mobilizing both civility and civil disobedience, the housing activists I interviewed readily occupy the margin as a position from

which to negotiate and resist. Rather than despising their construction as "the anonymous black man in public space [which] prompts an ambivalent societal gaze….[even suspicion]" as Calmore might typify them (138), these men relish taking the Other by surprise and eliciting a response. They challenge image constructions of their bodies and actions as stereotypically "black" by moving fluidly between expected and unexpected behavior. This is in line with bell hooks' idea of "outlaw culture"—"practical engagement…on the edge, as pushing the limits, disturbing the conventional, acceptable politics *of representations*" (5, emphasis mine). In other words, the subjects of this study exercise a critical invisibility that enables them to sit down at the table with traditional funding sources and critique them as the same institutional structures that they rely on for the benefit of their community work. Without using the term 'double consciousness,' the men reflect the DuBoisean ideal by maintaining an understanding of how race and gender are perceived and can be leveraged.

One of the most poignant quotes from Price was his admonition that we all have to "look at the world through black eyes. Not like somebody busted you in the eye, but you have to see the world through black eyes to see how far we've come, and what's even more frightening, is we've even further to go." This comment is both retrospective and progressive in my view. It interpellates the historically marginalized perspective of black people, a unique position; but it also posits the opportunity for a shared experience through its imperative, implying an overlap with the universal. What would it mean "to see the world through black eyes" when it comes to housing, and how does Price's statement reify the paradox of this dissertation? These questions continue the conversation of earlier chapters in an effort to discover just how important race is to the experience of home. Since apperception occurs through the senses, Price's words remind us that one major orientation to the world begins with sight. But because of the weight of certain social injustices, Price also reminds us that most black people are accustomed to seeing the world in double: through the lens of a racial history *and* through the lens of a sensory being. I think the former has thoroughly been explored and gets reduced in political discourse as "the race card" or "the chip on one's shoulder." The latter lens, on the other hand, is less affirmed by everyday language. To see the world through black eyes

from this perspective would mean seeing the visual structures that one would see from any eye but perhaps noticing nuances arising from particular conditions of experience.

Phenomenologically speaking, it's clear that these activists intuitively bracket or are able to suspend perception of the cultural at will. From their narratives, it can be gleaned that studying housing, working on housing, and commemorating housing has broadened their orientation. Steele's quaint descriptions, emphasizing the adjective "nice," illustrate the selection of memory and how features of home become more prominent in recollection depending on our associations. He did not, in his interview, for example, mention anything about run down interiors or backed up trash in hallways, which news articles about the projects often highlight. Gray's transformation of an apartment duplex into a multi-purpose meeting space echoes a corporate-minded emphasis on use value, true; but in reconfiguring a home for his own purposes, he also shows the cognitive facility wherein one assesses a space's functionality. Fleming and his organization reveal a more complex orientation to the space of housing: the impetus to rehabilitate a home requires an eye for seeing beyond the exterior and reifies the notion of housing as home, as a place needing people to define its boundaries. The further impetus to reconstruct the home in protest serves as political theatre for the fight for housing in general and, thus, keeps an eye on the theoretical and legal aspects of housing as embedded in the social. Interestingly, Fleming and his group also paint murals on the outer walls of abandoned housing as unsanctioned beautification projects, converting eyesores into art.

The particular condition of experience that all of the men share is having grown up in what some might consider substandard housing. Forced to deal with policy inequalities and private development conquests has influenced how they see what they see. I see their perspective of housing as a type of bricolage. While the majority of us might not have grown up in these environs or under certain rules, we may be able to relate through the very analogy of art: visually, it invites us to interpret its object differently, but the cognitive act of interpretation calls for some of the same mental processes. Moreover, there is a lesson in the fact that this way of seeing is passed down from father to son (Price to Steele, Fleming to McIntosh). It

means that some element of the perspective of housing can be constructed, can be taught. We can all share in this view of home.

This was my major finding as I was getting to know these men and reading *Invisible Man*. They taught me to see home in a new way. They showed themselves to be readers and creators of homespace, even while struggling against the imposition of that space being defined for them. Their activism demonstrates that physical manipulation and interaction with housing gives one more ownership and agency. Like Ellison's narrator in his basement, their construction of domesticity in the midst of an otherwise stigmatized geography leads to a provocative dialectic: on the one hand, we may have to endure or overcome the racialization of space; on the other hand, race by the nature of being constructed itself is already separate, even disparate, from the making of space. It can only be *one* of space's composite parts.

Alongside the arch I am trying to establish with this phenomenological approach to literary criticism, other findings in my discussion section are significant to public housing scholarship because they reposition black male housing activists as central to the movement and not simply shadow figures playing secondary, supporting roles. They speak back to the image of black men as passive, absent from the home, shiftless, and despairing of their status. Furthermore, they suggest that an efficacy of housing activism that deserves more theorization—the use of and interaction with the built environment itself to contest unfair housing and economic practices that inordinately affect residents of public housing and communities of color. They raise questions such as what is it about the space of the home or exterior of the house in particular that could potentially serve as a force of attraction for youth mentoring and development, as well as the formation of masculinity? And are we talking about an expanded notion of domesticity, or do we need a new term in order to explain how men might be transforming this non-public sphere in public, communal ways? Calmore argues, "To generate resistance to the construction of black males as unwanted traffic, the activist intervention must renegotiate culture" (140). I would say their activism renegotiates culture on both the symbolic or representational level *and* the economic level, thereby influencing the social. One example of this renegotiation is through the use of the built environment itself. For instance, on the gate of one of the

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homes the Anti-Eviction Campaign has been protecting from eviction, Fleming has hoisted a huge flag in the

Pan-African colors of red, green, and black alongside an equally huge yellow banner that reads, "MAKE

BANKS PAY." Below the words, a house is depicted with a fist coming out of it. This is a different

response to the oppressiveness of capitalism or economic exclusion than the cultural productions literary

critics and Cultural Studies theorists pay attention to in the black community: playing basketball or turning to

rap or breakdancing, among them. It is a very pragmatic response and particularly structured around the

house as a significant site of resistance rather than merely the street corner.

Actually, in spite of the explicit concern for the present and oncoming crisis facing black men, the

men were particularly future and solution oriented. Most of the participants' activism can be qualified as

pragmatic more so than theoretical. "We are the solution," Fleming pontificated. All of the activists

discussed their work as focusing on various aspects of economic and relationship development that

participants with them could pick up quickly. Not only are they engaged in policy advocacy, but construction,

education, filmmaking, entrepreneurialism, and consulting.[132] They are adamant about sharing information,

such as the fact that homeless men can use public aid as their address when looking for employment. In

some ways, their rhetoric intersected with the rhetoric of free or marketplace economics when they verbalized

ideals of self-sufficiency and competition. But importantly, their rhetoric was already contextualized within a

framework of the village ideal more so than the rugged individualism of twenty-first century capitalism. By

village ideal, I mean an ethic that views insiders of a community as participants in a kinship network with

respect for eldership, youth, and gendered cooperation at its root. So when they spoke of competition, they

mean competing and negotiating with those situated *outside* of the black community or the community's

interests. Gray shared, for example, that while he loved *elote*, or the Mexican corn on the cob sold by street

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[132] A story: Fleming gets approached by a bank about the next property he plans to overtake. The bank offers to employ the Anti-Eviction Campaign as a sub-contractor to fix the house up. Fleming says, "Look , once we get the equipment, we're gonna go start working whether we got a contract or not." The [banker] almost falls out of his chair. Fleming continues, "I said yeah. I'm gonna start on your properties and send your ass a check, an invoice. And I expect my check for fixing up your shit." The banker supposedly commends him for being creative. Fleming says, "We have no choice."

vendors, he was going to "love it so much" that he would learn how to make it. This command of knowledge, of the physical labor needed to get a job done, and of business savvy is highly practical. However, it also functions as a mode of power-knowledge that can be used to respond to the "discipline" that often constrains African American communities from external social institutions and structures. And it is the discursive level that leads me back to black male housing activists' contribution to African American literature and literary studies, in particular.

African American literary studies might take from this study means of reimagining the racialization of space, or uses for it. The men in this study acknowledged the historic conditions of housing where African Americans have been consigned to live. As Douglas Massey points out, it is a well-known fact that "the unusually high degree of residential segregation of blacks from whites stems from the operation of…(1) high levels of institutionalized discrimination in the real estate and banking industries, (2) discriminatory public policies implemented by whites at all levels of government, and (3) high levels of prejudice among whites against blacks as potential neighbors" (1203). Yet, the black male housing activists I interviewed and followed managed to organize multiracial groups around the home space as a universal construct while still prioritizing the salience of racism. Price initiated a phenomenological perspective of both the built environment and public housing residents by recalling that the Chicago Housing Authority turned Cabrini into "Frankenstein": "We were scared of Frankenstein when I was a kid, but who created this Frankenstein? The buildings ain't never shot nobody." Price touches on my earlier contention that new directions in literary studies might reimagine housing as a subject/object, and as such, metaphorically distinct from the peoples who inhabit it. He connected this to the argument that public housing residents needed to become human again by being *allowed* to be human in discourse, to be treated as subjects of their own destiny and not objects. So, granting housing the phenomenological attention of an important object makes it a viable subject to help us see the subjectivity of those who dwell in and around it. Focusing on the poetics of space does not dismiss the hierarchies we've been socialized to accept, but it does engage alternative ways of seeing those hierarchies.

As I argue in Chapter Three of this dissertation, from this study it can also be seen that men who have occupied lower income housing may think differently about the domestic space than women or middle class men do. Using the home as a vehicle for vocational training, widening the metaphors related to home to include a psychological royal terrain—but for the service of community building—both expand cultural notions we have of men *and* women when it comes to the domestic sphere. For instance, black male housing activists transform the old adage that "the home is a man's castle" by overlaying a political and social vision to that imaginary, rather than simply reinforcing man's patriarchal dominance over his wife and children. Similarly, black male housing activists present a different way of seeing the production of culture as emerging from 'ghetto' environments. Classically, the African American literary canon has relied on tropes of expressive culture (the blues, folklore, and literacy) to explain the African American response to the urban experience of residential segregation. As aforementioned, this leaves out a considerable group of people— namely men and women who do not perform "blackness" through the vehicle of the singing voice or literacy. By looking for or imagining more pragmatic responses to the urban experience, for the dignity of existence, ergo *being*, our readings of characters normally overlooked might be enlivened. This rereading could help bridge the gap between twentieth century spatial and discursive responses to racism and the twenty-first century's responses. There may be more of a continuum than meets the eye, rather than a radical break.

Contrapuntally, what black male housing activists might take away from the methodology and rhetoric of African American literary studies is an expanded use of narrative and interrogation of representations in order to examine their own notions of masculine identity and the body. Particularly, as these activists expressed concern for mentoring black youth, and especially displaced or disaffected youth, they might borrow rhetoric or methods to incorporate a more inclusive code of masculinity. In some cases, the language of my participants from Cabrini and Lawndale was quite conventional when expressing their perspective of male-female and male-male relations when describing their definition of manhood. As a female researcher, I was treated to the men's chivalry through ritualized acts such as assigning me an escort to walk me to my car or cleaning off its snow. I also observed one of the younger participants counseling his one year old son that "men don't cry," and I was told that women in the Anti-Eviction Campaign loved

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calling their men kings.[133] Probably the most traditional aspect of black masculinity the participants expressed

was a devaluation of homosexuality. The two oldest participants both discussed homosexuality as "men not

doing what men are supposed to be doing," as a form of feminization that detracts from the expression of

acting "like men." One of the participants clarified that his intent was not to judge or castigate

homosexuality, but rather, that he "was making a statement about 'womanizing' or feminizing the black

man:"

> We're pretty, we're not handsome anymore, Pretty Ricky, etc. We settle our conflicts like
>
> women. We're no longer men. We don't act like men. Guys' pants are so low, eventually
>
> they're going to take them off. They're making pimps out of themselves instead of taking
>
> care of the family; they're looking for someone to take care of them.

I took the participant to mean that he associated contemporary cultural behaviors like sagging and drag as out

of alignment with a more traditional performance of masculinity in which men "wear the pants" by

demonstrating self-sufficiency and family leadership. Albeit the performance of more blatant homosexual

gender identities seemed to converge with the disappearance of black men for the participants, their overall

espousal was one of acceptance and black male love, even using historically feminine terms like "nurture" and

"embrace." Possibly, on a spectrum on which being a king is viewed as the most liberating position for

heterosexual men, the construct of Civil Outlaw (as an assemblage of masculine behaviors more so associated

with justice than gender difference), could fill the gap between assumptions of non-masculinity or femininity

usually associated with the homespace. Therefore, homosexual or even "queer" or "effeminate" men need

not be the straw that breaks the camel's back in housing (or race) movements. Common ground with

everyone is needed to fight injustice (Calmore 151). Given that black transgendered people make up five

times the overall rate of homeless in America (Morris 107), there is an urgency to continue to add to the

plethora of identity containers sutured together to express black masculinity, and moreover, housing justice.

African American literary studies in particular has negotiated similar terrain within the canon and surrounding

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[133] This address was reciprocal; the women were also referred to as queens in spoken discourse.

discourse during the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, the Black Feminist Movement and Cultural Wars of the Eighties, and even work considered to be post-soul, i.e., work after the golden age of the Civil Rights Movement's imperatives and assumptions.

African American literary studies is also well-heeled in resources that it could offer to activists during national housing conference exchanges, for example, or more local collaborations. As literary scholars, we might contribute rhetorical analyses of the literature of housing authorities and their partnering private developers; help with weighing and leveraging the effects of historical metaphors and "characters" in spatial narratives; or even point to persuasive uses of representations in the hopes of changing the current neoliberal discourse. Because political and cultural rhetoric seem to take the negative representation of some housing spaces as "real" or indicative of social reality, the effects of this assumption domino in policy, urban planning, and even cultural interactions based on some housing spaces being considered more legitimate than others. Since beliefs about urban housing have already proven to be mythological, the acknowledgement of myth creates opportunity for new foundational discourses to emerge. Scholars could interject alternative poetics and aesthetics that might help recuperate 'ugly' spaces as potentially inhabitable, as metonymic of bodies needing shelter, and as a catalyst for more discussion around housing justice. Moreover, because of our training, we can simply lend our research, writing, and teaching skills. One of the beauties of black radical intellectualism in the sixties and seventies was its concerted effort to transfer knowledge to non-academic community members. This perceived cultural responsibility, in participant observation, is translated as mutual reciprocity. There is room for community partnerships like this to be fostered in literary studies all the while we examine uncovered intersections between narrative and place.

One of the largest takeaways from this chapter, and I hope this dissertation, is the necessity of assembling an assortment of stories to understand our social construction of space. Racial reality is socially constructed but not as easily deconstructed. We need different angles, methodologies, and pragmatism to fully understand and *change* the effects of racist practices in housing and profiling. But we may also need a multi-lens to fully grasp the positive uses of abject spaces in order to add to our basis of contesting their

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objection. As case in point, in 2010, Magee and King presented on the "psychotherapeutic process" of men in public housing; what important questions about the psychology behind black men and their conception of subsidized housing would shed light on how to make the space more welcoming to them? It is not my argument that one discipline or method validates the other and that its insights are not self-standing. I am arguing, however, that a conglomeration of unified perspectives from academic disciplines are often convincing as rhetoric within the field of public policy. From an ethical standpoint, housing activists aren't much interested in academic intervention unless those interventions are equally invested in the pursuit of equality and, at the end of the day, that there is more practical help given than aesthetics or theories decided. Since the current reality in African American literary studies, and definitely in American culture at large, is that we face a paucity of balanced representations of black men in low income housing, our body of texts would benefit from more interdisciplinary narratives, as would social science. This interdisciplinarity would add a richer reflection to our studies of how black people have negotiated the urban, and perhaps provide a sorely needed, multi-vocal response to public housing policy.

CONCLUSION

Thinking beyond Race to Space

Figure 14. Homan Street, Chicago, 2015

In her most recent book, *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice,* bell hooks voices what is now common knowledge: "Today, class differences coupled with racial integration have created a cultural context where the very meaning of blackness and its impact on our lives differs greatly among black people. There is no longer a common notion of shared black identity" (2). The admission of this reality has been in circulation since at least the eighties, when scholars and community intellectuals attempted to grapple with the emerging split between black baby boomers whose education or steady employment had won them comfortable middle class status; *post-soul* cultural hybrids indulging in multiple political and consumer identities; and the so called underclass,

whom many assumed would never overcome the impact of the crack epidemic. Race, for the past few decades, has only seemed trenchant as an organizing principle in the aftermath of police brutality or unjust criminal cases. It's surprising then that Kenneth Warren's monograph, *What Was African American Literature*, made so many waves. It's arguably an appropriate discursive response to conversations people were already having in so many other areas of culture. Some have argued that the universalization of the foreclosure crisis in 2008, the election of a black president, and the erasure of one of America's last racial scars (public housing) is proof of a new historical era and thus requires new ways of thinking about old ills of representation; and with the latter half of this claim, I agree. I would also assert, however, that it is possible—and necessary—to keep race on the table since capitalist white supremacy and ethnic factions are still in play around the world that use race indiscriminately to promote privilege and division. The side by side proximity of people's divergent experiences concerning race is one reason that it should continue as part of the discussion. Like three houses on a city block reflecting variant stages of neglect, the opportunities people have to escape racial discrimination are not the same. Compassionate redress calls for strategy.

African American literature to my mind provides insight into productive strategies for working through changes and fluidity in identity. It is not just a retrospective canonizing project, as Warren avers, it is a historical record of the debates, paradoxes, triumphs, and challenges of establishing Presence within the American social landscape. As historical record, it functions as part of a critical memory of American social reality, reflecting the ways black people have acclimated to the modern world, industrialization, liberal democracy, and the shifting geographies of the urban. I don't know if that function, per se, is a race thing. Certainly, African American literature teaches us about more than just race. However, the beauty of literature is that it can record and contest numerous ideas at once. It is sometimes the conventions of our reading that are slower to reflect this fact.

If thinking beyond race, it should not be assumed that the important work of methodologies invested in race should be discounted. Black Feminist Literary Criticism, Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Studies, for example, are integral to sustaining an intersectional critique of the neoliberal leanings of the "corporate university"; these schools of thought are ones that help expose how market-structured admissions and publication expectations may covertly privilege class, sex, and whiteness. To think beyond race simply means to expand the boundaries of race's interface with other facets of contemporary life and to be willing to subordinate the lens of race when other struggles for survival are more pressing. The issues around housing are such that they both cut across all demographics of society but also disproportionately affect people of color. Fourteen percent of the homeless population in the United States was black. Forty percent of veteran families in homeless shelters was black, since black veterans are twice as likely to be homeless than other racial groups (Morris 98). This means that while a focus on homelessness or housing injustice touches everyone, it also specifically takes up the social disadvantage of race. Without having to reframe its purpose, African American Literary Studies is in a prime position to illustrate how racial justice and housing justice are related. Since the themes of home, place, and identity are so central to its fiction and poetry, its content aptly shows the history of housing relations in America and raises questions for their future.

Once again, *Invisible Man* proves instructive. Just before the narrator goes into hibernation, riots break out around Harlem. The narrator follows the character Dupre as he executes a planned protest that involves burning his own housing tenement to the ground. The narrator is stunned, not only by the man's daring and commitment to his action but by the successful organization of community members the man has been able to effect:

> Below us, men shot downstairs five and six steps at a time, moving in the weird light
>
> of flash and flame in long, dream-bounds. On each floor as I passed, smoke and

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flame arose. And now I was seized with a fierce sense of exaltation. They've done

it, I thought. They organized it and carried it through alone; the decision their own

and their own action. Capable of their own action… (548)

The passage conveys the sureness of collective action through the description of the men's

quickness. The alliteration of the letter "f"—"five, flash, flame, floor, fierce"—resounds like the

pounding of the hammer the narrator hears echoing in the night (546). Unlike the other attempts at

collectivity around race or the Brotherhood's urging, the narrator is surprised at the residents'

effectualness. The repetition of "their action" also shows his surprise at the agency they exhibit.

Usually discussed in terms of its interrogation of racial realism and ironizing of American race

relations, this moment as a key turning point for the narrator also asks to be interpreted relative to

its signification on the housing struggle. In fact, there are several scenes and settings that advance

the plot, which all center on housing injustice or disparities: the eviction of the elderly couple; the

primacy of the Men's Shelter; even Mr. Norton's voyeurism and presumption to enter the log cabin

of Trueblood. These settings cause the narrator to question his own sense of identity and belonging

to space. More than once, the novel seems to show that a sense of self in space can only be

achieved after one has had enough. The crowd who moves the elderly couple back in and the

residents who burn down their own building are galvanized into action by a history of poor living

conditions. While the novel depicts the unreliability of race for organizing a collective, it portrays

the coherence that housing rights more often provide. *Invisible Man's* influence is in its criticism of

the artificiality of fixed identity, or essentialism; its power from my perspective is in the novel's use

of the built environment as a catalyst for activism.

   The trope of housing in African American literature does not just hold potential to shed

light on housing politics but academic inquiry as well. A part of what I have tried to argue in this

dissertation is the prioritization that history and time seem to get in our discipline over

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considerations of space. Studies that mention geography primarily discuss space as productive for cultural expression. They have also, as Madhu Dubey points out, favored the South, even the Gullah Islands, as spaces of origin and authenticity because of their diasporic relationship to the plantation and Africa (147). This is twenty plus years after Michel Foucault and Edward Soja identify the preeminence of history as a philosophical problem. Understandably, history is less burdensome to shrug off for those who don't experience its ramifications personally. The devaluation of the black body has a history that's hard to shake. The ships of the middle passage, the auction block and the lynching tree also have resonance as historical spaces whose tendrils still reach out and corrupt public perception of the worth of black life. Yet the importance of enriching critical study is a separate, intellectual enterprise.

If as hooks argues, that "art is necessarily a terrain of defamiliarization" (4), taking a discussion of housing in literature seriously might mean more than performing readings of literary writing but allowing different methods to be read against each other in order to interrupt conventional discourse. When biases in criticism limit the imagination of interpretations, they limit the opportunities for discovery. This is a similar expression of hope for a critical opening as Michele Wallace's call in the early nineties for attention to be paid to African American visual arts. Shifting the terrain to a more paratactic analysis of history and space could lead to new objects of study, as well as the discovery, or rediscovery, of overlooked literature. Case in point: Mat Johnson's 2003 novel, *Hunting in Harlem*, recounts an inmate re-entry program in which a former African American studies major becomes the head of a Harlem real estate company by killing off undesirable residents. Johnson paints a bleak picture of the slow corruption of the bibliophile by market interests. The book also portrays the underside of black gentrification. In a particularly creepy passage, after the protagonist relives his complicity in a murder, the third person narrative sublimates the protagonist's consciousness to a culpatory "you":

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It takes a while to build a home out of a Harlem shell. You start with the abused

structure, long the victim of poverty and neglect, and you salvage what little you can

from it: a façade, some original woodwork, a porcelain fixture nobody in fifty years

could figure out how to rip out for profit. Put a new roof on top to keep the

elements from causing further damage, then under its protection you can begin to

develop what's inside of it…To look at his prize in the beginning, Snowden's

brownstone seemed a hopeless cause, a place that would never be inhabitable let

alone one he'd enjoy living in. But it was, like all things in Harlem, a matter of small

steps and patience, dedication to a vision, the determination to see it to fruition no

matter what the cost. (268)

References to the built environment as victim of neglect and neighborhood decay provides a

commentary on the history of the neighborhood. The building is also a metaphor for the

protagonist himself; as a former inmate, he is the shell that has been rehabilitated. The novel asks us

to think about whether depersonalization is the only alternative to recidivism, and further, to ponder

what it means affectively for a structure to be "abused."

Tangentially, a focus on material culture could be an interesting pursuit for African

American Literary Studies. As mentioned in Chapter Two, following the lines of Bill Brown's

methodology in *The Material Unconscious* and "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny,"

we might consider the histories and affect of objects like Bub's shoeshine box or the ways people

construct home through objects and those objects' relevance to African American history or specific

locations. I am thinking of boom boxes, afro picks, basketballs, and the like.[134] Then too, thinking

more about space could lend itself to interrogating the generic codes that have constrained not only

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[134] It would be interesting to imagine how the impermanent may transmit the idea of permanence in otherwise ephemeral settings.

critics but writers. In Gloria Naylor's novel, *Bailey's Café*, the imaginative "real real mobile" space

that lets folks "take a breather" is threatened by the idea of a child being born on the street (28).

While on the one hand, the novel argues the travesty of young children needing a refuge like the

café, it also falls too easily into the trope of the potential antichrist. The baby is consigned to a

simulacrum of a college campus rather than an otherworldly place like the café. Although the text

wants to reinvent the spaces possible for its impossible subjects (cross dressers and prostitutes),

Naylor seems unable to resist the discourse of uplift and education. I wonder if this narrative choice

has anything to do with the high esteem which college environments hold in African American

culture, and yet, college campuses are another site in which splits in black identity are clear. Far

from being irrelevant to the twenty-first century, the critical analysis of illuminations and paradoxes

of space is a strong argument for shifting the lens of reading African American literature.

While thinking about space may not be required by everyone's work, I would argue that

spatial concerns do dictate a spatial practice. There continue to be too many political implications of

writing about the spaces where many African Americans are likely to live to avoid this ethical

obligation. That is, although the most visible markers of the ghetto have fallen, we have not escaped

their legacy. It may seem odd to try and speak to this socio-political and economic quandary

through literature when, after all, literature could be named as one of the primary culprits of the

uneven representations of people in low income housing. However, spatial analysis in literature

could help black collectivity in the future by pointing to housing solutions and housing injustices,

which generally fall along raced lines. Moreover, professors of African American literature have a

unique opportunity in their classrooms to shape how students see these spaces differently than the

media presents them. This cognizance is important since some of these students will graduate and

become the faces of gentrification. We need to teach about these spaces in multiple ways to help

students think outside of common assumptions.

The notion of home can serve as a point of consensus or commonality more universal than race. Home is where one returns at the end of the day. It is wherever one has experienced shelter or refuge, and so it is not dependent on property listings or a fixed address. Rather than emphasizing racial projections on the home or cultural effects that might be considered "black" (the use of African flag colors, cultural fabrics, or African American memorabilia), which are symbolic but superficial, 'home' can be established apart from race phenomenologically, as a space of nurture and rest, as well as reflective of kinship roots. This is an extension of the argument that says that migration and diaspora are key organizing tropes for establishing "blackness" as the affective outcomes of a history of displacement. Everyone can agree that a place to call home is necessary even if they disagree on forms and location of housing.

What I hope can be gained from this study is a rethinking of how we privilege certain forms of analysis and the boundaries between reading as practice and reading as praxis. To risk this shift is an intellectual exercise, but it also a political project. I have tried to make the case that representations of low income housing reveal the problem of representations of low income men. Although it has been proven that poor black women are the primary demographic of evictees, poor black men are equally if not more vulnerable to evictions, homelessness, and criminalization within or near homespaces. In literature, they are likely to be dismissed or overlooked. In sociological literature, they have been unevenly represented. Is it possible to make black men the subjects of study to render them more "knowable" without the motive of assimilation or objectification? I hope so.

By showing how African American housing activists take ownership of space, it inverts their invisibility and brings to light a domesticity that is half patriarch-half outlaw. It might also help with our focusing on housing wrongs against black men rather than wrongs inflicted by black men as an organizing or discursive tool. The effort of adding positive representations to the imagery that exists

of black men is also a proactive response to their cultural designation rather than a reaction to their deaths and disappearance. If we don't accept that segregation always and completely totalizes social space, new sides of familiar African American literary characters and genres open up but so do new sides (or unrecognized sides) of black men. Heidegger intones,

> However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the *real plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses. The real plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase of the earth's population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell.* What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *real* plight of dwelling as *the* plight?

Lifting our imagination to the realm of ontology, this argument suggests that we are linked to each other in our experience of home, or our misunderstanding of what home really is. For Heidegger, dwelling is the preservation of our own humanity. This means we have a common fate. By helping invisible men to find a home, we also redefine home for ourselves.

CODA

Curtis Cooper's name gets few internet hits now, and the Cabrini Rowhomes remain cordoned behind a black iron fence. I remember my first time walking onto Hudson Street with the high rises in the distance, tamping down the anxiety others had inspired because of media representations of Cabrini at the time, and because of how some black people, including some of the residents, seemed so surprised that I would want to intern there. As if there was no way that I could belong, or as if it was impossible that I would want to. I can remember reassuring myself that all would be okay and then setting foot on the street, and then realizing…here was a neighborhood like any other. There were wreaths on doors and flowerbeds that someone had tended. There were men on the corner, but they looked like the old men who sat on milk crates and nursed paper bags in the southern town of my youth. I knew that with these men resided cultural capital and geographic knowledge. They had probably seen the neighborhood change and shift, as it was continuing to do that day.

Three years later, I remember feeling an inexplicable sadness that these buildings would be torn down. Their physical presence had come to mean something to me in terms of belongingness and the power of resistance. As a nonlocal of Chicago, they also symbolized a community where I had come to be accepted and had generated for myself a new way of looking at space. In Roy DeCarava's application for his Guggenheim Fellowship to produce *Sweet Flypaper of Life*, he wrote of his photographic goal: "I do not want a documentary or sociological statement, I want a creative expression." Ironically, after exploring the overturn of a reliance on cultural expression, I find myself wanting to turn to my own form of art, to say something beyond what the language of academia afforded me in this project. I think this is an elegy:

Figure 15. Cabrini Rowhomes, Chicago, 2012

"Conditions"

Absinthe. Absence.

A fence spires up to keep me away from you – you out,

Me in. Prim white shutters   black   iron   lace.

No face in the window reminds us

Of home, that home needs body

Like sky needs air. Enigmatic slopes,

Invisible algebra. Bruhs

Don't strut this way no more,

Only X:

> *Remember? The rite of the brown paper bag*
>
> *Fist, chest, pass*
>
> *Slow as worm*
>
> *Before the law came down?*

We were on a climb. We would have to climb

A hundred Rapunzels' braids to swing through there now.

Chained off, boxed in, house-thinned,

Brown bodies missing   so rich the ivy overtaking the place.

"[Public housing] makes a ferocious beast of man, a martyr of woman, and a degenerate of

the infant, it disorganizes and ruins the family and menaces the future of the country."[1]

Plus, the fence is so beautiful.

Fishnet fingers pointing infinitely   pure in function,

        Hear, *Didn't we almost have it all?*

There is a house there that cannot be lived in.

I am there, empty,

Double-barred from you.

---

[1] Quote adapted from Conrad Barnaby's 1988 history of absinthe: *Absinthe History in a Bottle*, from Chronicle Books, p. 116.

Figure 16.

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APPENDIX

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research

Institutional Review Board
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820

January 16, 2013

Cameron McCarthy
English
360 Education Bldg
1310 S Sixth St
M/C 708

RE: *Narratives from the Invisible Men: Space Race and Housing*
        IRB Protocol Number: 13355

Dear Cameron:

This letter authorizes the use of human subjects in your project entitled *Narratives from the Invisible Men: Space Race and Housing*. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved, by expedited review, the protocol as described in your IRB-1 application. The expiration date for IRB Protocol Number 13355, is 01/15/2014. The risk designation applied to your project is *no more than minimal risk*. Certification of approval is available upon request.

Copies of the attached date-stamped consent form(s) must be used in obtaining informed consent. If there is a need to revise or alter the consent form(s), please submit the revised form(s) for IRB review, approval, and date-stamping prior to use.

Under applicable regulations, no changes to procedures involving human subjects may be made without prior IRB review and approval. The regulations also require that you promptly notify the IRB of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated side effects, adverse reactions, and any injuries or complications that arise during the project.

If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me or the IRB Office, or visit our Web site at http://www.irb.illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Anita Balgopal, Director, Institutional Review Board

Attachment(s)

c: Crystal Thomas

ILLINOIS

Title of Project: Narratives from Invisible Men: Space, Race, and Housing

Graduate Researcher: Crystal Thomas, PhD Candidate in African American Literature
Responsible Project Investigator: Professor Cameron McCarthy, Dept. of Education

Purpose of the Study:
Your interview is a part of a larger dissertation project that studies race, activism, and the representation of housing in African American literature and culture. This project is being researched by Crystal Thomas, a teacher and graduate student of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The project is being supervised by Professor Cameron McCarthy in the Department of Education

Through an in-depth interview, we would like to ask you about your experience as a housing justice activist and your identity as an African American male. Your responses will shed light about the role of black men in historical and contemporary housing struggles as well as the impact of housing on one's conception of race.

We will agree on a mutually convenient time and place for our discussion. If you agree, your responses will be recorded in handwritten notes and tape recorded. If you do not wish to be publicly identified, you may choose a pseudonym to accompany your narrative (replacing your actual name). All recorded data and notes from your interview will be stored in a locked drawer in the locked office of Professor McCarthy.

The session is expected to last one to two hours. There are no physical risks expected as a result of your participation, but because of the nature of in-depth interviews, there may be some emotional discomfort involved in your participation. In recalling and recounting your memories and experiences, you may touch upon emotional difficulty, embarrassment, or worry if information emerges that may normally be considered personal.

Every effort will be made to protect your privacy. However, you may decline to answer specific questions and/or you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. There will be no penalty for making such a decision.

In light of the demolition of public housing and the scarcity of affordable housing in large, urban areas, this research project is important because it may provide participants an opportunity to help memorialize public housing as well as illuminate the difficulty and benefit of securing affordable housing. Such an experience may prove personally rewarding to the participants in this study.

*Participants will not be paid for their interviews but there will be no cost to participants for taking part in this study.

The results of this study are intended to be published in a dissertation but may also be shared as a journal article, magazine article, conference presentation, exhibit and/or a book. Should you have

any questions or concerns about this project, please feel free to call Professor McCarthy at 217-244-4953 or email him at cameron.cmccart1@gmail.com.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 (collect calls accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant) or email at irb@illinois.edu.

As a study participant, you will be given a copy of your consent form for your records.

I, _____ (full name), hereby give permission for the research team of *Narratives of Invisible Men* to record, transcribe, and consider this interview for publication.

I understand that I have complete control over how my interview can be used, and can choose to remain confidential if the interview is used in any form. (This includes, and is not limited to, portions of the interview in newspapers, magazines and the Internet.)

I will receive a transcript and/or recording of my interview from Crystal Thomas for my personal use upon my request.

My interview (in full or excerpted) will not be published without my consent.

The research team for this project will not share my contact information with anyone else.

I have read and understand the above consent form and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been offered a copy of the consent form for my records.

Please mark with a check or an x your consent to any of the following:

_____I agree to be audiotaped for this study.

_____I agree that my narrative may be used in future publications or presentations.

_____
Signature

_____
Date

_____
Phone #

_____
Other way of getting in contact

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
APPROVED CONSENT
VALID UNTIL

JAN 1 5 2014

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research

Institutional Review Board
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820

February 27, 2014

Cameron McCarthy
English
360 Education Bldg
1310 S Sixth St
M/C 708

RE: *Narratives from the Invisible Men: Space Race and Housing*
        IRB Protocol Number: 13355

Dear Dr. McCarthy:

Your response to stipulations for the continuing project entitled *Narratives from the Invisible Men: Space Race and Housing* has satisfactorily addressed the concerns of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) and you are now free to proceed with the human subjects protocol. The IRB approved the protocol as described in your IRB-1 application, by expedited continuing review. The expiration date for this protocol, UIUC number 13355, is 02/25/2015. The risk designation applied to your project is *no more than minimal risk*. Certification of approval is available upon request.

Note: Previous IRB approval for this protocol expired on 01/15/2014. All research activities should have stopped between 01/16/2014 and 02/25/2014. Data collected during this period may not be used.

Copies of the attached date-stamped consent form(s) must be used in obtaining informed consent. If there is a need to revise or alter the consent form(s), please submit the revised form(s) for IRB review, approval, and date-stamping prior to use.

Under applicable regulations, no changes to procedures involving human subjects may be made without prior IRB review and approval. The regulations also require that you promptly notify the IRB of any problems involving human subjects, including unanticipated side effects, adverse reactions, and any injuries or complications that arise during the project.

If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me or the IRB Office, or visit our Web site at http://www.irb.illinois.edu

Sincerely,

Anita Balgopal, PhD
Director, Institutional Review Board

Attachment(s)

c: Crystal Thomas

ILLINOIS

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Title of Project: Narratives from Invisible Men: Space, Race, and Housing

Graduate Researcher: Crystal Thomas, PhD Candidate in African American Literature
Responsible Project Investigator: Professor Cameron McCarthy, Dept. of Education

Purpose of the Study:

Your interview is a part of a larger dissertation project that studies race, activism, and the representation of housing in African American literature and culture. This project is being researched by Crystal Thomas, a teacher and graduate student of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The project is being supervised by Professor Cameron McCarthy in the Department of Education.

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We will agree on a mutually convenient time and place for our discussion. If you agree, your responses will be recorded in handwritten notes and tape recorded. If you do not wish to be publicly identified, you may choose a pseudonym to accompany your narrative (replacing your actual name). All recorded data and notes from your interview will be stored in a locked drawer in the locked office of Professor McCarthy.

The session is expected to last one to two hours. There are no physical risks expected as a result of your participation, but because of the nature of in-depth interviews, there may be some emotional discomfort involved in your participation. In recalling and recounting your memories and experiences, you may touch upon emotional difficulty, embarrassment, or worry if information emerges that may normally be considered personal.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Every effort will be made to protect your privacy. However, you may decline to answer specific questions and/or you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. There will be no penalty for making such a decision.

In light of the demolition of public housing and the scarcity of affordable housing in large, urban areas, this research project is important because it may provide participants an opportunity to help memorialize public housing as well as illuminate the difficulty and benefit of securing affordable housing. Such an experience may prove personally rewarding to the participants in this study.

*Participants will not be paid for their interviews but there will be no cost to participants for taking part in this study.

The results of this study are intended to be published in a dissertation but may also be shared as a journal article, magazine article, conference presentation, exhibit and/or a book. Should you have

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I understand that I have complete control over how my interview can be used, and can choose to remain confidential if the interview is used in any form. (This includes, and is not limited to, portions of the interview in newspapers, magazines and the Internet.)

I will receive a transcript and/or recording of my interview from Crystal Thomas for my personal use upon my request.

My interview (in full or excerpted) will not be published without my consent.

The research team for this project will not share my contact information with anyone else.

I have read and understand the above consent form and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been offered a copy of the consent form for my records.

Please mark with a check or an x your consent to any of the following:

_____I agree to be audiotaped for this study.

_____I agree that my narrative may be used in future publications or presentations.

_____I give permission for my name to be presented with my interview responses in research reports and presentations.

_____	_____
Signature	Phone #
_____	_____
Date	Other way of getting in contact