D Society and Space

Creative extraction: Black towns in white space

Danielle M Purifoy
University of North Carolina, USA

Louise Seamster
University of Iowa, USA

Abstract

This article interrogates the "anomalous" case of Black-founded towns, so-called because of their relative absence from discourse on Black place, their unique struggles for self-determined development, and their externally ascribed narratives of absent or dysfunctional governance, frequently invoked to explain their lack of access to basic infrastructure. We propose illuminating some of these so-called anomalies through Charles Mills' "racial contract," which we argue structures space at a deeper level than traditional legal arrangements and allows us to look relationally at Black towns in "white space." We also rely on Cedric Robinson's "racial capitalism" to demonstrate how white space develops through extraction of value from places racialized as nonwhite. Through the case of Tamina, Texas, we argue that Black towns specifically, and Black places more generally, experience racially predatory governance and resource extraction, often by nearby white places, under the guise of following mundane rules of legal jurisdiction, standard economic planning, and development. To illustrate this, we focus on three overlapping mechanisms of "creative extraction" that reinforce white spatial, political, and economic power at the expense of Black places: *theft*, *erosion*, and *exclusion*. These mechanisms are tied to the environmental harms inflicted on Black towns, as some of the existential threats they face.

Corresponding author:
Danielle M Purifoy, Department of Geography, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Carolina Hall, Campus Box 3220, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, USA.
Email: danielle.purifoy@unc.edu

Introduction

Tamina, Texas is an unincorporated Black freetown settled decades before the U.S. Civil War. Once an isolated community north of Houston, Tamina saw its territory systematically carved away for the creation of several fragmented white communities beginning in the 1970s, including, most notably, The Woodlands—an unincorporated white city—and Shenandoah, a small incorporated white town (Murray, 2019, see Online Supplemental material). Tamina's insistence on its right to exist as an independent place with its own development agenda, and its defense of its legal rights to manage its own water and sewer utility, are severely undermined by the frontierist growth interests of Shenandoah and other surrounding white towns. Despite its longevity and its residents' stable landownership, both intended as defenses against territorial encroachment, Tamina faces gradual erasure. It is a Black town pillaged by white power.

Existing frameworks for understanding race and place fail to adequately situate Tamina's predicament. But Tamina's situation is predictable. Creative extraction, our race-relational development framework, connects several phenomena explored in various literatures, from Mills' racial contract (1997) to Aiken's municipal underbounding (1987) to Robinson's racial capitalism (1983). By shifting the analysis from the level of the institution or phenomenon to the place, this framework allows for greater clarity about the integrated processes of uneven development and their stark racialized consequences.

Why Black towns?

Black places across multiple scales, from the neighborhood to the city, are in persistent negotiation for their survival with the white economic and political structures in which they are embedded. We argue that they are linked by a number of existential threats, manifested in the form of land grabs, environmental risks, political exclusion, denial of basic services, and other tactics aimed at both stifling Black-centered development *and* redirecting resources to bolster white development (Pulido, 2017; Wilson et al., 2008). Despite their shared fates, Black places are frequently analyzed through ostensibly race-neutral axes of comparison, such as physical dimensions, region, legal jurisdiction, and other geographic characteristics, which treat their experiences as separable phenomena, and lead to missed connections between them. Moreover, these Black place problems are usually treated as unconnected to white places. We adopt the *Chocolate Cities* frame in which the *Blackness* of places, whatever their size or legal structure, is the point of departure for how they are treated by law and through the political process, especially those of other white localities, and ultimately how they develop (Hunter and Robinson, 2018; Mills, 1997).

Recognizing these commonalities across Black places of all origins and at all scales, we focus specifically on Black-founded towns like Tamina, which are frequently left out of Black place analyses altogether. Black towns are intentional communities, typically established by Black people, for the purpose of creating the sociopolitical conditions for Black freedom and autonomy (Roberts, 2017; Rose, 1965; Slocum, 2019). From the fugitive antebellum communities of the Great Dismal Swamp (Sayers, 2014) to 20th century incorporated municipalities, such as Langston and Boley in Oklahoma (Slocum, 2019), they are critical sites not only for understanding the nuances of Black spatial imaginaries and governance (Lipsitz, 2011), but also to understand how whiteness is inherent to the structure and function of the town. Indeed, our observations of Black towns across the U.S., from Institute, West Virginia to White Hall, Alabama (Purifoy, 2018, 2013; Seamster and

Purifoy, 2020) clarify that the U.S. town as a legal–spatial form is predicated on whiteness (Seamster, 2015).

White-founded localities are mostly chartered by state governments as incorporated municipalities or special districts and comprise the overwhelming majority of local places in the U.S. Though their whiteness is frequently unnamed, their various physical characteristics, cultural, and political traditions are central to the U.S. definition of a local place. By contrast, Black towns have small populations (typically < 10,000) and are sometimes state-recognized municipalities with formal local governments. But many, if not most, are unincorporated communities with local institutions that serve governance functions without state recognition or legal boundaries (Rose, 1965; Slocum, 2019). The unincorporated status of many Black towns obscures the number that exist across the country: unincorporated towns are often omitted from official maps. Black towns often encounter structural barriers to incorporation, and sometimes even avoid incorporation to shield against conspicuousness or state intervention.

We focus in this paper on Black-founded towns, rather than *demographically* Black places—white-founded places where the majority of the population is now Black—because though the dynamics of creative extraction apply in those places, Black towns are paragons of Black governance and Black-centered development, helping us identify the specific mechanisms that reproduce their development outcomes. These outcomes of their attempts to utilize the same political and legal institutions of place development used by white communities, for the purpose of building Black power, are indicators of the functional "neutrality" of those institutions.

Despite similarities to demographically Black places like Atlanta, Georgia, Black-founded towns share characteristics of size, economy, and infrastructure that are distinct from those places. These distinctions arise from the comparative lack of historic white economic and political investment in Black towns. For example, demographically Black places are more likely to have comprehensive water and sewer infrastructure than Black towns because those infrastructures are typically built out of white investments for white populations residing in those places. Black communities living in those places "inherit" the benefits of those infrastructures, even after white populations leave. By contrast, Black towns often struggle to secure public financing and political consensus from white officials at the county and state levels to build their own infrastructures, because the town is not a white-led project perceived to benefit white populations (Purifoy, 2018). The difference in infrastructure access has direct bearing on the comparative growth and development of these Black places.

Because the common characteristics of Black towns exist *regardless* of their legal status as incorporated municipalities or unincorporated communities, we use the terms Black towns, places, and communities interchangeably in this article to illuminate the connected experiences of Black-founded towns. We do not suggest there are no meaningful distinctions between an incorporated Black town and an unincorporated Black community; rather, we view the similarities among these Black-founded places as worthy of common analysis.

This research arose from a pattern of spatial relations we identified in existing case studies and research projects we pursued in seemingly disparate Black places—small rural and periurban Black towns like Princeville and Taylortown in North Carolina (Purifoy, 2021, 2018) and the larger, demographically Black cities of Flint and Benton Harbor in Michigan (Seamster, 2018). Working within our "community of inquiry" (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012: 179), we observed a pattern captured in literature about race and local development. That is, towns chartered and governed by white officials are frequently "shadowed" by Black towns lying outside their boundaries—whether unincorporated county communities

or chartered municipalities (Aiken 1987; Kellogg, 1977). These "shadow towns," regardless of region, possess remarkable similarities in their development and relationship to their neighboring white towns. They typically lacked adequate water and wastewater sanitation infrastructure, possessed few signs of thriving economic development, and most of their residents worked in the adjacent white town or somewhere outside of the community. They relied on neighboring white towns for many basic necessities—including banking and finance, groceries, and healthcare (Purifoy, 2018). The similarity of conditions across U.S. regions generated three main observations, which are the focus of this article. First, we understand place development processes as relational, rather than independent. The dominant urban studies framework centers around an individualized model of development, wherein localities build viable tax bases and compete through political processes for scarce resources (Jacobs, 2012). We argue that the more common model of local development is premised on systemic and legally sanctioned extraction of resources and value from one place to grow another. Second, the relationality of place development is both racialized and uneven. White places develop through routine extraction of resources and power, enabled through the devaluation of Black places via seemingly race neutral structures of political geography, property ownership, and public finance (Delaney, 2010; Taylor, 2019). Third, because of these race-relational development processes, Black governance is structurally hindered from generating and sustaining development in tandem with white governed places. Black places thus have unique environmental, economic, and political perils vis-à-vis white places.

We introduce "creative extraction," the process of race-relational development, demonstrated here in the context of Black towns in white space. We argue that the legal and sociopolitical structure of the U.S. reproduces the nation as white space that maintains power through the seizure and control of resources and political power from communities of color, particularly Black communities (McKittrick, 2013; Mills, 1997). Black governance, formal or informal, violates what political philosopher Charles Mills calls the "racial contract"—a historically grounded challenge to social contract theory—which endows whiteness with the power to shape the future of any space.

Tamina's development history of the past 30–40 years is emblematic of creative extraction. The town's fight for basic services is replicated in Black places in all regions of the U.S, as well as in Indigenous communities and Latinx colonias (Curley, 2019; Jepson, 2012). As an exemplar of Black sovereignty and governance, Tamina arguably poses a greater threat to white spatial hegemony than Black populations in white-founded localities. Creative extraction "corrects" for that threat, utilizing white governance at multiple scales to reclaim control through three connected processes—theft of land and resources, erosion of environmental and economic conditions, and exclusion of Black people as entitled participants in the social contract.

White space and the racial contract

According to Mills (1997), the dominant spatial order is predicated on whiteness, and is obscured by race neutral theories of an equal rights polity. Specifically, social contract theory asserts the organization of space into recognizable political units like towns occurs through a community's collective investment in governance, protection, and shared resources, regardless of race. Mills argues white supremacy is the actual collective investment that polities uphold–thus creating the racial contract. Further, within this framework, whiteness, including white space, is defined by its relationship to Blackness, its constructed opposite.

Mills argues that "the political space of the polity is not coextensive with its geographical space" because "dark" [or Black] space is "normatively discontinuous with white political space" (1997: 51). The fundamental discontinuity of Blackness with the white polity goes beyond segregation and resource inequality. Black places are distinctly different types of places than white places, with differing, but relational, rules for formation and development. The logic of the racial contract is that white space is normative, enlightened, and thus able to manifest any destiny of its choosing. Indeed, the "standard" rules of town formation in U.S. local government law—specifically municipal incorporation and formalized town government—can be broken or changed at will, so long as the white places abide by the central premise of the racial contract.

We observe these broken or changing rules through the increasingly complex forms of local governance, from special districts which provide essential utilities that cross local jurisdictional boundaries (Mullin, 2009), to "quasi-cities" (Shoked, 2014) in which services exist, but there is no overarching government—and thus no elected representatives. For instance, in our study, The Woodlands, a white unincorporated city of 117,000, is made up of special districts and functions as a quasi-city. Though a political anomaly of its time–it was established in the 1970s under the federal Model Cities program (Forsyth, 2005)—The Woodlands' legal status is largely imperceptible to its residents. Thanks to services provided by Montgomery County and a nonprofit corporation funded by assessments, rather than taxes (Insa-Ciriza, 2012), The Woodlands still *looks* like a city.

The anti-Blackness of local white polities drives many Black people to seek emancipation by establishing Black towns (Slocum, 2019). Examples of these efforts abound, from Tamina in the 1830s to Taylortown, North Carolina in the 1980s to the 20 Black towns incorporated across the U.S. from 1990 to 2010 (Purifoy, 2018; Smith and Waldner, 2017). Some of these emancipatory attempts reflect the presumption that Black communities can utilize the "standard" rules and institutions of local governance to coexist with white places without being governed by them. However, we argue that because of the racial contract, Black places cannot expect that following these standard rules, much less the changed rules of places like The Woodlands, will manifest successful development.

We observe strong patterns of hindered development in Black towns across the U.S., particularly around the provision of basic infrastructure, which is the foundation of any modern economic development. For example, neither municipal incorporation in towns like Princeville, North Carolina and White Hall, Alabama, nor utility district designations of otherwise unincorporated places like Tamina or Taylortown, North Carolina, resulted in the sustainable provision of sanitation and water infrastructure, much less the desired Black-centered economic development (Purifoy, 2021, 2018).

White places are expected to thrive indefinitely; if they do decline and die, it is often as part of a "boom and bust" dynamic (Anderson, 2012) or a natural death rendered as part of the town life cycle. By comparison, Black places rarely boom like white places; they almost always bust. If Gilmore's definition of racism is "group-determined vulnerability to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies" (2002: 28), our observations of Black places meet those criteria.

In addition to the racial contract, this "geographic violence" (McKittrick, 2013: 4) is predicated on the development model of the white polity. Robinson (1983) called this model racial capitalism: the systematic extraction of value organized through racial hierarchy to build and perpetuate white wealth and resource control. Black towns cannot replicate white models of development because the pursuit of Black development, via Black governance, disrupts the development of white places. As we observe

in Tamina, Black places, regardless of their legal status or claims to sovereignty, are the resources on which white places rely for their own growth, through a process we call creative extraction.

Creative extraction

While the consequences of the racial contract and racial capitalism may be perceivable in individual Black towns, through underdevelopment in the form of crumbling or nonexistent infrastructure, substandard housing, and shuttered businesses, less apparent are the processes through which they are reproduced.

To understand Black towns' trajectories not as aberrations, but as predictable outcomes, we use the term "creative extraction" to describe the process through which Black towns form and [under]develop within mutually constituted white space and governance structures. We arrive at creative extraction through reliance on relations between the racial contract, racial capitalism, and underdevelopment as well as a spin on Schumpeter's "creative destruction" (1950[1942]). Whereas creative destruction refers to obsolescence in the service of innovation and improvement, creative extraction centers around the artificial "creation" of white development through persistent predation of communities of color, particularly Black places. The racial contract establishes the supremacy of white governance and race-relational control of space. Racialized underdevelopment is a key dimension of racial capitalism (Robinson, 1983; Rodney, 2018), whereby value for white spaces is predicated on the devaluation of Black places. Black places are thus not simply deficient or forgotten; their fate is indelibly linked to the fate of white spaces.

Extraction, in the literature on political ecology, development, and colonialism, is most often understood as a systematic removal of resources from one place for the benefit of another (Rodney, 2018; Valdivia, 2015). Extractive practices reproduce wastelands at the site of the resources, transforming great wealth into poverty and precarity, while transferring wealth to external beneficiaries. But such outcomes can also be produced without a clear removal of resources—a subtler form of extraction occurs through the devaluation of land, by denial of development, or through the development of hazardous or otherwise undesirable land uses. Such devaluation is not typically considered as a form of resource "taking" or "land grab," particularly if there is no clear transfer of property or resources. But our observations of the land dynamics of Black towns demonstrate a pattern of white towns controlling land value in Black towns as part of longer term efforts to literally or figuratively take land, whether as new territory or containment spaces to externalize the toxic burdens of white town development.

These subtler forms of extraction are "creative" because of the value they create for white towns. White towns' land increases in value by displacing environmental harms, by facilitating expansion, and, because value is relationally determined, by being compared to devalued space. This extraction is also creative because it requires innovation in laws, policies, and implementation to reproduce racialized uneven development, particularly as various political movements force shifts or overhauls of extant legal regimes. What we observe is not only the passive application of "race neutral" procedures like zoning or taxation for a racially unequal result, but active processes like the blocking of public financing, adaptation of powers for new purposes, or urban planning processes aimed at erasing places under legal authority. But because white development is valorized and normative, these actions are seen by white towns, regional arbiters and media as necessary or commonsense, rather than aggressive or violent.

Finally, we see "creativity" in the recreation of racial schemas to justify the persistence of the development patterns. Following Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations, where resources are differentially allocated within and across organizations according to racial schemas, the racial contract is the schema underlying the rules for local development. Per Mills' description of the Western-constructed relationality of whiteness to Blackness (2001), white entitlement and resource monopoly are activated alongside Black "backwardness" and "undeservedness" to enforce creative extraction. Creative extraction can thus be understood as a critical development paradigm for white towns as well as a blueprint for the destruction of Black places. We outline three mechanisms of creative extraction common to Black towns, each of which are existential threats to Black places: theft, erosion, and exclusion. The threats we identify here are often experienced sequentially by the same populations, with cumulative and compounding effects. To illustrate these findings, we present a case study of Tamina, Texas, in its relationship with surrounding white towns.

Process and research methods

The similarities in development processes and outcomes across Black places demand a theoretical analysis of how these purportedly anomalous phenomena are reproduced so reliably. We chose Tamina as a theoretical case, both because it is a primary example of Black-led development, and because it demonstrates many mechanisms of creative extraction in one location, with the added benefit of comparison to another unincorporated town, The Woodlands.

Our findings for this study rely on three forms of data-archival data, in-person interviews, and nonparticipant observation. Our work began with three years of archival research, including newspaper articles, maps, and government documents and reports. We reviewed material on Tamina's legal cases and grant applications for public infrastructure funding and water rights, and studied state rules for water provision and funding. We also spoke with Tamina's lawyers periodically for two years by phone, tracking Tamina's most recent attempt to obtain water and sanitation services.

We conducted our interviews and observations in Tamina, Shenandoah, and The Woodlands in late 2018. We interviewed community leaders and Old Tamina Water Supply Corporation board members James Leveston, Julia Leveston, and Ranson Grimes. The Levestons and Grimes, along with their late collaborator, Warzell Booty, have deep roots in Tamina and other historic Black towns in Texas and have been critical advocates for Tamina's development for decades. The Levestons granted permission for us to interview their attorneys, Ramond and Richard Howard, father–son proprietors of a Black law firm in Missouri City, TX, who have been working on legal disputes between Tamina and neighboring white towns since the 1980s. We also interviewed Tamina's water engineer David Collins, who works with Black towns in Texas on infrastructure development. We conducted semi-structured interviews in small groups, in one session with the Levestons and Ranson Grimes at Tamina's Community Center; in another session with the two attorneys in their law office, and over lunch with the water engineer. The interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours and were recorded and transcribed. We developed interview questions based on our archival research of Tamina and our research on other places (Purifoy, 2021; Seamster, 2018), both to develop our understanding of the sequence of events in Tamina, and to track the frequent co-occurrence of extractive phenomena.

In addition to the interviews, we attended public meetings for the Municipal Development District and the City Council in the neighboring white municipality of Shenandoah, which engaged in litigation over infrastructure with Tamina for over two

decades. We were interested in how Shenandoah presents its everyday concerns and how it understands its regional role and development aspirations. We conducted a driving tour of Tamina, The Woodlands, Shenandoah, and two other smaller white municipalities neighboring Tamina, to observe the varied development patterns in this relatively small geographic region (Murray, 2019, see Online Supplemental material). We compared town characteristics, including road construction, local businesses, park amenities, industrial siting, advertising, and local events featured. We also sought out landmarks from our interviews, like Tamina's water tower and community cemetery, to better situate our analysis. Finally, we traveled to the Montgomery County Memorial Public Library in Conroe, Texas, to study their collection of historic maps and documents tracking the development of Tamina in the early 1800s, and the white towns that developed around it over a century later.

Our research approach uses Timmermans and Tavory's "abductive logic" for qualitative research (2012), a process for theory construction that both engages with extant theory and begins with "the cultivation of anomalous and surprising empirical findings" not explained given existing theoretical frameworks. The observed outcomes in our case were parallel fates for Black towns across location, scale and municipal form, and divergent outcomes for Black and white unincorporated places (Purifoy, 2019) that should have been more similar according to extant theory on municipal formation (Aiken, 1987; Anderson, 2008). Rather than accepting the lack of water and sanitation access in Black towns as inexplicable or due to local incompetency, as posited in several media accounts of Tamina, we generate abductive hypotheses by relating the observed phenomenon to others, positing "a cause and effect hidden from view" (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012: 169). By understanding why a decades-long effort for water and sanitation service has been unsuccessful in a region where both resources are plentiful, we are able to think creatively about what sequence of events could have produced these outcomes, and then look for confirming and disconfirming data.

The abductive approach relies on "socially located, positional knowledge" (172), emphasizing lived experience. Thus, we draw not only on our own observations of Black places, but the experiences of people living in these places. Rather than imposing academic categories of analysis on the social processes of towns, we begin with the local dynamics most salient to those who live there, which are experienced cumulatively. Further, since the abductive approach is concerned with explaining "surprising" outcomes, we also are interested in the positional understanding of outcomes beyond our own understanding as researchers. For residents of Tamina, and many other Black places, these stark outcomes are not surprising at all. They are the routine consequences of their repeated efforts to assert any power over the future development of their communities.

By adapting abductive processes for studying race and space, we emphasize the importance of building theory informed by the U.S. historical context of racial spatialization. Rather than fitting our observations within dominant frameworks of racial residential segregation, which often treats the phenomenon as anomalous or presumes a baseline integrated space, we adopt Mills' framing of racialized space as relational, yet ontologically distinct and "normatively discontinuous" (1997). Tamina is not the same kind of place as Shenandoah and The Woodlands, but their fates are deeply intertwined.

We engaged in Glaser and Straus' "constant comparative method" (1967) across multiple units of analysis and scale: between each dyad out of the Tamina–Shenandoah—The Woodlands triad; between Tamina and other cases; between The Woodlands and other types of white unincorporated space, generating theoretical hypotheses and testing their predictive power both within our case study and across our other cases.

Findings

When free Black people settled Tamina in the mid-1800s, they lived in a forest at least 30 miles from the city limits of Houston, Texas. Determined to build a future beyond the reach of white supremacy, they built homes, churches, schools and stores along the Houston and Great Northern Railroad route to the Red River. At first, Julia and James Leveston told us, a man named Dr. Falvey provided free water from an artesian well in what is now neighboring Sleepy Hollow. In 1971, several years before the boom of white suburban town developments surrounded them, Tamina built and incorporated a water supply company. Julia Leveston said fifty families put up $50 a piece to build the system: "Even the ones that had the water well paid it so that the other people could get water."

But due to the interference of growing white towns, Tamina has fought for decades to defend rights it already has—the right to build a sewer system to replace the community's aged and failing septic tanks, and an upgraded water system that can service commercial businesses, fight fires, and connect all its residents (Marshall et al., 2017; Snyder, 2017). Without the expansion of basic infrastructure, Tamina can neither grow nor protect its current community. Its homes lose value and security without sewer and fire safety services. Its businesses are nonviable.

Two miles west of Tamina, another white community emerged in the early 1970s, largely from land formerly within Tamina. Replacing much of the forest that once protected Tamina, The Woodlands sprouted from the deep pockets of oil baron and hydraulic fracturing pioneer George P. Mitchell, along with heavy federal subsidization as a "Model City" (Forsyth, 2005). Despite its identical legal status to Tamina as an unincorporated community, The Woodlands developed exponentially over the ensuing decades to over 100,000 residents, receiving services and infrastructure through a range of public and private arrangements, making possible its tremendous economic growth. Thanks largely to this favored status in county, state, and federal politics, The Woodlands is not threatened by Tamina's existence in the same way as Tamina's smaller white neighboring towns. But The Woodlands' easy access to infrastructure complicates arguments that unincorporated status explains Tamina's predicament. Despite The Woodlands' unincorporated status, it is granted many services from the county that comparable incorporated cities have to pay for, from well-kept roads to police.

As James Leveston put it in a 2015 interview, "When we came down here, there was no Woodlands, no Shenandoah, no Oak Ridge—nothing but Tamina...As time went on progress ate us up" (Leonard, 2015). A 2003 engineering report observed about Tamina, "The community has been diminishing over the past forty (40) years, one parcel at a time. Private developers have bought the land from the original landowners and created The Woodlands, Shenandoah and Oak Ridge North" (Jones and Carter, Inc., 2003).

Shenandoah is Tamina's most consistent aggressor. Incorporated in 1974, Shenandoah is described by Tamina's lawyers as 90% white with just over 2000 residents, originally "borderline poor" and "not an influential player" locally until it created several large commercial developments—primarily highway strip malls. Shenandoah's unusual tax structure, deriving 63% of its city revenue from sales tax (three times the average for Texas municipalities), has allowed the town to profit immensely from commercial development while cutting its property tax rate in half over a single decade (Shenandoah 2018–2019 Adopted Budget). Because Shenandoah lacks The Woodlands' corporate and publicly subsidized wealth, its "in between" status pits Shenandoah's interests more directly against Tamina's. Tamina residents know their community lies in the only direction available for Shenandoah's expansion. As lawyer Richard Howard explains, "There's no benefit to

having Tamina there [to Shenandoah]. And Tamina's success and existence is a block to Shenandoah's development, its aspirations." As such, Tamina has been locked in litigation with Shenandoah for two decades, trying to compel the town to provide water and sewer connections for those without service.

We show creative extraction in Tamina through the three mechanisms outlined above: theft, erosion, and political exclusion. These mechanisms not only clarify creative extraction as a live process of racial capitalism, but also demonstrate how the racial contract frames extraction as a mundane, normative process of whites' entitled development and Blacks' undeservingness for basic infrastructure, due to perceived recalcitrance to white-centered rules of development.

Theft

Dispossession of physical resources, from land to water rights, is the primary feature of creative extraction observed in Tamina. Maps show the gradual reduction of Tamina's physical footprint as white towns cropped up around it. The signs of overburdened or nonexistent infrastructure—aging water towers, the presence of raw sewage in places where septic tanks have failed or are nonexistent—are also often evidence of dispossession.

The white land grabs of Tamina's territory in the 1970 and 1980s were part of white flight from Houston to avoid integration and city taxes (Gottdiener and Feagin, 1988) and the growth of white-collar jobs in Texas' oil industry. Rather than being built on "empty" territory, white suburbs like The Woodlands and Shenandoah were formed over preexisting Black communities (Greason, 2014).

The elder Mr. Howard first got involved with the community in the 1980s to help residents resist land grabs and harassment from outsiders.

> There were several people…outside of the Tamina community, that were pursuing land that the people of Tamina had owned for generations…there were so many back then that were calling me…And I would intercede on their behalf and do the best I could to stop them from getting the land for little or nothing or just taking it outright.

Displacement also occurred for public buildings: Julia Leveston mentioned that Oak Ridge High School, constructed for the white suburb Oak Ridge, forced some Tamina residents "to relocate across the tracks, because they…were made to sell. Then some—they just took the land."

One method of land theft in Tamina occurs through the targeting of heir property—land owned in common by all heirs to a deceased owner. Such land can be vulnerable to seizure by nonfamily members seeking clear property title: if even one family member sells her stake in the property, or if the heirs are not coordinated enough to track and pay property taxes, the entire property can be sold away from the family, through nominal purchase by a non-heir or through foreclosure (Dyer and Bailey, 2009). Heir property in Black families is not only a vulnerability stemming from lack of access to resources and trusted attorneys to develop viable wills, but also represents an important alternative to individualist models of property rights. However, the U.S. Agricultural Census found in the 1990s that Black landowners had their acreage decimated over the 20th century, often through seizure of heir property (Gilbert et al., 2002).

Shenandoah refers to Tamina not as a sovereign Black place with development rights, but a "blank space" on which to implement its own aspirations. Shenandoah's 2010 "Comprehensive Plan" marked Tamina on their land use map as "vacant land having no

apparent use" (2010: 23), commenting, "Large tracts of land...are becoming increasingly hard to find for the industrial business community" (2010: 3–2).

In 2005, Tamina discovered Shenandoah had filed for a water Certificate of Convenience and Necessity (CCN) significantly overlapping Tamina's long-existing water CCN (Tresaugue, 2015), and pursued legal action to reclaim its rights. Richard Howard explained that the map held by the state was different from Tamina's version, and matched Shenandoah's desired boundaries:

> Even though Tamina already had expectation as to what the map was supposed to be, and had submitted that, at one point TCEQ mails to Tamina...what's purported to be the final map, and then the group has to sign off on it...Supposedly no one from Tamina received that map and approved it. So it was approved by default. But it was only later that the Tamina Water Corporation realized that the map that had been approved was not the map that they thought.

Not only did Shenandoah place its CCN territory directly over Tamina's, but it cut and moved Tamina's water service line in the process. "They encroached our service area," Julia Leveston explained, "dismantling our service line at David Memorial [Drive]" to serve new commercial customers. "So nobody asked us anything. They just cut our lines there." This selective provision of water was especially malicious, as Tamina had been involved in litigation to obtain additional water from Shenandoah for residents Tamina did not have capacity to serve with its own system as early as 1999. Shenandoah also used its ill-gotten water CCN to preempt Tamina's application for a sewer CCN, which was pending before Shenandoah applied, in the process endangering a federal loan Tamina obtained to create its own sewer system (That sewer CCN was not approved until March 2019).

The serial thefts of Tamina's resources, occurring across multiple domains, by both private and public actors, reflect a shared logic of creative extraction. The erosion of Black towns' resources can work in parallel to theft as an equally effective mechanism of extraction.

Erosion

Even if a town is not threatened by immediate capture or erasure, Black places are often starved of essential development tools as a precursor for theft. White communities can erode Black towns by using them as dumping grounds or "sacrifice zones," extracting their resources and property, or blocking their access to infrastructure (Anderson, 2008; Wilson et al., 2008). The harm to land itself constitutes a form of extraction, robbing Black places of the ability to thrive from the full use of space, while unburdening white places to pursue other forms of desirable development. Tamina has been a frequent target for such environmental erosion since the white towns began growing around it.

Contractors working on developments in Shenandoah and The Woodlands, for example, dumped their waste back in Tamina, such that two decades ago, Tamina was described as "sit[ting] inside a perimeter of muddy lanes and illegal dump sites holding debris from the explosion of construction going on around it" (Contreras, 1999). Rather than cleaning them up, industry paved over these illegal dump sites and built on top of them. Runoff from one of these illegal dumps put Tamina's cemetery, Sweet Rest, underwater; burials have been impossible since 2007. Heir property is also vulnerable to degradation, as development of even basic infrastructure is frequently disallowed without permission of all (typically unknown) heirs to the property.

One common, but understudied, method by which white towns can degrade Black spaces is through the use of extraterritorial jurisdiction powers (ETJ) (Wilson et al., 2008). Towns are usually granted land use and limited taxation powers over unincorporated communities outside of their municipal boundaries for the purpose of future town expansion. But the ETJ can be abused as a dumping ground to avoid political liability for environmental hazards within municipal boundaries, particularly as ETJ residents cannot vote in municipal elections (*Holt Civic Club v. Tuscaloosa,* 1978). Much of Tamina is in Shenandoah's ETJ, but two other towns hold a sliver too: as Ranson Grimes put it, "if they get a mile [radius of control from city limits], then Oak Ridge North gets their mile. Then Conroe got their mile, and then we just have a little–teacup."

Shenandoah reinforces the environmental harm of Tamina by using its ETJ to influence land use. Although the town only has half the population needed to become a "home rule" city and involuntarily annex Tamina, Shenandoah has already marked Tamina for future expansion, and has zoned the community industrial, despite hundreds of families living there. Geosouthern Energy, headquartered in the Woodlands, has an oil field immediately north of Tamina (and adjacent to a gravel company). A 2011 engineering report observed that many Tamina homes "depend on water wells even though they are adjacent to an oil field" (PTI, 2011: 1). The industrial contamination of local aquifers is one potential reason many Tamina residents that were still on wells now need to be connected to a water system.

Rules ostensibly designed to protect the health and safety of residents can also work against Black places' survival, and can be deployed by outsiders to break up Black communities. Shenandoah used its condemnation powers to take forty acres of Tamina property for extending a commercial road (Williams, 2007). Lawyers representing Tamina clients described receiving environmental complaints from state agencies just before outsiders appeared, offering to "help" residents get into compliance with regulations. "And these people come in and they will assist them in trying to cure their problem, and the next thing you know, they're claiming ownership." Similar rules can appear written to frustrate the residents' own property ownership: Julia Leveston claimed that her attempts to divide up inherited property for family members were stymied when she was told Montgomery County had made a new rule mandating each building using a septic system have at least one acre of land.

These forms of erosion rationalize later erasure, dispossession, or extraction, as underdevelopment of Black spaces is misread as "backward" (Mills, 2001; Woods, 2017[1999]). The confluence of these phenomena, as well as the lack of basic services, produces low property values, which hinders both individual residents and towns relying on property tax revenue. Environmental externalities also diminish Black residents' health and use value of property (Bullard, 2008). The property devaluation serves the use value of the white towns; however, as degrading Black land preserves the value of white land. Blighted properties, or brownfields, are subsequently easier for white towns to take and redevelop using public funds, particularly under the guise of environmental remediation and revitalization (Bryson, 2012).

Political exclusion

Finally, Black towns face political exclusion as the third arm of creative extraction. This mechanism includes the erasure or deconstruction of Black political forms and structures, the direction of resources away from Black governance, and the blocking of Black town development, which is perhaps most visible through conflict over infrastructure. This

mechanism can encompass theft and erosion within its scope, as observed, for example, with Shenandoah encroaching on Tamina's CCN boundary.

Tamina's independence threatens the growth aspirations and spatial interests of nearby white towns, which rely on degraded Black space to bolster and project their own legitimacy and value. In a 2014 letter to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), James Leveston wrote that Tamina residents felt nearby cities were trying to "dislodge" them: "One way is to block Tamina from providing sewer services to its community and to hamper our development." In our interview, Julia Leveston made the same point: "I'd say the big problem with us getting sanitary service—[it] would stop a lot of annexation. That's what they don't want. So that's the blockage. They want the land."

Shenandoah actively desires to annex Tamina. Despite a Houston reporter's claim about Tamina that "the impoverished community doesn't have the healthy tax base that would make it an attractive target for annexation" (Snyder, 2017), Tamina lies in the only direction in which Shenandoah can expand. Shenandoah's forays into merging the two communities are not political negotiations so much as public threats. For instance, in 2007 Shenandoah administrator Chip VanSteenberg announced at an Old Tamina Water Supply Corporation meeting that "Tamina and Shenandoah are going to be married...Tamina will one day be in Shenandoah" (Williams, 2007). Tamina resident Rita Wiltz responded to this announcement, "I'm not getting in bed with you...It seems to me like a form of enslavement. If you want to jump across the freeway and take us whether we like it or not, you are going to" (Williams, 2007).

With these designs on annexing Tamina, Shenandoah blocked Tamina's ability to access water and sanitation services through a USDA loan (Leonard, 2015). Although Shenandoah had (again) agreed to provide sewer access to Tamina through the terms of a settlement over the CCN conflict, Shenandoah ultimately reneged because the agreement would prevent Shenandoah from annexing Tamina until the loan was repaid, as long as 40 years. "[That land] could end up being extremely valuable to the city," Shenandoah City Attorney William Ferebee said. "I don't think any responsible [city council] would agree. You'd [be] tying up the next 20 city councils" (Leonard, 2015). Despite Shenandoah's marriage announcement, our respondents said Shenandoah had never proposed that Tamina file for voluntary annexation into Shenandoah.

Moreover, as Shenandoah's threats imply, annexation of Black communities does not necessarily entail inclusion into the larger municipality, political representation, or even the same application of rules (Gilbert, 2013). Our respondents said Shenandoah told them that, even after a voluntary annexation, Tamina residents would only be able to renovate their homes for under 50% of their value, effectively blocking their ability to maintain their homes (also cf. Williams, 2007). Annexation, therefore, would not stop the parallel process of erosion of Tamina's property values and ability to direct their own development.

Julia Leveston describes the antagonism toward Tamina's independence and development as obvious attempts at erasure. "[W]e wanted to keep our identity as Tamina," she explained,

> because it was on the county map and they took it off the map...There was a big sign there on the railroad tracks when you come across Tamina. They'd done away with that. So they're actually fading us out, and most of the time if something happens newsworthy, they'll say [it happened in] Shenandoah...

But while annexation is not desirable for Tamina residents, incorporation to preserve Tamina's independent identity also raises potential costs very different from those facing

The Woodlands. The latter town is contemplating incorporation to escape Houston's inter-est in annexation, weighed against having to pay for its own roads, police, and other services currently provided by the county. However, Houston's annexation would not likely erase The Woodlands' community identity and certainly would not threaten the property rights of its population. A white place like The Woodlands incorporates to avoid sharing resources with a much larger and more diverse population; a Black place like Tamina incorporates to preserve its own existence (Smith and Waldner, 2017). Even after incorporation, as evi-denced in cases from North Carolina to California, Black towns still face an uphill battle to obtain new services, as they must compete with other local entities for public funding (Goel et al., 1988; Purifoy, 2021, 2018). Thus, the fight for political legitimacy would be similarly onerous for Tamina after incorporation, as it still must navigate a deeply interconnected white political bureaucracy, and antagonisms that seek to undermine their standing as a municipality.

Without formal incorporation, Black governance is enacted, and Black territory is demarcated, through alternative or ad hoc structures, like Tamina's Water Supply Corporation and its CCN, guaranteeing its right to provide water service. But even these minimal protections or boundaries impede whites' absolute authority over space, which has made them a target for local political conflict. The normative white town builds incremen-tally, using its political structure and institutional recognition to assemble services and enact development. In contrast, Tamina is expected to surrender its political standing as the "cost" of obtaining basic services, thereby undermining a primary benefit of the services. Each failed attempt to obtain infrastructure attacks Tamina's political legitimacy, which makes a takeover of the community appear less as a land grab and more as a normative adoption of "underutilized" territory.

County government also plays a key role in bypassing Tamina for resources or enforcing local units' demands. In our interview, James Leveston noted that the county had made Tamina its highest priority for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, only to erase Tamina as a priority altogether. For instance, in 1999, Montgomery County announced it would devote $1.25 million in CDBG funds for a Tamina water plant, then blocked its own decision, because the community's poor condition meant the cost of service hookup wasn't "worth it" (Contreras, 1999).

While some offers of service were simply retracted, other deals would have required Tamina to surrender its autonomy as a condition. In 2003, Tamina was again promised CDBG money and state grants to receive water and sewer service from Oak Ridge North's municipal utility district (MUD). Tamina agreed to a steep price to obtain this deal. Not only did it agree to settle litigation with Shenandoah in exchange for this new opportunity, but Tamina Water Supply Corporation dissolved to form a new entity, Tamina Water and Sewer Service Corporation (TWSSC), which gave South Montgomery County representa-tive majority control (Reut-Overman, 2001). Moreover, Tamina agreed to pay for improve-ments Oak Ridge North was planning for customers outside of Tamina. Despite Tamina's subsidizing other communities' development, U.S. Congressional Representative Kevin Brady announced the money would go to "the neediest of the needy" and made Tamina's successful acquisition of public funds sound like charity from outsiders: "It was because of Friends of Tamina, Oak Ridge North and Montgomery County that this was possible" (Aikin and Webre, 2001).

But the political cost went one step too far: Tamina would have to surrender its CCN granting the right to provide water service. Tamina wanted a written promise that Oak Ridge North would return the CCN after Tamina finished paying its 20-year loan. Tamina's CCN, as the license for Tamina's water company to operate, is the sole legal designation

identifying Tamina's boundaries and rights as an entity. James Leveston described the process by which Tamina decided on this requirement:

> All Tamina has is a water company. They have to have the CCN to operate the water company, but they wanted us to turn the CCN over to Oak Ridge. We had a community meeting, and the community agreed that we would turn our CCN over to Oak Ridge if, once the loan had been paid off, all obligations had been met, that they would turn it back over to the Tamina community; because that's all the identity that we have.

He continued, "They said, oh, yes. They agreed to it on that – no problem; the only thing we want to do is help you all out." But when it came time to include the agreement in the contract, Oak Ridge North balked. "They said, no, they couldn't put it in writing; we'd just have to act in good faith." Looking back, James Leveston's interpretation was that Oak Ridge North "wanted to maintain this little grip that they would have on Shenandoah if they decided to annex us or whatever." In other words, Oak Ridge North wanted to hold water provision rights in Tamina to keep a competitive edge on Shenandoah.

While The Woodlands-based Friends of Tamina wanted Tamina to give up its CCN and trust Oak Ridge North's verbal promise, Tamina refused. Warzell Booty later told county commissioners that he could not "find any other group that has been asked by the county to give something up to receive CDBG funds" (Speakman, 2005). Just before the deal fell apart, the local paper editorialized that the "short-sighted vision of handful of self-appointed leaders could kill water and sewer for underprivileged community of Tamina," complaining about their "stubbornness" in the face of "good-hearted community members" who "have been toiling for six years now" (Courier Staff, 2004). They asked, "So what do Tamina residents really want—a 'sense of identity' from a water supply corporation that can't fully serve its own community? Or, would they like to finally enter the 21st century, with both water and sewer service to their homes?" Another article pointed out that the new, outsider-led TWSSSC could have made this decision over Tamina's objections, and was exercising restraint in allowing Tamina to back out. When Tamina refused to approve the deal, outsiders' interest in helping Tamina get water evaporated (Hoofard, 2004). The "Friends of Tamina" dissolved within a year (Hutton, 2004). The county again reallocated its state and federal project funds away from Tamina.

After these setbacks, Tamina is again thinking about incorporation. In March 2019, after another long delay, the TCEQ reaffirmed Tamina's water CCN, which has been in limbo since Shenandoah first crossed Tamina's jurisdiction in 2005, and granted Tamina its sewer CCN, a necessary step for Shenandoah to provide service. At the same time, Shenandoah's planning efforts show no indication of diverting its plans to remove Tamina permanently from the map. In a December 2018 planning commission meeting, a transportation consultant presented plans backed by the DOT to alter the roads at the major intersection where Shenandoah ends and Tamina begins. The mayor called for extensive landscaping and beautification along that road, referring to it as the "entrance to the city."

Conclusions and future directions

We draw upon principles derived from Mills' racial contract and Robinson's racial capitalism to demonstrate that the environmental and political conditions of Black towns are eminently explainable through a critical race framework. Black towns appear to violate established rules for a range of mundane placemaking activities—from municipal incorporation to economic development. However, careful exploration into the underlying

processes of placemaking reveals the stated rules are structured to serve white interests, often at the expense of Black interests and even when power is ostensibly in the hands of Black leadership. Because much of political life generally, and Black efforts at political autonomy specifically, occur at the local level, Black-founded towns are an ideal unit of analysis to demonstrate how such structures impact Black places more generally, regardless of physical or legal category.

Creative extraction offers a relational framework to explain persistent patterns of Black underdevelopment combined with proximate white overdevelopment. Processes of erosion, theft, and political exclusion refute assertions of "independent" white space as much as they reject arguments about the "dysfunction" of Black space. White spaces have always depended on the resources of subordinated spaces to build and sustain viable economies. In addition to Black labor, Black-owned land and resources are systematically employed in the service of white growth and development. Tamina's decades-long fight for water and sewer infrastructure—the most essential resources of habitability and development—is not an indication of simple competition over finite resources, but rather the surrounding white towns' critical investment in Tamina's demise.

Tamina represents a much broader pattern of existential threats to Black places imposed not only by local white interests, but also by white governance structures serving the racial contract at state and federal levels. From Sandbranch, Texas, to Flint, Michigan, to White Hall, Alabama, and East Chicago, Indiana, Black places struggle with remarkably similar developmental challenges, from infrastructure access and viability to toxic overburden by multiple industries and waste sites to climate vulnerability due to residing in floodplains and lacking tree canopy cover (Pulido, 2017; Reynolds et al., 2019). Even when these Black places are not "paired" with a proximate white place which benefits from their underdevelopment, one can trace the origins of diverted waste, the industrial profits, the absent public finance to white places near and far which benefit, even if white residents are not privy to the extraction. The mechanisms of creative extraction are serial and cumulative, framed through "territorial stigma" (Kirkness and Tije-Dra, 2017; Kornberg, 2016) to portray Black spaces as financial and moral burdens on white spaces, rather than as critical resources for white development.

In addition to expanding this introduction to creative extraction to provide more nuance about how the mechanisms operate across scale and geography beyond Black towns, our future research will ground creative extraction in the historical context of colonialism and the iterative production of white and Black space. We welcome application of this frame beyond the Black-white binary. We also look forward to connecting creative extraction to other racialized extractive practices, such as predatory inclusion (Seamster and Charron-Chénier, 2017; Taylor, 2019) and stategraft (Atuahene and Hodge, 2017). Further, we will support and extend critical environmental justice scholars' observations about the deep embeddedness of environmental racism in our larger society and demonstrate how environmental degradation is linked to larger processes of placemaking (and unmaking) in Black spaces (Seamster and Purifoy, 2020).

We designed this inquiry into the experiences of Black towns to derive theoretical hypotheses and initial tests of "creative extraction" as a framework with predictive validity. As we noted in the introduction, the very nature of this topic, from perceptions of Black towns as aberrations, to their fugitivity and impermanence, creates a false perception that the common challenges of Black towns specifically, and Black places generally, are delinked and complicated by innumerable external variables (such as region and state jurisdiction and laws) that preclude systemic study. Rejecting such contentions, we seek to advance existing work connecting the common experiences of Black places across the country, utilizing strategic information-sharing to further illuminate these patterns and their processes, and ultimately to end these practices.

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ORCID iD

Danielle M Purifoy 🔟 https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8405-6073

Supplemental material

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Danielle M Purifoy is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her research traces the racial politics of development, environmental inequity, and institution building, particularly in Black communities.

Louise Seamster is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and African American Studies at the University of Iowa. Her research focuses on race and political economy, particularly racial governance, urban development, and debt.