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# White supremacy as design

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**WHITE SUPREMACY AS DESIGN**

Gabriel A. Ramos  
April 28, 2017

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies

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Adviser, Tyrone R. Simpson, II

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction: .....	4
Chapter 1 Racialized Space, Designs, Regions and Minds .....	7
Chapter 2 Contextualizing Race in Forms and Systems .....	20
Chapter 3 Documenting Racialized Space.....	35
Conclusion .....	56
References Cited .....	59

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## Introduction

This thesis argues that the process of urbanization in North America is correspondent to a restructuring and rearticulation of the white supremacist tradition that began with the colonization of the continent. This process of urban planning and design proceeding the dissolution of the plantation system, following the end of the civil war, reinterpreted race as a social technology of maintaining white supremacy and black subordination in the following 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Urban planning and design during the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was bolstered by white supremacist efforts of actualizing a racialized urban environment through land-use controls. Their results begat mid-20<sup>th</sup> century planning policies that deepened racialized developmental practices, such as the creation of suburban space, the disinvestment of city centers, the creation of public housing, and the rise of the prison industrial complex. This apartheid was enforced through the creation of various social controls that targeted freed blacks. These social controls act as technologies of white supremacy, a sociotechnical system that hinges on racialization as a dominant mode of social categorization and order.

The technologies of white supremacy find themselves occupying various spaces, temporalities, and modalities. As society in North America complexified, through the process of urbanization, these technologies found themselves increasingly situated in the spatial configurations and logics of the built environment. The technologies of white supremacy and their role in our society became increasingly obfuscated by the rearrangement of social forms. Their obfuscation is resultant of many factors that required their users to abandon or rearticulate the technologies original purpose. For example, public lynching fell out of practice during the twentieth century but police brutality and the rise of the prison industrial complex filled that void and purpose.

Another example would be that of segregation which shifted from a legally enforced system to one based on exploitative neoliberal economics that relegate middle and low-class blacks to less socioeconomically advantageous areas. The exclusionary dimensions of the housing market reinstate old problems of segregated living and the notion of separate is not equal—particularly concerning urban services and institutions such as schools, healthcare, and even housing. Regardless of the technology, the built environs of the United States host the technologies that comprise the larger system of white supremacy itself.

As the United States urbanized through the government's massive investment, the nexus of human settlements, whether it be township, village, or global city, pledged an allegiance to white supremacy through their compliance with white supremacist planning visions. This allegiance or lack of deviation from this tradition creates a situation in which racialization, and white supremacy itself are immanent within the constellation of urban environments. Racialized logics are preexisting based on their spatial forms that dictate experiences and potentials for racialized treatment. Simply put: cities are sites of social and economic production, they are the engines of the state, but they are also sites of social control and mediation. The methods of control and mediation have been shaped and influenced by white supremacist visions and racist imaginaries that hinge on racialized space, bodies, and life.

It is this complex, racialized system, these constellation of urban forms, has become the hallmark of urban development and the paragon of modernity. None of what is applauded by urbanists could be real if the systemic denial of blacks into American society hadn't occurred, that alternate reality which would be a far more technologically, economically, and politically advanced remains unimaginable, uncharted, and desperately

in need of exploration. Primarily due not only to the fact that lives are restricted and lost due to the ideological underpinnings of American urbanism but the fate of the natural environment as well. White supremacy is a socially and environmentally destructive system. The investment in this current urban superstructure was never sustainable and considering its scope of influence, it is difficult to separate it from the activity that thrust humanity into the Anthropocene and the onset of global climate change. The development patterns of twentieth century America and the corresponding lifestyles of suburban living are incongruent with the direction society must go if we wish to stop global environmental devastation(Mandell, 289).

The convergence of environmental devastation and social erosion dovetail not only with our urban forms but with the insidious persistence of white supremacy and its implications on human identity and environmental stasis that have ultimately produced our urban forms. Discarding tradition to embrace social innovation must be made into a goal of today. This thesis is structured into three chapters. The first introduces the notion of social innovation and design thinking as a means of discontinuing the logics of white supremacy in favor of a different future, the second chapter serves to reconceptualize urban development in America as an extension of white supremacist intentions and visions that are still operating against progress today, and the final chapter uses the Poughkeepsie region as a site of analysis which builds off historical and contemporary urban trends to illustrate aforementioned themes and calls for change.

## Chapter 1: Racialized Space, Designs, Regions, and Minds

Fundamentally, the urge to design is the urge “to consider a situation, imagine a better situation, and act to create that improved situation,”(Manzini, vii). Design as a practice and a profession finds itself amongst the service professions, which are those that strive to “meet human needs” through “a broad range of making and planning disciplines”(Manzini, vi). What is important about design is its potential to interfere with social norms, which can make its implementation operate discontinuously to the social logics of its setting, and if successful, it can rewrite social norms and “innovate” the system it was placed into. Design seeks to essentially “innovate” the lifestyle of those affected by the design.

The design of a city is crucial to the experience of the city—it’s what makes each city unique and different. The seemingly deterministic arrangement of urban space is actually powerful arrangement of social controls that find themselves concretized through architecture and design. These controls manifest as active, passive, and even dormant depending on their intent and implementation. In concerning the rights one has to a city one must understand the ways in which rights are permitted or restricted through spatial practices and behaviors. These practices and behaviors are made possible through the spatial organization of the city. Road networks for example while connecting disparate spaces create behavioral patterns shaped by vehicular transport, and these behavioral patterns inform social norms and standards. These behaviors can become politicized and/or capitalized and can begin to have a temporal impact on the city, in which certain behaviors become privileged over others. For example, the low ridership for public transportation is a clear reflection of the lack of government investment and political lobbying against mass public transit in the United States and the dangerously high



ridership of car owners. One must consider how the design of a city to promote private transport has restricted our cities to be ones fixed to the methods of traversing those roads: cars and vehicular traffic. In this sense the presence of roads and their organized networks permit a dominant spatial practice of which the basis of urban life occurs.

All life in this example city is organized by the necessity to drive. Access to this city is predicated by the ability to purchase, possess, and upkeep a car. If we understand cities to be sites of collective behaviors—behaviors collectivized and operationalized through synchronous practice—not only can we begin a process of understanding which spatial forms permit socially deleterious behaviors (practices), but we can categorize existing and potential behaviors and social forms based upon their impact on urban life. Consider the permanence of the car in urban life, it defines a standard for travel but through its diffusion it has become a barrier to all other forms of transportation that can subvert it. However, in the example of the car, is also the dimension of capital financing and contrarily environmental degradation. What does it mean to be an car owner in the time of global climate change, when no viable alternative to your carbon emissions exists or even when private transport has been largely documented to facilitate socioeconomic and racial segregation? Designing new methods and systems of public transport that are social and environmentally advantageous pose not simple changes to 21<sup>st</sup> century urbanism but can radically transform our society.

An example of how design can radicalize lifestyle is illustrated by Ezio Manzini when he reimagines care of the, in his book *Design, When Everybody Designs*. He states we should, “consider the elderly not only as a problem but also as possible agents,” in their care. Then, we should “support their capabilities and their will to be actively involved, and optimize use of their social networks.” This notion of elderly care he has

conceptualized is a “circle of care and cohousing for the elderly (where elderly people are supported in different forms of mutual help),[producing an] to effective symbiosis between the elderly and young”(Manzini, 13). Manzini categorizes these examples as instances of “radical innovation.” According to him these can be formulated into new strategies for problem solving, but more critically “generate answers that change the question themselves.” The question is complicated because the *mainstream* view responds to the question of “how can we take care of all the elderly people?” by creating “more dedicated professional services,” but this “radical innovation”, Manzini proposes, fundamentally reinterprets the role of the elderly—from users of a type of conventional service, to participants of a new service. It is through the implementation of these “local discontinuities” that design can systematically redefine entire societies, the more people see the elderly as active agents in their own care versus users would allow disparate models of elderly care can emerge that seek to radicalize the treatment of the ageing.

Change, in human societies, according to Manzini, is simultaneously social and technical and for that reason social innovation is the innovation of a sociotechnical system triggered by social change. Manzini is describing the creation of a new social form that fundamentally transforms a society’s relationship to existing technologies – resulting in a change of the technical system of that society. The more these changes occur or the more diffuse a new technical system, (and by technical system Manzini defines as the “interface between technology and society”) the more a new technological practice is adopted and those affected people by the technical system find themselves becoming organized by that intervening technology, and thus a new social order or form emerges. An example of this can be simply seen by the smartphone market, touchscreen phones fundamentally “innovated” communication technologies and we find ourselves

organized into those with smartphones, or not, and within that sociotechnical category are those with iPhones and those with Androids – we are organized and categorized by the tools (the technologies) we use.

This paradigm shift can only really correspond to what is referred to as “critical design” or what Manzini refers to as a design mode--the combination of “critical sense, creativity, and practical sense” (Manzini, 31). It is through the interface of these tools that “makes it possible to imagine something that is not there, but which could be if appropriate actions were taken” (Manzini, 31). Manzini expresses the critical design mode as a strictly human ability. The design mode, according to Manzini, is what radicalizes or innovates and not the conventional mode, or “affirmative design”, which reinforces the status quo. The *conventional mode of design, or affirmative design*, according to Manzini occurs when “tradition guides us in what we do and how we do it (and also in why we do it), and when social conventions enable all those interested in an activity or a given production process to know in advance what to do and how to do it (and everything happens in accordance with what everyone expects)” (Manzini, 30). Conventional design allows for a “rapid way of achieving tangible results that incorporate learning accumulated through a long series of previous experiences, through trial and error” (Manzini, 30). Additionally, an adherence to the “standards of the craft” absolves the need for specifications and prescriptions, the standardization allows everyone in that “particular sociocultural context” to understand the products of this design mode to be one of a deterministic status, immutable; eliciting the notion that things are the way they are because that’s just how it is. In order to be tolerated as a design mode, it must achieve satisfactory results, however, the systems created by conventional modes are typically plagued by reoccurring problems, according to Manzini. When new problems do occur in conventional systems they are often put to a process of testing it against each

preexisting problem, this trial and error period, is a longwinded process that when coupled with other reoccurring or even new problems can “overwhelm traditional know-how” and “indeed tradition as a whole,” (Manzini, 31).

Manzini references Anthony Giddens who wrote that “The more tradition is weakened; the more individuals find themselves having to negotiate and choose – from a multiplicity of possible options and referents – what lifestyles to adopt. In our language this means that the more tradition is weakened, the more subjects must learn to design their own lives and shift from a prevalence of activities carried out in a traditional way to one in which choices are mainly of design” (Manzini,31). Through the language and frameworks of designing for social innovation provided by Ezio Manzini allows for a framework of conceptualizing the built environment and the sociospatial management of the United States to be the composite sociotechnical system – the interface that connects us, that enables the state to exist.

### *Identifying and Rewriting Convention*

The sentiments captured by Manzini mirror those captured by Angela Y. Davis in her assertion that prisons are obsolete. When Davis states, “In other words we would not be looking for prisonlike substitutes for the prison, such as house arrest safeguarded by electronic surveillance bracelets. Rather, positing decarceration as our overarching strategy, we would try to envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment— demilitarization of schools, revitalization of education at all levels, a health system that provides free physical and mental care to all, and a justice system based on reparation and reconciliation rather than retribution and vengeance” (Davis, 107). Davis, here, whether she recognizes it or not is speaking in line with the tenets of critical design. Davis, in her

reimagination of the prison system goes on to propose a model that Manzini would label as “diffuse design” (Manzini, 37).

“The creation of new institutions that lay claim to the space now occupied by the prison can eventually start to crowd out the prison so that it would inhabit increasingly smaller areas of our social and psychic landscape,” but Davis continues by targeting specific social institutions that would subvert conventional modes of design and development, “schools can therefore be seen as the most powerful alternative to jails and prisons,” but her connection to the built environment draws connections to the current dysfunction that this institution operates under, “unless the current structures of violence are eliminated from schools in impoverished communities of color—including the presence of armed security guards and police—and unless schools become places that encourage the joy of learning, these schools will remain the major conduits to prisons,” she ends by referencing the school to prison pipeline (Davis, 108). What Davis describes not only encapsulates the dream behind critical design but clarifies it with the argument of abolition. How critical design mirrors the goals of prison abolition—as described by Davis—serves as complimentary frameworks particularly in the analysis of critical design as a mode of social innovation. What necessitated us to consider prison abolition has been the result of centuries of adhering to white supremacist traditions; the transition from slavery to freedom, did not correspond with an equalizing of ability and privilege in the United States. The transition was a rearticulation, a reformulation, of racial apartheid that continued to deny the promise of self-determination to freed slaves and their descendants and this has remained constant through each instance of urban development. This habit of reinscribing racial logics as opposed to abolishing them from the built environment corresponds to what Manzini describes as the “conventional mode” in design, (Manzini, 30).

This notion of the “conventional mode” in design and this notion of perpetuating the traditions, or conditions of the norm resonates with Davis’s warnings for abandoning the search for “prisonlike structures for the prison” and even abandoning other social logics that serve to reinstate the conditions that necessitate abolition, “alternatives that fail to address racism, male dominance, homophobia, class bias, and other structures of domination will not, in the final analysis, lead to decarceration and will not advance the goal of abolition,” (Davis, 108).

The fact that racism prevails today can be attributed to the fact that as a society we have not deviated far from the tradition of the United States of America – white supremacy. However, white supremacy functions jointly as an ideology, a belief, but also as a sociotechnical system, in this sense let us understand that if the built environment is the composite sociotechnical system, it subsumes racialized space and thus the logics and frameworks of white supremacy. Viewing white supremacy as a system, with an interface (the built environment), allows us to conceive a more complex understanding of what sustains it, maintains it, and what it’s byproducts are but also how we can potentially innovate ourselves from it.

The technologies become normalized praxis, habits and choices of everyone a part of the sociotechnical system this corresponds to technologies such as what computers we use or kitchen appliances to racial technologies such as racialization, discrimination, and mass incarceration.

#### *Technologies of Power in the Racialized State*

Thus power in this system is decentralized because “ways of knowing, norms, and technologies of power are distributed in myriad ways rather than only from a single person or institution.” It is because of the diffusive nature of technologies of power that, “eliminates the false notion that we could win the change people need simply by using

the electoral process to vote in certain representatives or pass certain laws,” (Spade, 4). Understanding power to be decentralized allows us to consider and investigate “how the norms that produce conditions of disparity and violence emerge from multiple, interwoven locations and recognize possibilities for resistance as similarly dispersed,” (Spade, 4).

The prison industrial complex for example illustrates the “kind of multivector analysis of law, power, knowledge, and norms,” required for dismantling the deeply interlinked social conditions that permit its existence. Spade writes, “. . .using the term “prison industrial complex” suggests that multiple, connected processes and forces determine how certain populations get labeled as “criminal,” how certain behaviors and actions come to be classified as crimes, how racist ideas are mobilized to justify an expansion of imprisonment systems, how various financial interests are implicated in motivating law enforcement expansion, and how criminalization and imprisonment filter through every aspect of how we live and understand ourselves and the world. Living in a society defined by criminalization and imprisonment shapes how we design and build schools and discipline kids who are perceived to misbehave. It relates how we frame issues in the news and in entertainment media It relates to how we run homeless services, agriculture policy, elections, and health care systems. It relates to the availability of finance capital and so much more.” (Spade, 3)

Spade continues to explain that what propels or perpetuates, the locus of power in sustaining the prison industrial complex, are the “regimes of practices and knowledge that coalesce in conditions and arrangements that affect everyone and that make certain populations highly vulnerable to imprisonment.” It is these regimes of practices and knowledge that create norms in which vulnerability and security are distributed.

Examples of such regimes of practices are, “the routines of bureaucracy; the technologies

of notation, recording, compiling, presenting and transporting information, the theories, programmes, knowledge and expertise that compose a field to be governed and invest it with purposes and objectives; the ways of seeing and representing embedded practices of government; and the different agencies with various capacities that practices of government require, elicit, form and reform” (Spade, 4). Finally, regimes of practices according to Spade exist wherever there is a “a relatively stable field of correlation of visibilities, mentalities, technologies and agencies, such that they constitute a kind of taken-for-granted point of reference for any form of problematization.”

(Space/MitchelDean, 4)

Spade introduces the term “subjection” which is used over “oppressed” because subjection according to Spade, “captures how the systems of meaning and control that concern us permeate our lives, or ways of knowing about the world, and our ways of imagining transformation.” Using racism as an example Spade states that “racism does not only occur in moments when individual people of color are excluded from employment opportunities by individual white people. Racism also occurs when media perpetuates stereotypes about people of color. Racism determines policy discussions about everything from health care to agriculture to national security. Racism shapes how individuals and communities see ourselves and understand our relationships to one another. Racism determines what schools will be well funded and which communities will be sites for toxic industry. Racism shapes how things like beauty, reason, intelligence, and enterprise are culturally defined. Racism determines who will be arrested, what public benefit programs will be cut, and what behaviors will be considered criminal. Racism does not just flow from the top down but rather permeates the entire field of action. The invention of racial categories—the “racialization” of people—was essential to establishing the interests in land and labor that founded the United States.



The continued maintenance and reinvention of racial categories and new sites of racialization have been essential to the distribution of wealth and life chances....”Subjection” is a term that tries to capture that complexity and the significance of how thoroughly our ways of living, thinking, and knowing ourselves and the world are imbued with the meanings and distributions wrought through these various categories of identity, and how multifaceted the relations of these categories are to one another,”(Spade, 7).

*Climate Change as a byproduct of White Supremacy*

These complex relations and processes find themselves situated in the American built environment. It is not simply the setting for white supremacy but the cast white supremacists built to give it structure and form. Embedded within it are various technologies used to practice white supremacy, such as racialization, lynching, slavery, mass incarceration, and segregation. The built environment has become the facilitator and the enabling ecosystem<sup>1</sup>, of these technologies (of power) and social practices, that allow it to continue. The tools of city planning emerged as a means of instituting control and order to land under control of the United States. Urban development in America ditched the notion of integrated urban environments for segregated living – the racialization of people led to the racialization of space. All of this begetting a practice of a racialized experience that has been passed down from generation to generation, constituting a tradition, a convention of being, and even designing, and thinking. However, the innumerable deaths and destruction that emerged from this practice, this way of being, is not one that just marks an entire nation with its trauma but the environment as well.

American urban development during the 20<sup>th</sup> century diverged entirely from

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<sup>1</sup> Enabling ecosystems are according to Manzini are “complex entities that cannot be entirely changed with a single design project (i.e., with a single mode of intervention, based on a single way of thinking and seeing things). To change such an ecosystem requires a plurality of projects operating on different levels and with different logics. p.90.

strengthening and supporting city centers to constructing separate white spaces that became known as the suburbs,

“Suburbia, as we know it today, became the preferred middle-class lifestyle. With it came patterns of economic development, land use, real estate investment, transportation and infrastructure development that reflected race, class, and cultural wounds deeply embedded in the psyche and history of the United States. Jim Crow—institutionalized segregation and apartheid against African Americans and other nonwhites—was reflected in urban and suburban zoning codes, restrictive racial covenants in real estate investment and lending practices, redlining by financial institutions, discriminatory private business practices, and the distribution of public investments. All these served the interests of the policy-makers, usually the corporate elite who were typically European-American and middle class or wealthy,” (Mandell, 294)(Holmes, 22, 24).

Suburban development necessitates massive deforestation, electricity generation, and inefficient transportation systems that compose the most harmful human activities as all result in releasing large amounts of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas into the atmosphere (Mandell, 295). Global warming is the unforeseen side effect of white supremacy and “therefore a meaningful response to the global climate crisis requires a dismantling, or at the very least a reordering, of the spatial systems we have created to construct and perpetuate the concept of race in the United States,” (Mandell, 295). The apathetic response to global climate change in the United States is rooted in the very behaviors and lifestyles that “have actualized the idea of race and maintained the “white-over-black” hierarchy that is the essence of our social, economic, and legal structure,” (Mandell, 293). What Mandell describes as “behaviors” and “lifestyles” that have reified race and destroyed the environment are one in the same with the urbanism that has

“created and protected white privilege in American society,” (Mandell, 293). White privilege in this context “refers to the hegemonic structures, practices, and ideologies that reproduce white’s privileged status,” maintaining and reifying the very idea of whiteness itself,” (Mandell, 293), (Pulido), (Ford). Mandell provides a insight to the dangers of operating within conventional logics as Davis and Manzini, in their criticism of climate change activism, “most activism is limited to changes that maintain the existing spatial, social, economic, and legal framework that defines American society,” which Mandell credits to the machinations of white privilege (Mandell, 298), “those who currently enjoy the privileges of consumption fear losing the bigger houses, bigger cars, and the economic power to consume, not only because they provide material comforts, but because they have become the signifiers of wealth, power, and whiteness in American society,” furthermore, “those material comforts that identify whiteness do so in dialectic opposition to the high crime, low test scores, and crumbling schools that mark blackness in American society,” (Mandell, 296). Mandell points to this “fear of eroding the hierarchies that define race” as the reason the most successful climate change advocacy takes the form of “market-based approaches,” (Mandell, 297). The fixation on “relatively insignificant individual behavior changes” whiteness remains, as does the racial hierarchy that defines the country. Mandell suggests that “the painfully slow reaction of the American public to the growing dangers of global warming highlights just how important racial privilege remains and how reluctant its beneficiaries are to give it up,” primarily because to “give it up” requires “relinquishing the spatial, social, and economic markers that have created and protected whiteness and the privilege it confers,” (Mandell, 300). The implications to challenging climate change and white supremacy have on the built environment are largely unprecedented and will require a new vision of urbanism that abandons much of what we are familiar with today.

*Emergent Urbanisms + Social Dreaming*

Manzini, in the introduction to their book explains that we are “immersed in a process of change that, in nature and time, will not be unlike the passage in Europe from feudal civilization to industrial urban society,” and that the transformation we are undergoing occurs as responses to local and large-scale systemic crisis that affect society at all levels (cultural, economic, political, and technological). This all occurring at different speeds and levels of visibility. Manzini informs the reader that “we must expect to be living this turbulence for a long time, in a double world where two realities live together in conflict: the old “limitless” world that does not acknowledge the planet’s limits, and another that recognizes these limits and experiments with ways of transforming them into new opportunities.” Manzini describes these dual worlds as one being “the dominant world” which remains as reference for many and informs primary economic and institutional structures and the other world being one like that of an archipelago or a group of islands “where people think and act in ways that are different,” (Manzini 2). We can categorize white supremacy to be the foundation of the “dominant world” and social sustainability as the foundation of this “other” or emergent world, (Manzini 3). It is important to refer to the confluence of politics of Davis and Mazini here, as similar and even complementary politics but certainly are not the same. The radicalism of abolition and even the optics of it are at odds with the concept of *design*. Primarily because of design’s misapplication and myopia which in many ways reflect the whiteness of the design profession’s themselves. What is important part here is that both claim to subvert what has already been designed. To innovate from something that was laid in place.

## Chapter 2 -- Contextualizing Race in Forms and Systems

Achille Mbembe speaks of race being used as a “force of production” and a “relation of production,” within urban spaces (Mbembe, 380). According to Mbembe urban space subsumes racialized space, which is superimposed onto social, economic, and physical space. This ingestion of racialized space by urban space results in what Mbembe describes as racism becoming the “constitutive dimension of the city’s modernity,” which initiates apartheid (Mbembe, 382). In Johannesburg, where in the post-apartheid era, when blacks were denied the right to their city, their bodies were “serialized and subjected to various forms of spatial distribution and apparatuses of capture,” by the regulatory institutions that their city housed by the demands of the dominant racial state (Mbembe, 391). Mbembe describes this process as the black life undergoing “parallel formations,” where they themselves become subsumed by the city, becoming embedded in the “heterogeneous regime of signs that the apartheid city was” (Mbembe, 391). The logic of organized life permits black bodies to become “sites, floating spots where “inhumanity” could be immediately experienced in the body as such” (Mbembe, 392). Becoming victim to the process of racialization by simply entering urban space, those marked by race (by blackness) live within that primary regime of coerced racial performance that simultaneously informs their identity but also assigns a place within the racialized structure of the city — “race defeated the triumph of the idea of the city as a site of free movement and free association. It affected everything, including the domains of taste, language, sensibility, and image,” (Mbembe, 398)

City design, whether speculative or traditional provides glimpses into operations of the unconscious, both collective and selected, that inform “the psychic life” of the metropolis (Mbembe, 375). Mbembe describes the built environs of cities as “a

projective extension of the society's archaic or primal fantasies," each masking itself and its machinations underneath protective membranes of superfluity that void meaning and divert attention from the psychosis that is articulated by its managers, its conductors, as its rationality, its logic, its laws, and the normative practice of urban life (Mbembe, 375). In the context of the United States this psychosis finds itself as a continual rearticulation of the color line. These cycles of racial management have followed every turn of urban developmental shifts in the United States.

In this thesis let us consider white supremacy to be something more than an ideology but a complex design project. It's a project in the sense that it has a temporal dimension and is bequeathed to those that subscribe to its vision. It relies on the successive generations who follow its framers to uphold the tenants of a white supremacist urban superstructure. To deviate from these inherited logics of development, spatial practices, and urban typologies we must understand the extent to which our current urbanism is rooted in them.

The United States of America was and continues to be designed in accordance to a white supremacist tradition. One that seeks to sort or organize society on the basis of race, through the process of racialization, which is operationalized through the process of urbanization. Urban agglomerations, or cities, towns, suburbs, operationalize the process of racialization through a complex system of spatial organization. Through land-use controls and transportation policies the process of racialization has become immanent within the American built-environment and is effectively embodied within our urbanism, or social space, our everyday life.

Racism, white supremacy, is a social logic given life by the spatial arrangement of the built environs of North American society. White supremacists laid the framework for

our built environment, their choices and policies about how we were supposed to live were diametrically opposed to an integrated society. This extreme opposition required an intensification of racialization as a means of organizing our society and thus our built environment. The segregation of space based on race did not create two equal societies but one that existed in direct subordination and degradation to the other.

Understanding urban space to be a site critical to the reproduction of race, and by extension racism and by extension white supremacy, we can determine urban space to be composed of a series of connected sites of racial production – urban space, the built environment, functions largely as a system—one that is economic but also political but also one that is racial.

Furthermore, if we can consider urban space to be the nexus of, the composite space, of American cities and towns (urban agglomerations), we can determine that this nexus of denser urban areas act as not isolated, but, connected systems of sociospatial production. Historically this has been a process that has privileged constituents of white society over those categorized into black society. This privilege manifests just as complexly as the process of racialization itself. The privilege is multidimensional and occupies varied temporalities; it is a present privilege and a future privilege as long as the structure of race remains as a dominant mode of social organization.

It is a present privilege in the sense that what has been inherited by white America is a racist superstructure that promotes their access and mobility over anyone that can be categorized as black. This inheritance takes the form of land and wealth inherited through land owned by previous generations that was denied to blacks, the health, wellbeing, and status of being beneficiaries of racism and segregation, safety, and personal agency. These privileges occupy a future temporality by being indefinite in their duration, something that requires little to no effort primarily because the built

environment facilitates the normalization/naturalization of white supremacy – our behaviors and reactions are merely respondent to how our environments are structured to make us think.

The built environment is rarely understood to be a historical process shaped by political visions and apparatuses of control. It is often perceived as something matter of fact, innate, or natural to our human development, but how can the built environment not be rooted in artifice when it's primary means of organization is rooted in the artificial construction of race?

The use of spatial organization and city development as a dominant means of social and racial organization required massive investments in costly, unsustainable practices and technologies that are environmentally and socially devastating. These technologies and practices of life find themselves within our cities, which can allow us to understand cities to be not isolated human settlements but a nexus of relational sociotechnical systems embedded with technologies and practices that operate in tandem with white supremacy to effectively reify race and racialization as a dominant means of social control. These technologies can be understood on a very basic level to be tools, they do not have to conform to machinery or electronics but can operate more abstractly and invisible as social behaviors and methods of socialization – such as lynching, which served as a psychosocial technology of eliciting fear amongst blacks and evoking a sense of domination amongst whites. Segregated facilities did the same and so does the hypervisibility of police brutality, all three examples are rooted in urban space and have impacts on the individual and collective psyche. As these technologies, diverse in their forms and intents, find themselves situated in our cities and towns we can begin to visualize how each city plays its role in the production of white supremacy, they operate as technologies of it by being the primary sites of its production.



*Racial Zoning, Planning, and the Foundations of the Racial City*

The built environment we have inherited today is one that began approximately with the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the first instances of zoning ordinances laid the groundwork for cities across the country. However, it is important to know that this was merely a superimposition on a preexisting racialized landscape. The desire and need to structure American cities came out of disparate populations drive to urbanize and the need to limit the subsequent disorder (Bartholomew, v). The twentieth century was critical for American urban development, a century that started deep under the throes white supremacy and ended post-racial propaganda.

Zoning's proper function at the turn of the twentieth century was "to control the use of land and buildings, to regulate the size and shape of buildings and their relation to each other" (Bartholomew, 4). Planning requires public sanction, "in the form of legislation," and "authorization" from "the police power of the community"(Bathrolomew, 4).“ Therefore, "it is through the use of this power to promote the general welfare of the community as well as the public health and safety that we regulate building materials and methods by building ordinances, and control land use through zoning, subdivision control, and other planning measures," and finally, "zoning is perhaps the most important of these, both as a social control device and in its wide effects on land use," (Bartholomew).

Zoning works as a means of social control by determining what urban space is to be used for. Its historical function has been to regulate the use of cities and towns in the aim of protecting "the desirable character of development" and to "stabilize real estate values and the community tax base," (Bartholomew).

Zoning emerged as an attempt to protect residential property, control “nuisance”, and serve as a “tool for comprehensive planning.” At the turn of the twentieth century zoning emerged as the primary means in which blacks were excluded from neighborhoods, as a means of protecting white private property from the depreciation resultant of neighborhood integration. Early zoning and planning sought to create segregated spaces. The zoning ordinances of this time were highly informed by white supremacist principles, evinced by the Baltimore mayor in 1910, when the city enacted the country’s first racial zoning ordinance. Baltimore Mayor J. Barry Mahool, stated that, “blacks should be quarantined in isolated slums in order to reduce the incidents of civil disturbance, to prevent the spread of communicable disease into the nearby White neighborhoods, and to protect property values among the white majority,”(Silver, 4) That same year Richmond, Virginia also began their racial zoning movement, and was permitted by the state of Virginia to zone their entire area according to race. In Atlanta, GA “the objective of racial zoning was legalized separation of the city into separate racial worlds,” as every city block was assigned a racialized category based on the existing majority of residents (Silver, 5). This move shut the black community out from much of Atlanta’s housing market and assigned them spaces to the west, isolated from White Neighborhoods in the east. After seeing how advantageous zoning ordinances were to protecting white real estate and capital, as it effectively controlled residential demographics in neighborhoods, it gained widespread support by residents, (Silver, 6). The motives behind the reasoning for segregated living stemmed from a prevalent fear, held by segregationists and white supremacists, that the integration of the races disrupt social stasis and lead to the “mongrelization” of the country (J Ward, 87).

The U.S. Supreme Court, in 1917, unanimously ruled against racial zoning ordinances determining that “the denial of the full use of property ‘from a feeling of race

hostility” was inadequate to uphold racial zoning ordinances in Louisville. The ruling disrupted segregationist’s momentum by requiring them to rearticulate their vision, and wording, of the segregated metropolis and effectively launched a decade dedicated to local governments attempting to out maneuver the 1917 court decision. This shift in tactics coincided with the engagement of those in the planning profession to create comprehensive city plans that sought to protect white spaces from black encroachment. This shift in tactics however was most succinctly put by John Nolen, who made the 1928 comprehensive plan for Roanoke, VA, who said that explicit racial zoning was a *fait accompli*, in the sense that because blacks were already segregated and that their campaign had been successful and cities needn’t pursue it further (Silver).

These visions required comprehensive master plans and many were made by Southern cities, New Orleans went as far to argue that “zoning and comprehensive planning should join the host of legal Jim Crow strategies being employed to transform the racially integrated Southern city into a bifurcated racial world,” however their attempts continued to be ruled unconstitutional by the Louisiana Supreme Court on the basis on the 1917 court decision, (Silver). This back and forth between the courts and local governments created many creative means of protecting and constructing white spaces. In Charleston, South Carolina, for example, they utilized the concept of neighborhood preservation as a means of racial exclusion, in 1931. Silver writes, that in the general city plan of 1931 an area they determined to become a Historic District houses several thousand Black residences that would be displaced for maintaining the integrity to of the district. This was a plan that was favored by local preservationists who deemed the displacement of the black residents a “desired outcome of neighborhood revitalization,” (Silver).

By the 1930s the planning movement abandoned their efforts to find a legal means of racial zoning, in favor race based planning. Silver defines race-based planning as a process “that marshaled a wide array of planning interventions in the service of creating separate communities.” This extends to “street and highway planning,” or transportation planning which erected racial barriers beginning in the 1920’s, with “the siting of public housing projects explicitly (and legally) for Black occupancy,” slum clearance, neighborhood planning, private deed restrictions, and racially charged real estate practices [which proliferated northern cities] all served the cause of segregation as effectively as racial zoning.” The shift to race based planning coincided with the massive investment by the federal government in the creation of suburban developments. The federal government gave white middle-class families the lucrative option of buying a suburban home with “little or no down payments and extended 30-year amortization schedules.” The monthly charges were less than the rents the families had been previously paying in denser urban areas, (Rothstein). Richard Rothstein determined that 83% of the 300 large subdivisions built from 1935 to 1947 had racially restrictive deeds and even in the event a black family bought into a white neighborhood “without government help, the Federal Housing Administration would refuse to insure future mortgages even to whites in that neighborhood, because it was now threatened with integration.” While the Supreme Court ruled racial restrictions legally unenforceable in 1948, the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration continued to be major mortgage providers and “the racial restrictions themselves were deemed lawful for another 30 years” (Silver).

Suburbanization was structured to be a more financially sound option for white families. Suburban living was made to be more peaceful and affordable to live in than urban areas and the ability to sell this newly acquired property provided a massive benefit

that one would be unable to claim within urban areas. The suburbs became a hallmark of American culture, primarily because that was the culture, the guiding vision behind American urban development at that time, the creation of a segregated metropolis.

By the mid-twentieth century urban renewal programs took aim at low-income black communities. Ghettos became the default relocation sites for these displaced families because “relocation to stable integrated neighborhoods” was not provided. The interstate highway act was a strategic move in eliminating “integrated or mostly-black neighborhoods” that were too close “to white communities or central business districts” according to the director of the American Association of State Highway Officials who’s lobbying heavily influenced the interstate program, “some city officials expressed the view in the mid-1950s that the urban Interstates would give them good opportunity to get rid of the local “niggertown,” (Rothstein, 4)(Schwartz, 1976, p. 485 n. 481)

Much of the segregation that occurred in the twentieth century was part of a complex process of state and local governments isolating white communities through a very conscious process of developing and organizing the built environment to encourage white families to leave cities for more financially and socially advantageous spaces that were institutionally denied to blacks. White families were given the option of remaining in expensive urban areas that faced massive disinvestment or relocating to peaceful and affordable housing outside city limits, equipped with new systems of bureaucracy and infrastructure to solely support their lifestyle. This forced isolation of whites only worsened race relations as much of the campaign to suburbanize only created and sustained prejudices and fears among segregated white communities. Their investment at any time could be significantly impacted if black families simply moved into their neighborhood. All of this resulting in a situation that allowed many to attribute the conditions of slums and blight as characteristics of black residents themselves, when in

fact black Americans were simply attempting to survive a lifestyle predetermined by an ideological need to halt and suppress integration by the American government.

*Contemporary Racial Reproductions/Reconstructions*

According to the United States Census Bureau the median income of black families is only 61% that of white families. Black wealth is five percent of white wealth, however while the share increases to 22% of white wealth when only the black middle class is examined, the differential in capital accumulation is stark. Particularly in the context of an extremely hostile and unstable economy which works disproportionately against black families, the recession of 2008 and subprime mortgage crises placed extreme burdens on black communities, (Rothstein) (Mishel, Bivens, Gould, & Shierholz, 2012, Tables 2.5 and 6.5).

These disparities bleed into every aspect of these family's lives and create the conditions in which reoccurring themes of poverty, incarceration, and criminality occur. The differences in wealth burden the ability to matriculate into college as it has been shown that total family wealth, including home equity, correlates to whether or not high school graduates can afford college. This is something most low-income families are aware of, the financial inability to attend college, and often lowers students and family's expectations that they can even attend and even complete college. Just by assessing the differences in wealth and income gaps between white and black families, "white middle-class children are more likely to prepare for, apply to, and graduate college than black children," (Rothstein, 5).

This of course continues to enact harm on the generations that descended from the very families denied access to accumulating and inheriting wealth through the aforementioned systemic denial that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The result of not being able to acquire a federally funded house throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has extreme

generational affects, for example Levittown where homes were first sold to whites in 1947 for \$7,000 (two and a half times the national median family income), and even white veterans could apply for loans through the Veterans Administration and Federal Housing Administration with no loans or down payments. Houses in Levittown sell for around \$400,000 today, about six times the median income, and loans require a twenty-percent down payment deeming it unaffordable to most black Americans. Levittown, despite being in a racially heterogeneous region, in 2010 had a black population of less than one percent, (Rothstein, 5).

Another present manifestation of the impacts and persistence of housing segregation is the intensification of educational segregation, “Education policy is constrained by housing policy: it is not possible to desegregate schools without desegregating both low-income and affluent neighborhoods,” (Rothstein, 1). However, the challenges facing present-day segregation are perhaps even more pernicious and immediate than before. As urban resources are outsourced and outpriced to low-income communities, their students face an increased risk of absenteeism and failure. This is attributed to: less routine and preventive health care, less exposure to complex language at home, lack of educational spaces, lack of a stable education due to changing schools and inconsistent teacher quality, fewer opportunities for enriching after-school and summer activities, a less developed background knowledge and organizational skills, and fewer family resources. These lack of urban services and resources exhaust schools and limit their effectiveness by making remediation the norm. This leads to teachers repeating lessons as opposed to creating a more dynamic learning environment where lessons could be adapted to meet student’s individual strengths and weaknesses. This remedial nature to urban education discourages student engagement and gives rise to behavioral problems that shift the role of teachers as educators to disciplinarians.

Concurrently as these children live in their socioeconomically racially isolated communities, they experience diminished exposure to mainstream society and become less familiar with the standard English and social conventions that are necessary to succeed in rigorous academic spaces.

Additionally, when families have poorly educated parents there is often a lack of “parental pressure for a higher quality curriculum” and children have less exposure to college-educated individuals to set higher academic standards. This problem is only increasing in America as “the share of black students attending schools that are more than 90 percent minority has grown from 34 percent to 39 percent between 1991 to 2011. In 1991, black students typically attended schools where 35% of their fellow students were white, in 2011 it had fallen to 28 percent,” (Rothstein, 2)

The average black student is experiencing increasing socioeconomic isolation, in 2006 black students attend schools, where on average, 59% of their fellow students are low-income. A number which has risen since 1988 where on average 43% of fellow students were low-income. These numbers tend to be more extreme where students are struggling the most. In Detroit, for example, the typical black student attends a school where 3 percent of students are white, and 84% are low income, (Rothstein, 2). Rothstein writes, “the racial segregation of schools has been intensifying because the segregation of neighborhoods has been intensifying,” (Rothstein, 2).

When concerning the contemporary racial dynamics of neighborhoods and environs statistics show, that in 2011, 7% of poor whites lived in high poverty neighborhoods, where more than 40% of the residents are poor, up from 4% in 2000; 15% of poor Hispanics lived in such high poverty neighborhoods in 2011, up from 14% in 2000; and a breathtaking 23% of poor blacks lived in high poverty neighborhoods in 2011, up from 19% in 2000,” (Rothstein, 2).



In a study that assessed academic performance in children, using a scale similar to the IQ measure, “where 100 is the mean and roughly 70 percent of children score about average, between 85 and 115” researchers found that children who come from middle-class (non-poor) neighborhoods that have mothers who also grew up in middle-class neighborhoods scored an average of 104 on problem-solving tests, while children from poor neighborhoods whose mothers also grew up in poor neighborhoods scored lower, an average of 96, and that “children in poor neighborhoods whose mothers grew up in middle-class neighborhoods score an average of 102, slightly above the mean and only slightly below the average scores of children whose families lived in middle-class neighborhoods for two generations. Children who lived in middle-class neighborhoods—yet whose mothers grew up in poor neighborhoods—score an average of only 98.” These score differentials indicate that “living in poor neighborhoods over two consecutive generations reduced children’s cognitive skills by roughly eight or nine points” which is roughly equivalent to missing two to four years of schooling, (Rothstein, 2).

American cities were coded white and were defended as white until a secure refuge was provided, outside of the city in the suburbs. In their isolation, white communities, took jobs and resources with them, letting their former urban spaces hemorrhage from the financial loss, effectually forcing those behind to live in declining conditions with no way out. These suburban or white spaces developed directly in response to the growing presence of blacks in urban spaces (Powell, 30).

Suburban development corresponds to the utilization of single-land use planning, a strict adherence from the mixing of uses. The push to segregate land-uses corresponded with the creation of segregated housing. Segregated housing is the process of assigning spaces to people based on their racialized identity. Racialization is a process of assigning

a racial category to a person, it is a process rooted in the social construction of race created as a method of establishing white supremacy, by denying the ability of certain people membership to a privileged group based on their skin color. This division of humanity, with one being regarded as a higher-kind and the other as an inferior kind is the hallmark of white supremacy.

White supremacy survives on the persistence of racialization, as a means of social control. The built environment is embedded with a logic that reproduces the conditions of white supremacy by controlling the choices and opportunities available to its inhabitants based on race. Without substantial reorderings the built environment remains composed of an array of practices, choices, and decisions that promote white supremacy as a spatial practice—an aspect of our everyday life. The 21<sup>st</sup> century brought with it an adherence to what was intended by segregationists at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the segregated metropolis. The persisting achievement gap amongst black Americans, the housing bubble and subsequent affordable housing crisis that targeted black Americans disproportionately, gentrification, and the formation of suburban ghettos, characterized by food deserts, police brutality, high incarceration rates, high single mother rates, concentrated poverty and social stratification capture this other reality of the contemporary American city.

The notion of the *segregated metropolis* was marshalled by segregationists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (J Ward, 67-91). The phrase articulates the dissonance between the intended segregated realities. Black Americans are placed into cities or if they can afford it lower-tier suburban neighborhoods, while white Americans get to choose from gentrified cityscapes or their very own segregated suburban communities. By failing to address the generations of financial loss inherited by black Americans, through the prevalent racial

barriers that have taken on myriad forms is too permit the damages of such policies to become rearticulated into present manifestations of past problems.

This reiteration of past racialized struggles and traumas clearly manifest as the persisting achievement gap in America. A gap which points to the reality that Black Americans lack the ability of self-determination, to live outside of racialized logics. The current built environment is unable to actualize that reality for black Americans, as it in many ways cannot allow that reality based upon the restrictions of its racialized logics that uphold white supremacy and black inferiority. If we are going to rewrite urban life and its systems in the United States it must be done without a reliance on the traditions of city planning and design, as those traditions, the founding of urban planning and design in the United States came out of a need further buttress white supremacist efforts.

### Chapter III -- Documenting Racialized Space

The development of suburbs in the United States has dominated residential growth over the last century (Melvin, 7). Half of the 132 million homes in the country are in suburban communities (2010 Census). However, determined by the Census Bureau, people are making a return to cities. This is contributed to the recent recession which has reversed a fifty-year trend of outward migration. The poor economy has limited building activities in suburban communities. Additionally, poverty has seen a fifty-three percent increase since 2000, with 15.3 million suburban residents living below poverty, (Melvin, Gallagher). Conceived as a ideal way of living American suburbs have inherited the unsolved problems of cities, the recent housing bubble burst has directly impacted suburban communities more than any other housing option. Foreclosures, displaced families and higher rates of crime have begun to enter suburban communities,” (Melvin, 7).

Leigh Gallagher determined five societal changes that are “forcing suburbs to decline or change their current makeup,” first, households are shrinking; second, millennials are avoiding suburban communities, suburban flight has been attributed to: the rising price of gasoline, fatigue from traffic congestion, a rising divorce rate and the recent housing crises has made people re-examine their lifestyle; third, a diminishing reliance on cars; fourth, society is becoming more aware of the environment and find the excess of suburban living unattractive and unethical; and lastly according to many the suburbs were poorly designed, (Melvin, 8). Furthermore, Gallagher purports that the “suburbs were poorly planned and now public administrators are facing the results of poor planning.” (Melvin, Gallagher, 2013). Melvin states that, “the suburbs were not designed to last generations and did not consider societal well-being,” and in the declining conditions of suburbs today (due to massive foreclosures, ailing infrastructures and

housing stock) there is a necessary “realignment of societal priorities and a reversal of the fundamental social equation that once defined the American Dream,” (Melvin, 10).

This notion that the suburbs are not well and that they were improperly designed was articulated by architect Moshe Safdie in his book, *“The City After The Automobile”* where Safdie, opens the first chapter with the claim, “our cities are not well,” (Safdie 3).

Safdie continues the chapter with a brief overview of historic urban trends:

(de)industrialization, suburbanization, and the development of the automobile. The automobile becomes central to Safdie’s chapter. According to him, “the automobile has devastated the physical fabric of both older and younger cities,” (Safdie, 4). Older cities had more difficulty adjusting as they had to reformat their downtowns to keep up with unprecedented traffic volumes. These older cities he discusses are the ones shaped around the streetcar and were characterized by their compactness and walkability. To complete such a transformation required the massive investment into the interstate highway system by the federal government in 1956 (Safdie 4). The U.S. government’s decision to suburbanize this country simultaneously encouraged and required the purchase of a car, this transformed this country’s culture and the world’s. This is evident simply by the number of cars that exist today, a total now well over one-billion (Sousanis, WardsAuto). That mark was passed in 2010. In 2010 the total amount of automobiles in this country was approximately half the population of South America, and more than the population of the United Kingdom and Russia combined, Bureau of Transportation Statistics). The United States, which has the most cars than any other country in the world, is roughly 80million cars short of having a 1 to 1 ratio of cars to humans. The government participated in this process quite heavily, if not singlehandedly

orchestrating the entire shift itself<sup>2</sup>. Suburbanization should serve as a precedent of the government directing the urban form of this country.

When Safdie mentions how cars “devastated” the fabric of cities he is attempting to bring focus to how governments across the planet her modeled United State suburbanization models and collectively to transformed their cities to make space for one billion cars. This was a time when “the patterns of development, land-use, and land coverage,” became consumed and altered by the requirements and presumptions of car-dominated transportation (Safdie, 5). The practice of city building and planning now “required appropriate parking to be included at the outset” forcing “buildings, the distances between them, and the sequences of entering and exiting them” to be reconceptualized to meet the demands of the car.” This resulted in a new scale and pattern of urban morphology, known as suburbanization, a contradictory mode of urbanization financed by the federal government, that traded the “physical premise of the traditional city” for issues of vehicular access, aesthetics and parking (Safdie, 5) Safdie uses the sprawl of Los Angeles, Dallas, and Houston as an example of this pattern of development, one that is “not related to any type of pedestrian travel, but generated instead by regional highways and their principal intersections, and extended by regional arterial and county roads,” (Safdie, 6). The highway, as an extension of suburbanization, necessitated new urban forms which have become quite commonplace in our society, Safdie describes one of these forms, that he calls the strip:

“An arterial road lined with readily available parking and low-density, one-story, commercial development; the mall or regional shopping center, a concentration of stores

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<sup>2</sup> “The Federal commitment to an interstate highway system was so profound that the Federal-Aid Highway Act pledged to reimburse states for ninety percent of their final construction costs, regardless of the total price” (Mandell, 323). “The federal interstate highway program became a literal path to suburbia for middle-class whites during the post war period; building super highway directly into urban downtowns facilitated travel with insulated ease” (Mandell, 323).

surrounded by a sea of parking and generally located on a freeway intersection; and the suburban office complex, one huge block or cluster of buildings set along a regional highway, served by a parking structure or enormous lots (Safdie 6). The shift in development trends are noticeable as the urban streets and public buildings that exist in Manhattan or Washington, DC do not exist in these suburban spaces. This is because suburban development fundamentally rejects centralization. In suburban spaces, “highways separate office parks from shopping centers, which are separated from hotels and housing,” (Safdie, 6). Even the schools are decentralized as they are found isolated in residential suburbs, “distant from cultural and recreation facilities that remain in the traditional centers,” (Safdie, 6). For Safdie this all points to a development pattern marked by isolation, “an isolation of different activities,” to be specific. This development pattern of isolated land-uses made American urbanization even more contradictory and paradoxical than ever. Safdie realized this in the 90’s, the decade he wrote this book, but since then not much has changed. He points to architects as being complicit in encouraging this development pattern:

“During the 1960’s, we architects felt we could make a difference: we could influence the character of urban development, revitalize downtowns, and stabilize suburban sprawl. We continued to think of the city in traditional historical terms, with a cohesive center surrounded by suburbs – a radiating pattern of density and intensity set within a rural region – and focused primarily on the meaning of, and the need for, the traditional downtown. Could the affluent who had left over the previous two decades be convinced to live there again? Could civic institutions be revitalized and strengthened? Could the slums be rehabilitated, or should they be replaced?” (Safdie xi)

Safdie points not only at architects but to the business and intellectual communities for leading the initiative, because according to him, they knew that at that

time “the whole urban environment could not function with a rotten core” and while debate occurred between architects, intellectuals, and politicians on the direction of urban development, suburbanization intensified without serious scrutiny. Approximately thirty years later, Safdie’s declaration that cities are not well is still consistently supported by the very contradictions of contemporary urban and regional development. Safdie’s realization that suburbanization was a process rooted in the very neoliberalism that stifles the growth and imagination of today’s cities shifted his professional and academic understandings to write this book. According to him, suburbanization is more than just roads and balloon frame houses, but an amalgamation of “complex economic and technological trends that have ushered in a way of life.” It was a new way of life born from a “desire to escape the city.” He notes that, that desire “was loaded with the implicit wish for the comfort of living with “your own kind” – insulated from poverty, dirt, and diverse populations associated with urban life,” and “therefore, clearly, preserving the richness of the city center alongside the freedom of the suburbs cannot be accomplished by “merely” inventing new building types,” as just like with Habitat ’67, the problem simply is not only architectural but structural. “To “have our cake and eat it too” means recognizing not only what our urban landscape has come to look like, but what forces shape it and how they operate it,” (Safdie xii). Suburbanization according to Safdie has been poorly understood across the board, he writes “today, ideas about the relationship of transportation systems to cities and suburbs, urban form, organization, and building types remain vague and outdated. We continue to formulate policy and generate technology based on lifestyles and concepts of the built environment that are already many decades old, never to be regained,” (Safdie, xii)

Safdie wants to fight for a “urban-policy regime dedicated to pursuing equity in addition to growth,” but when initiatives and policies are only perfunctory and when



“people do not rally or march or organize to support transit-oriented development, regional planning, [and] poverty deconcentration,” what is to be done? It certainly does seem we are in a “profound poverty of vision in planning for our cities,” (Safdie, 7). Safdie urges the reader to consider “Why have the old programs and investment in the prevailing patterns not worked? Why has the new expanded city failed to satisfy many of our needs for beauty, affiliation, or social commitment? How can we as a society begin to take responsibility not only for solving the problems we have already created, but also for planning to realize our dreams for the future?” (Safdie, 8)

He orients the reader for the next chapter, “in order to go forward and consider the city that might be, we must look at the many visions of our cities since the beginning of the massive urbanization that marks this century. What have the proposals been? Have they been tested, and if so, what have we learned from them? What were the values that guided their authors, and to what extent has society itself changed in the unfolding of the saga of twentieth century urbanism?” (Safdie, 8). After having done this and determining the ideological underpinnings that designed suburban development in America to be that of white supremacist intentions it is important we begin alternative designs and plans to rewrite the logics of American urbanism.

### *Racialized Space: Interpreting Typologies and Urban Dynamics*

The site of analysis used in this thesis, in which the aforementioned themes will be situated, is the Poughkeepsie region. This region is defined as the City of Poughkeepsie, and the surrounding ring of suburban development that resides beyond the city boundary in the Town of Poughkeepsie. Situated in Dutchess county together the city and town of Poughkeepsie have a total population of seventy-five thousand residents

(The United States Census Bureau). The city however holds the highest concentration of black residents in the region(ArcGIS).

I use the phrase *Poughkeepsie region* to disturb the notion of the city as a closed unit. I use the notion of *urban theory without an outside* that seeks to forgo what critical urban theorists have come to call: *methodological cityism*, a framework that sees cities or urban areas as typological binaries, in which the city is defined in contrast to non-city zones such as suburbs, towns, villages, rural areas, the countryside etc. Conversely, *urban theory without an outside* conceptualizes cities, or urban areas, as processual dialectical agglomerations that are organized and structured through capitalism, state strategies and sociopolitical struggles of which results in discontinuous, uneven sociospatial configurations that “are creatively destroyed through the crisis-tendencies of capital” resulting in territorial differentiation and redifferentiation at various spatial scales,” (Brenner, 22). I mention this at the start of the chapter because to analyze the City of the Poughkeepsie not in relation the its surrounding Township weakens the results of the inquiry. Their relationship is dialectical and typifies the shifts population trends from city to suburbs and back to cities.

#### *Urban Disinvestment: Border Vacuums*

The City of Poughkeepsie is intercepted and segmented by a series of interstates and highways that connect the larger metropolitan region to the densely city center. The dense network of transportation corridors already display major themes of suburbanization in the region. The ability for those in outside of the city territory, a primarily white population have sufficient the access to the dense city center’s institutions, and services without having to live there; they do not need to enter the city, however, as these institutions and services have been relocated outside of the city. How

to a certain extent the need to go into the City of Poughkeepsie, for many is unnecessary due to the extreme disinvestment in the city that deindustrialization and suburbanization brought to it. The City of Poughkeepsie typifies the conditions of the rustbelt cities in the United States. The City went through many transformation in the late twentieth century when concerns over its decline, primarily blighted conditions, spurred the city to design various urban renewal projects that only seemed to quicken the city's decline.

This decline is best illustrated by what Jane Jacob's termed as *border vacuums*, which she defines as: "the perimeter of a large single-use territory or corridor (often a transportation corridor)." Jacobs included institutional borders, such as universities, hospital campuses, office parks, superblocks, strip malls. Marc Szarkowski expands on Jacob's notion of border vacuums by explaining that transportation corridors (railroads, highways, and arterial roads) act as border vacuums because they isolate and compartmentalize city zones and districts by discouraging casual crossing. Furthermore, Szarkowski explains that borders depreciate urban space and when found in clustered spaces can become "dead places," (Szarkowski). "Wherever a significant "dead place" appears on a downtown street, it causes a drop in the intensity of foot circulation there. Sometimes the drop is so serious economically that business decline to one side or the other of the dead place, (Jacobs, 263). These borders, being spaces of single-use aren't inherently bad and often do serve a purpose such as parking lots and office towers, but they can also form several from vacant lots and buildings. In the instance of the City of Poughkeepsie the notion of border vacuums is successfully illustrated by examining the downtown area(Figure 1).



Figure 1. Downtown Poughkeepsie – from South Clinton St. (bottom) to The East West Arterial (top). Blue color fields indicate building area and yellow lines indicate major streets.

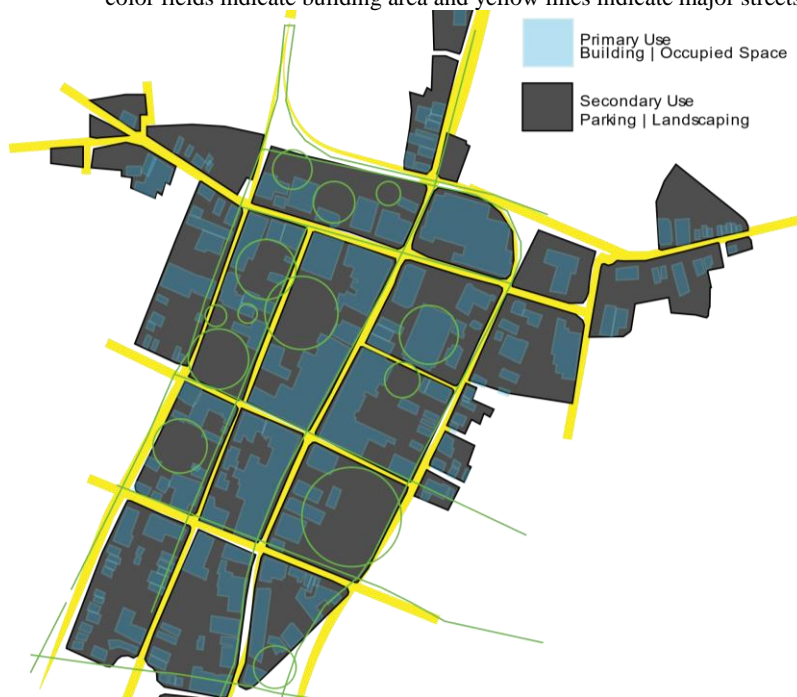


Figure 1.1: Downtown Poughkeepsie Voided Spaces

The green circles in Figure 1.2 represent spaces that are either large-scale parking lots, vacant lots, and vacant buildings. The blue shapes are the buildings, and the dark gray space is their corresponding block. This diagram serves to capture the inefficient

use of urban space downtown. These inefficient spaces become border vacuums, or voided space, that erode at sustainable urbanism and are prominently depicted in Figure 1.3.

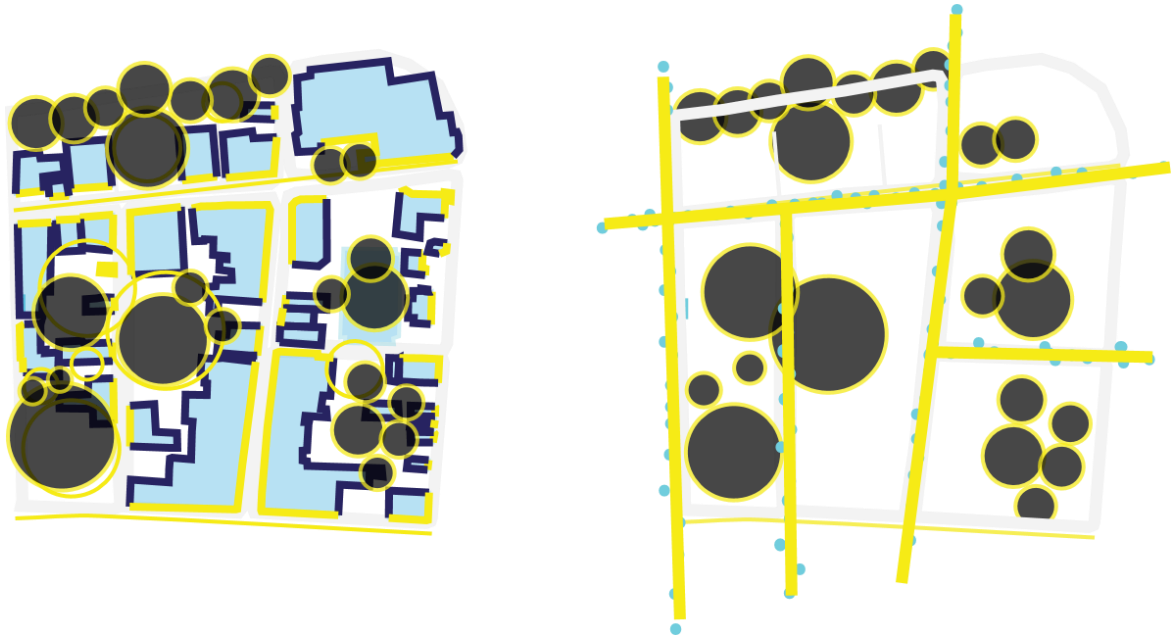


Figure 1.2: Voided Spaces from Academy St. (bottom) to the East-West Arterial (top). The left image is overlaid with building coverage while the right image isolates voided space overlaid with main roads.

These images serve as representations and evidence of disinvestment within the City of Poughkeepsie but additionally serve as a visualization of the damage done by suburbanization and 20<sup>th</sup> century planning policies that segmented downtowns into large superblocks through the insertion of arterial roads. The lack of inter-city connectivity diminishes urban activity and promotes an isolationist car culture.

*Zoning, Demographics, and Sprawl*

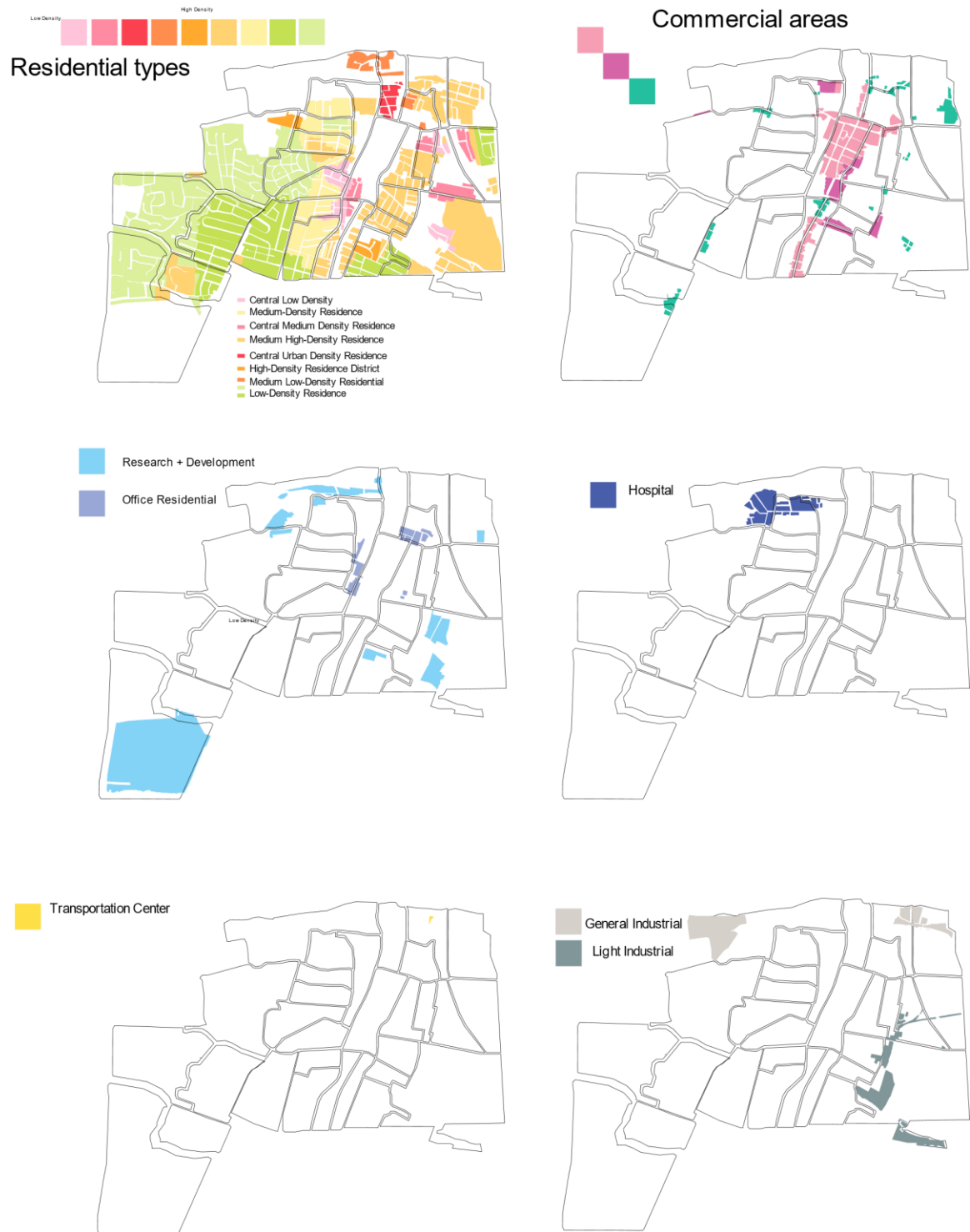


Figure 2: Zoning types overlaid with block group boundaries for the City of Poughkeepsie.

The following diagrams display income, land-use, and racial disparities amongst the thirty-one block groups within the City of Poughkeepsie. Wealthier block groups hold higher concentrations of white neighborhoods while poorer block groups have greater portions of black populations, and tend to have multiple different types of land-uses indicated by the colored squares. Wealthier blocks were found to have low-density housing districts and were generally found on near the boundary of the Poughkeepsie town/city border. Block groups in the City of Poughkeepsie are organized into wealthier, white, suburban areas and poorer, black, higher density areas. The middle ground between the two extremes are located closer to the central city areas. Wealthier areas are predominately white (with black populations lower than 7% of the total population), poor areas have some racial diversity but can be further categorized into poor white areas (Northwest Poughkeepsie) and poor black (Northeast) Poughkeepsie.



Figure 2.1 Land Uses + Median Household Income in thirty-one blocks.

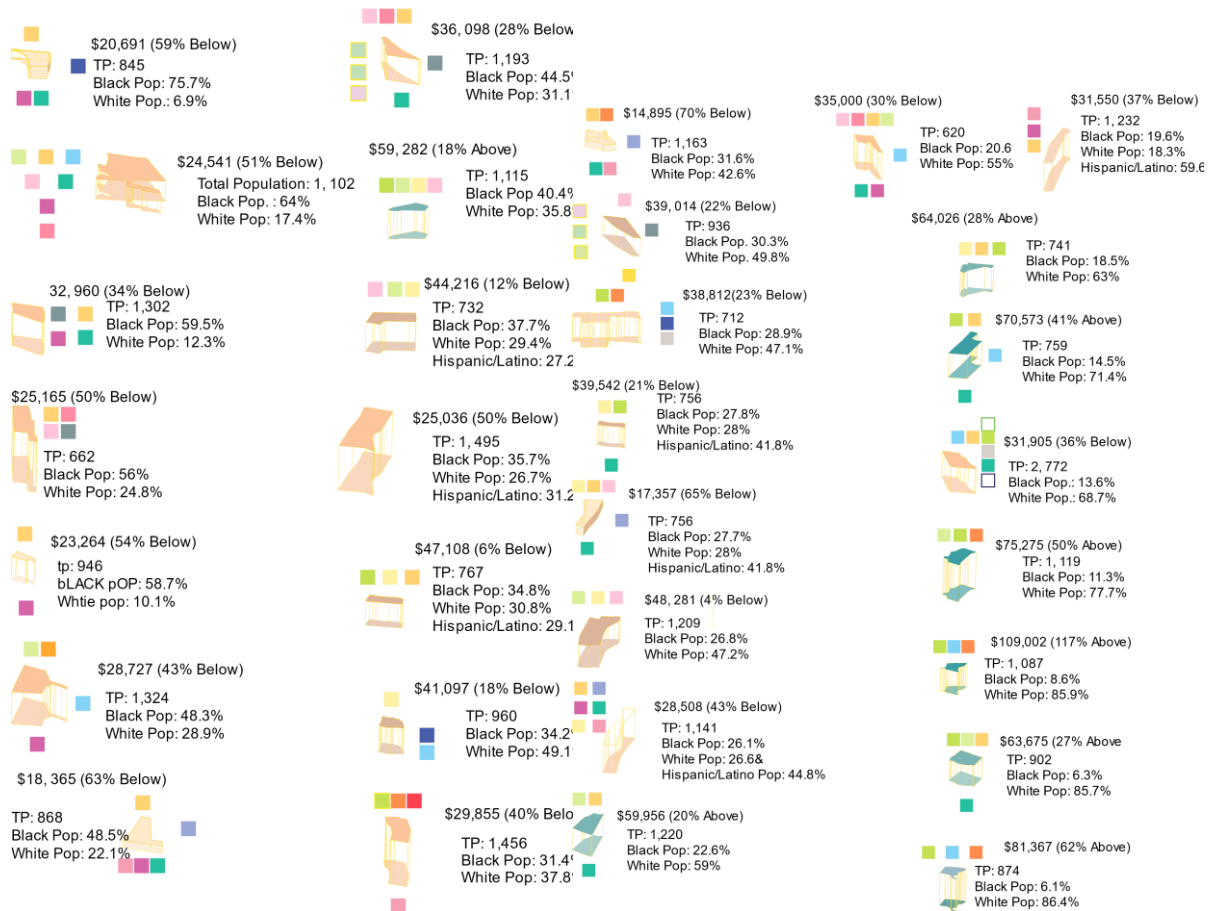


Figure 2.2 Block groups in descending order from highest percentage of black residents to lowest percentage black. Median household income, total population, and percent white population is included.

Northern Poughkeepsie contains heavy and light industrial areas which are situated adjacent to these low-income housing areas. The divisions of housing zones correspond to what was proven by the chain of exclusion detailed earlier-- the positioning of lower cost housing, the availability of rental housing, and the increased exclusion of neighborhoods with higher socioeconomic status facilitate a sort of sorting of people and families that intensifies residential segregation in Poughkeepsie. The ability to proliferate segregated communities requires a sudden gain of income to afford buying into those communities or a hybridization of land uses that can allow families and individuals looking for affordable renting units to live amongst those with mortgages -- however the simple segregation of housing types does not allow this mixing. The demographics of the City of Poughkeepsie further elucidate racialized dynamics and tropes



of predominately black(segregated) communities: low homeownership, high unemployment, and low incomes. This appears inversely with predominately white communities.

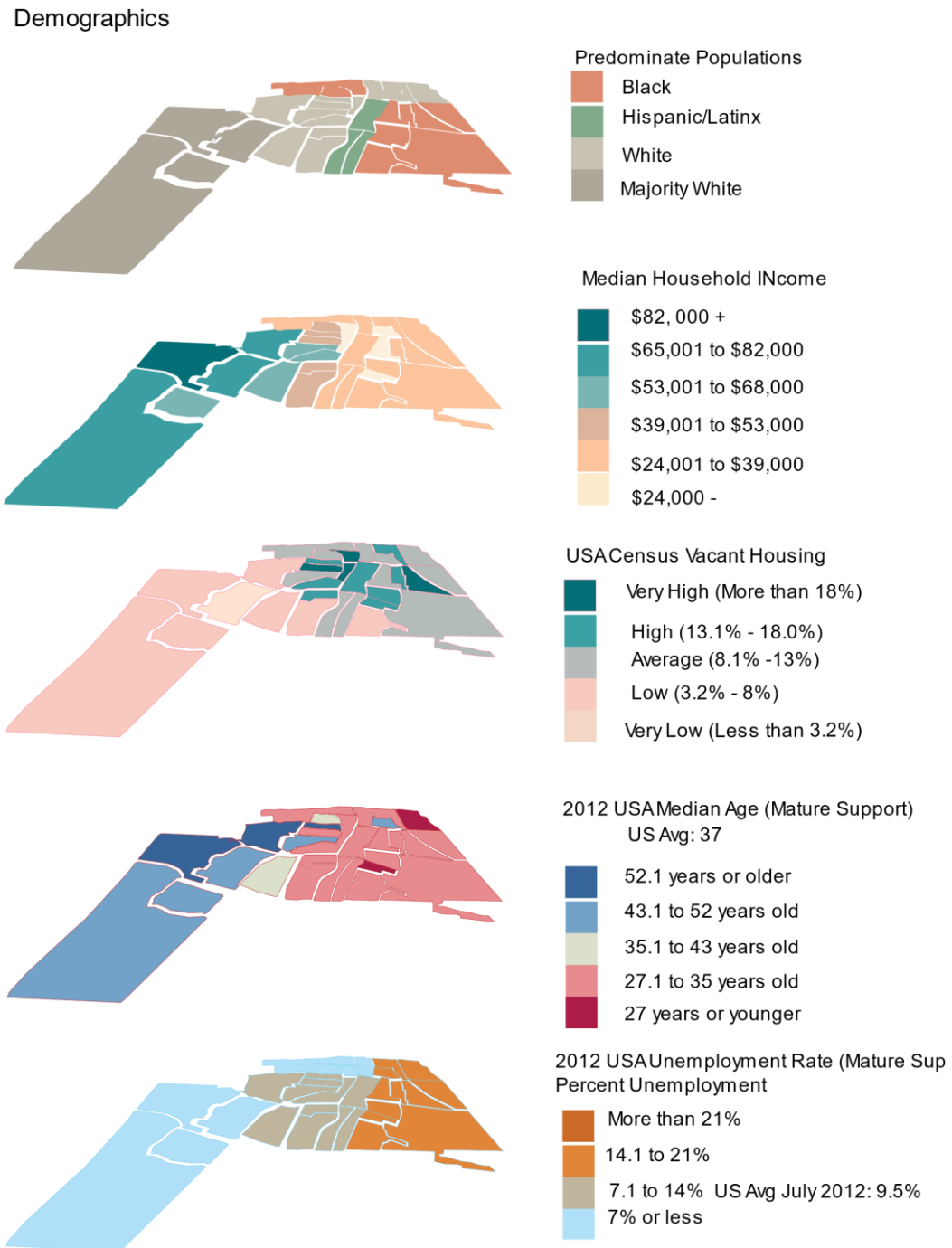


Figure 2.3 City of Poughkeepsie Demographics

*Regional Analysis*

The map in the middle represents housing districts determined by the city and town of Poughkeepsie zoning codes. Concluded from the study done by Rolf Pendall on local land use regulation, Pendall determined that generally areas of low density zoning have lower black populations because of lower density zones correspond to having more expensive housing not available for rent and higher density areas allowed for more diverse housing types such a multi-family housing, which attracts black renters. R-20 zones are medium density zoning equivalents but in the town.

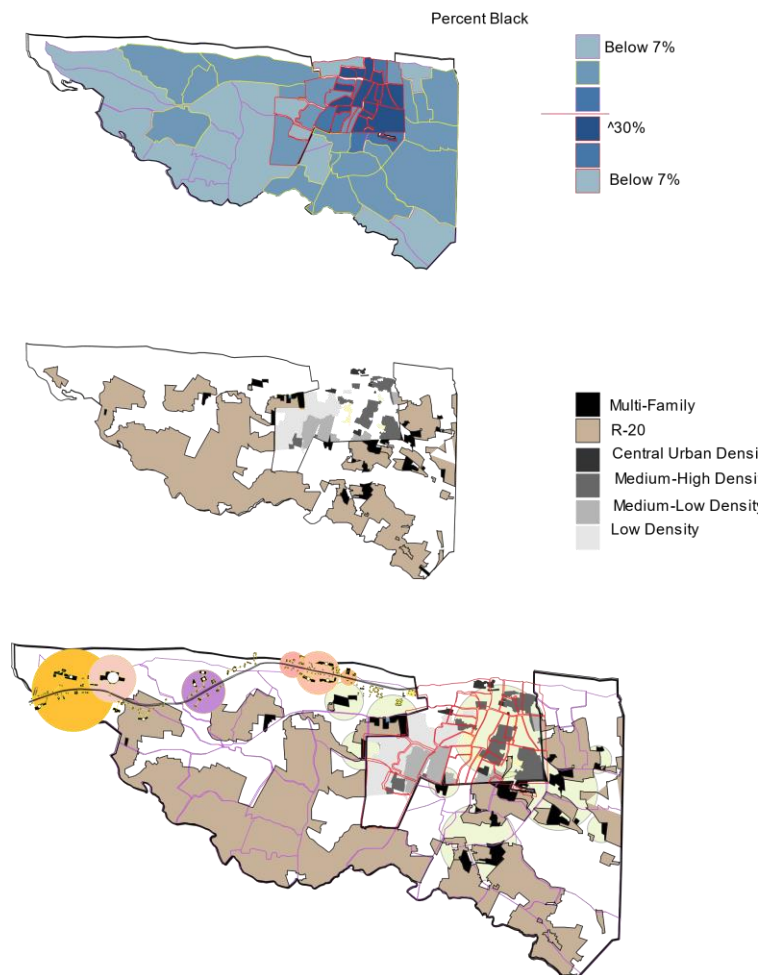


Figure 3 The maps displaying % black population, housing zones, an Town commercial centers overlaid with black boundaries.

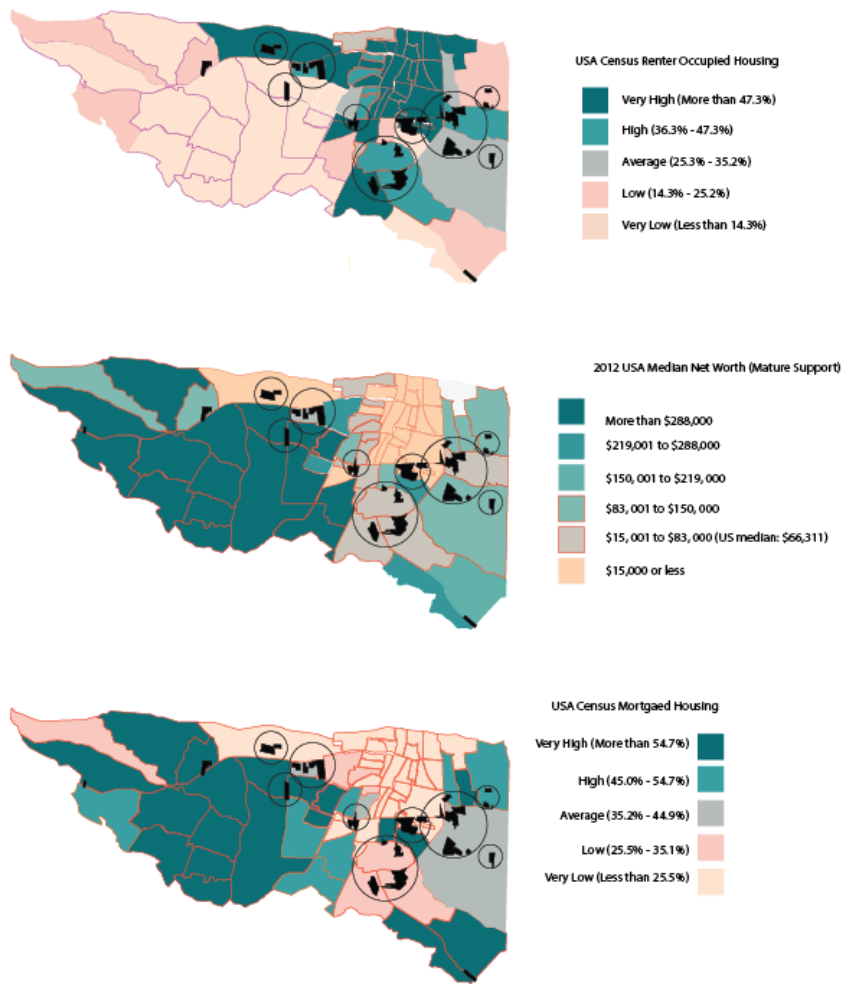


Figure 3.1 Regional Demographics (Renter Occupied, Median Net Worth, Mortgaged Housing).

All but one area of multi-family zoning is in primarily white (under 7% black) and the only areas with block of high percentages of blacks is in the City of Poughkeepsie, which are primarily concentrated in higher density residential areas. Most the higher density residences are positioned northeast of the arterials and are generally of lower income, as in the city of Poughkeepsie median family income rises significantly south of the east-west arterials.

However, in accordance with Pendall's study the higher income of a suburban development, the more exclusive that neighborhood becomes to black residences.

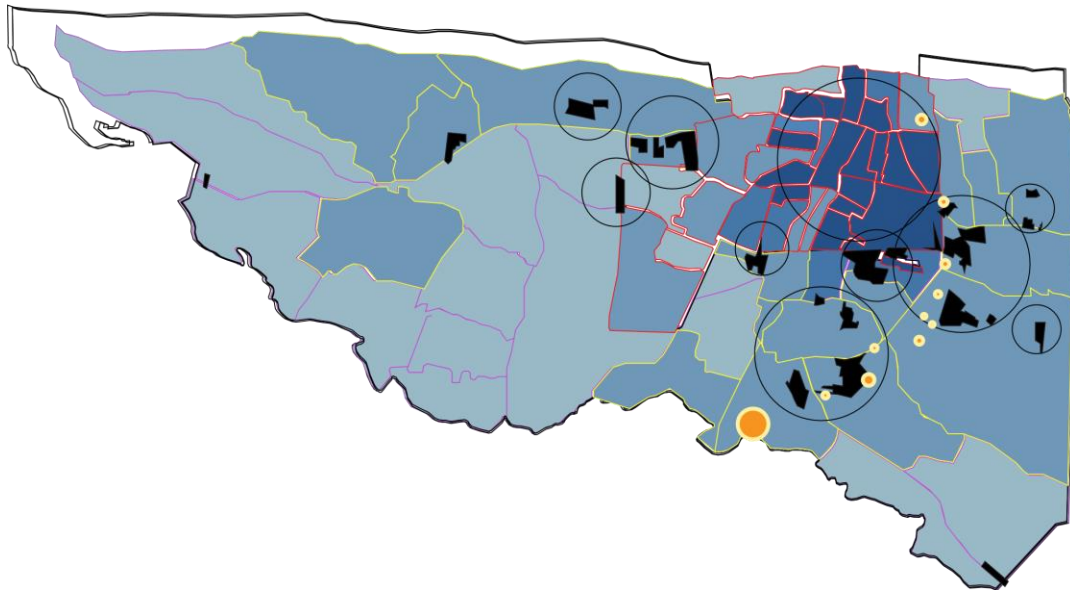


Figure 3.2 The location of Industry in the Town of Pouhkeepsie overlaid with multifamily residences areas.

*Suburban Sprawl in the Pouhkeepsie Region*

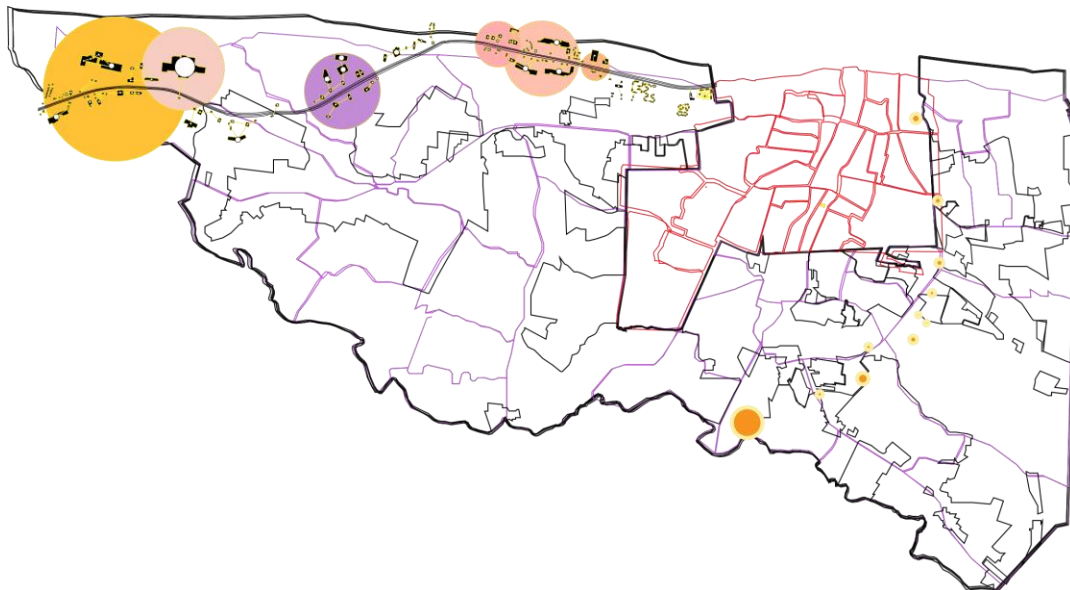


Figure 4 The location of the main commercial corridor in the Town of Pouhkeepsie w/ primary commercial zones indicated the color fields.

200ft is the distance one can travel in approximately 1 minute at a walking speed of 3 miles per hour. The circles below indicate a two-hundred-foot distance on the segment of main street that comprises the Main Street Commercial district (Downtown Poughkeepsie). Below (Figure 4.1), is a similar diagram however due to an increase in scale each outer circle represents 2,000ft. Approximately the distance one could travel in ten minutes, moving at a speed of 3 miles per hour. Juxtaposed together, Route 9 (Figure 4.2) which serves as the major commercial area in the Town of Poughkeepsie covers far more land, making it impossible to conveniently walk, particularly when the main commercial areas, indicated by colored circles are spaces so far from each other. The density of the Main Street commercial district contrasts providing an ease of travel, however due to its depreciation major stores and services are located on Route 9.

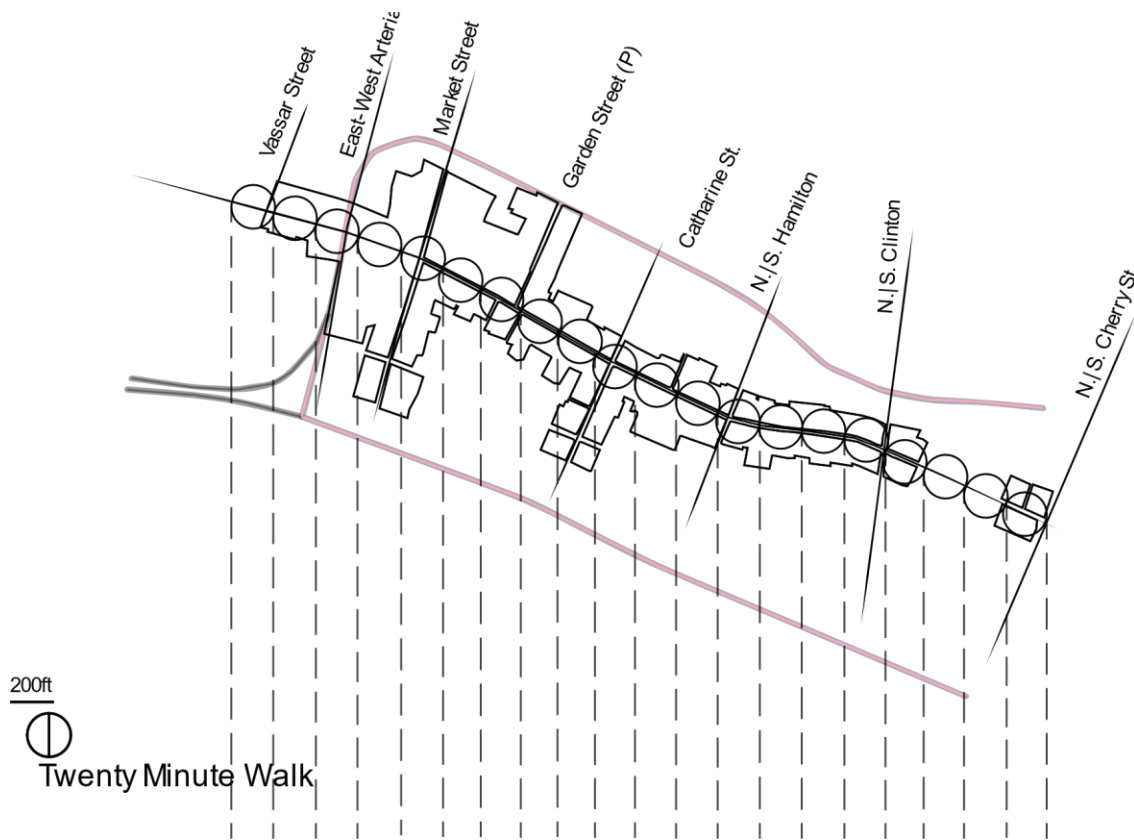


Figure 4.1 Main Commercial Walkability – City of Poughkeepsie

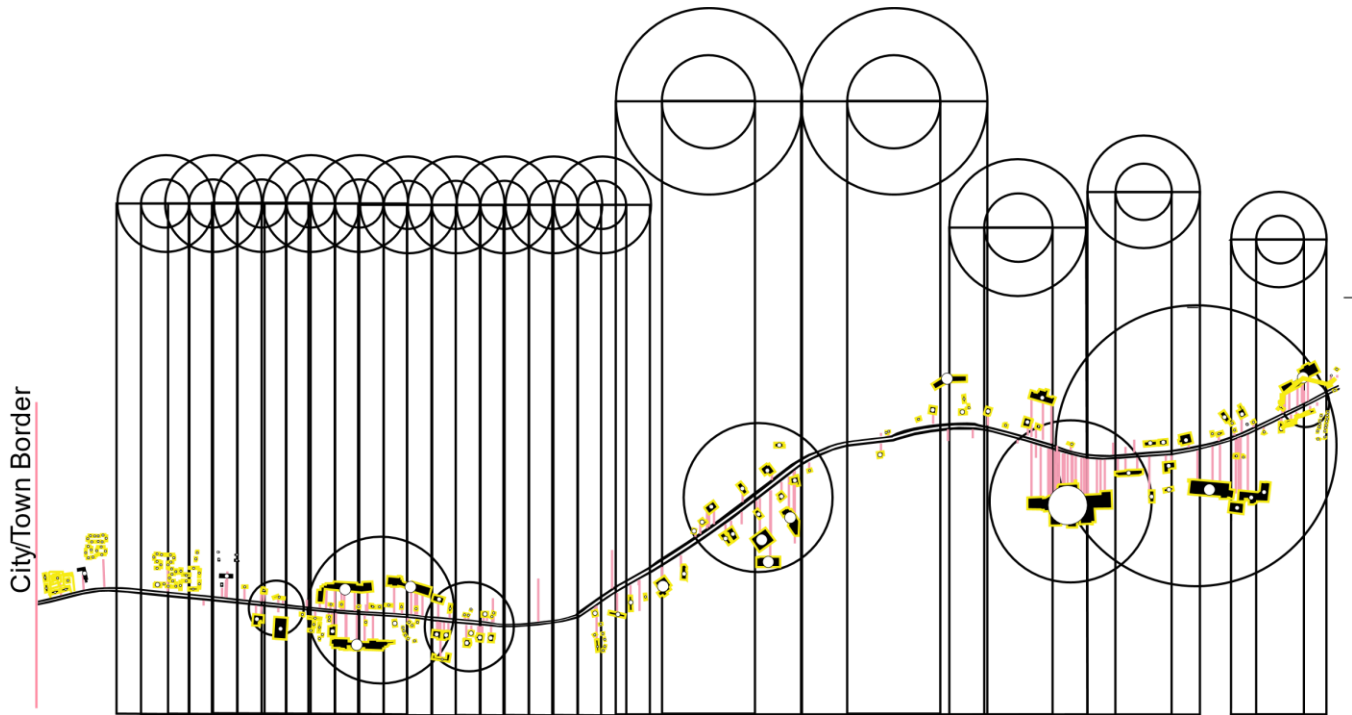


Figure 4.2 Main Commercial District – Town of Poughkeepsie

*Poughkeepsie in Conclusion / Judge Jane Bolin + Race in Poughkeepsie*

The name of the first black woman judge in the United States is Judge Jane Matilda Bolin. She was born in Poughkeepsie, NY, in 1908. Bolin was a descendent of an activist family that had resided in the Poughkeepsie region for two centuries. Her mother, Matilda Bolin, was of white English decent and her father, Gaius Bolin, was of black and Native American ancestry. Judge Bolin graduated from Wellesley College, and went on to become the first black women graduate of the Yale University Law School in 1931. She returned to Poughkeepsie, after passing the New York Bar, to practice law with her family but soon left for New York City to pursue more. When asked about her reasoning for leaving her hometown Bolin said (G. K. Ward):

“Yes, it is physically beautiful, but I hate fascism wherever it is practiced, by Germans, Japanese, or by Americans. Poughkeepsie is fascist to the extent of deluding itself that there is a superiority among human beings by reason solely of color or race or religion.”

--Jane M. Bolin, Oral History Interview (by Jean Rudd and Lionel Bolin)

In a speech in Poughkeepsie meant to celebrate her life achievements, Bolin turned the spotlight upon the values of her audience, declaring: “There are Negro and Jewish and Catholic and Chinese, Japanese, and Indian youngsters, who dream the same dreams I once had and who shoot at the same stars. What will you make democracy mean to them? They too study the Constitution and the history of America. They take seriously the Constitution and unlike the United States Supreme Court during much of our history, they take it literally. They mean to have liberty and a full, rich life, free of want oppression and inequality of opportunity, whether economic, social, or political.”(Ward, 193).

Bolin, in a testimony regarding the impact of housing discrimination in her court said, “I see daily the effects not only of inadequate housing but of segregated housing on families and children. I see bodies dwarfed by an overcrowded and substandard home and I see little minds warped by the knowledge that ‘we are somehow considered different and inferior.’ With that injustice as a starting point, festering over a period of time, it is perhaps little wonder that there should finally be a rebellion against law and authority.” Compounding the problem were “segregated schools, diseases of slum living, [and] blatant exploitation of unscrupulous real estate interests of people . . . trapped because of their race, religion or nationality” (Ward, 194). In a letter to President John F. Kennedy, Bolin described how her experience in domestic relations court allowed her to observe the “physical, moral and psychological destructiveness on

children and families of poor housing, racially segregated housing and racial discrimination in any form” (Ward, 194).

This legacy of segregation and racism that characterized Jane M. Bolin’s upbringing and life serves as a reminder of the traction lost by civil rights activist in the changing face of racism and white supremacy in the built environment. What does it mean for the city of such an activist to be still amid a struggle she fought against on a national level? The persistence of racial inequality alone gives evidence to the ability racialized logics have of resurfacing and reclaiming space.



## Conclusion

This thesis catalogues the ways this *dominant* world was structured very intentionally but more particularly how this intent, has transcended the time of its framers. It operates to occlude itself but even more perniciously to reinvent itself to abscond any practical or strategic debasement. The racialization of our social space restricts our own abilities to envision, or even consider alternatives. If we cannot conceptualize alternatives how is it possible to picture the emergent world posited by Manzini? How is it possible to believe that a radical transformation of our world is actually possible?

A glimpse of this emergent world may perhaps be illuminated by the work completed by the Altarum Institute. They studied the effect of closing the earnings gap between people of color and non-hispanic whites. Using the 2011 American Community Survey data they determined that: “if the average incomes of minorities were raised to the average income of whites, total U.S. earnings would increase by 12%, representing nearly \$1trillion today. By closing the earnings gap through higher productivity, gross domestic product (GDP) would increase by a comparable percentage, for an increase of \$1.9 trillion today. The earnings gain would translate into \$180 billion in additional corporate profits, \$290 billion in federal tax revenues, and a potential reduction in the federal deficit of \$350 billion, or 2.3% GDP.” Extrapolating these results into 2030 and 2050 resulted with notable increases:

“minorities make up 37% of the working age population now, but they are projected to grow by 46% by 2030, and 55% by 2050. Closing the earnings gap by 2030 would increase GDP by 16%, or more than \$5 trillion a year. Federal tax revenues would increase by 1\$ trillion and corporate profits would increase by \$450 billion. By 2050, closing the gap would increase

GDP by 20%. This is roughly the size of the entire federal budget, and a higher percentage than all U.S. healthcare expenditures.” (Altarum Institute)

I ask what would the United States feel like today if realizing that reality was what was meant by the Make America Great Again campaign? What would our urban structures look like if on January 29<sup>th</sup> of 2016 the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on behalf of the United Nations General Assembly, did not conclude that regardless of legal and constitutional developments in the United States, the end of official Jim Crow laws, and the civil rights era, “a systemic ideology of racism ensuring the domination of one group over another continues to impact negatively on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of African Americans today,” to such a degree that the has group felt it necessary to declare that the level of structural and institutional discrimination has created de facto barriers for African Americans to experience unimpeded and constitutionally guaranteed human rights (HRC/33/61).

Sustainability is not characteristic of the praxis of white supremacy. White supremacy is not socially, economically, or environmentally sustainable. This is clearly indicative of its many iterations: the civil war and the freedom and citizenship granted to the enslaved Africans required white supremacy to be rearticulated less overtly and not through such visible displays of racialized domination, it found itself in the notion of “separate but equal” in sociospatial segregation. The segregationist movement was diametrically opposed to the complete acceptance of descendants of enslaved Africans primarily because that would dissolve the entire foundation of civic society. The crises brought by the segregationist movement necessitated a rearticulation of white supremacy that led to its neoliberalization following the perceived progress made by the civil rights movements. The crisis brought by neoliberalism are being felt currently but most profoundly witnessed by the recession in 2008 and the subsequent affordable

housing crisis, the persistence of the achievement gap, the resegregation of public schools, gentrification, the development of suburban slums, and the rise of black lives matter. These crises are rearticulating the unsustainable methods of white supremacy and each find themselves and their respective sites of reproduction in the bureaucratic and professional management of the built environment. If according to Mbembe, architecture and urban design concern themselves with “acts of repression, separation, and fantasy,” through their decoding and analysis it may be possible to understand how their disparate arrangements feed collective anxieties and fears of urban space. If they concern themselves with the social mind and its disorders, they may also concern themselves with providing the necessary therapy to heal its prolonged traumas and psychosocial maladies. Through critical city design, we can begin a process of analyzing and critiquing the collective conscious mobilized by urban living, to parse out rationality from irrationality, from cities organized by racialization to cities structured by the auspices of abolitionism, humane modes of collectivity, and social and environmental sustainability.

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