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Blackness, place and learning: Youth cultivating a sense of identity-in-place through spatial storylines

Kaleb Germinaro

Curriculum and Instruction, University of Illinois Chicago

ABSTRACT

Background: This paper examines how five youth in Seattle's Central District and Southend participated in an architectural design-build project that centered Black spatial histories. The project aimed to foster a meaningful context for identity development, learning, and spacemaking as intertwined relational processes.

Methods: Using critical ethnography, this study documents key activities and moments where students leveraged their spatial knowledge and relationships to design for their own communities. In positioning the Black neighborhoods as a Figured World, ethnographic observations and analysis focus on how students engaged with the histories and present-day realities of their relations to these neighborhoods during the design process.

Findings: Data highlights how students' design work cultivated their sense of identity-in-place and spatial storylines. Youth utilized design as a mode of resistance to gentrification and displacement. Findings reveal how students took on roles as both designers and storytellers to embed their personal and collective histories into architectural practice.

Contribution: This research connects the Learning Sciences with Black geographies by demonstrating how centering Black narratives in project-based curricula can foster youth resistance and produce knowledge as relation to space. Strategies are illuminated for creating learning experiences that prioritize identity development and community-centered design.

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CONTACT Kaleb Germinaro kaleb@uic.edu Curriculum & Instruction, University of Illinois Chicago, 1040 W Harrison St, Chicago, IL 60607, USA.

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Introduction

I want to start this story out slowly see Collage 1. There is something difficult, yet worthy, about weaving two fields of thinking together to both tell a story and display research. Stroll with me through this paper as I do my best to frame a learning environment through a Black geographies school of thought. Allen et al. (2019) "position black geographies not as a catch-all for all geographies of race but instead as a term encompassing works that emphasize black experiences, as well as alternative visions and articulations



Collage 1. Commissioned by Isidor Studio, this provides an accompanying representation of the student's time and work on designing and building a place. In Belonging: A Culture of Place (2009), bell hooks eloquently writes: "Objects are not within spirit. As living things they touch us in unimagined ways. On this path one learns that an entire room is a space to be created, a space that can reflect beauty, peace and a harmony of being, a spiritual aesthetic. Each space is a sanctuary" and further notes "Aesthetics then is more than a philosophy . . . it is a way of inhabiting a space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming" (p. 122)

of space drawn from these experiences" (p. 43). Working from this definition, I examine how youth in Seattle learn through the layered spatial histories of the Black community, both as a pedagogical and methodological point of departure for the learning environment. During Urban Renewal in Seattle, historically redlined areas yielded repercussions from where the historic housing insurance and investment maps categorized neighborhoods as: A. Best (green), B. Still desirable (blue), C. Declining (yellow) and D. Hazardous (red). Due to racially restricted covenants, red and yellow areas encompassed Seattle's central and Southend neighborhoods where Black, Jewish and Japanese communities were forced to be. The site of this project is in the Central District and Mount Baker neighborhoods, areas apart from the central and Southend. This project reverberates in the wake of these realities, particularly as the students learn as they're experiencing rapid rates of gentrification and displacement. If we (myself & you the reader) were in Seattle, I would humbly offer to take you around Seattle on a spatial story tour of these places. The relations to these locations are central to the intentional pedagogy, design and building conducted by all those involved in the design-build project.

Literatures tied to Black Geographies include topics of youth in relation to design, gentrification, displacement, and contributions to liberation processes. The focal group and data collected for this project follows the experiences of three Black youths and two Southeast Asian youths in a community-based design-build program. In this program, I served as a mentor, researcher, designer of pedagogy, and community member in the program ran by the organization named Sawhorse Revolution. In this program, the youths were tasked with learning how to design (10 weeks of architecture) and build (10 weeks of carpentry) a space in the Central District for a community organization named Deaf Spotlight. Taking place in Mount Baker, I focus on the design portion of a larger program and the key design activities youth engaged. At the conclusion of the project, students had built a two-structures (less than 120 sqft each) for Deaf Spotlight. By engaging Black spatial histories as an anchor point in the curriculum, the students were able to discuss how a place came to be, building on their individual and collective spatial knowledge derived from their learning and community.[1]

I had a mentor tell me that if my momma can't understand my writing, it's too confusing, so I'll write this more like a story, or how I'd share it with someone I'm in community with (of course with theory, methods and analysis interlaced). I view that "learning is, at its core, a fundamentally fugitive act, underscored with deeper fugitivity in societies where the

[1]To note, since this project took place in 2020, the city of Seattle ended the larger city ran arts and culture program, forcing these structures to not be installed and eventually sold. Although the sell allowed Deaf Spotlight to recoup their funds, it led to further displacing the Deaf Spotlight community.

dangerous, agentic act of learning is constricted with punishing precision" (Patel, 2016, p. 397). Learning is a tool for resistance to oppressive systems and can promote power through agency and decentering whiteness. I focus on the youths' spatial relations, both how they tell their stories and how they engaged those stories to identify spatial issues while conceptualizing resistance to gentrification and displacement. Seattle's history is muddied with racial covenants, land dispossession, internment, and ongoing colonial occupation (see Silva, 2009). Seattle also has a beautiful history of cross solidarity, collective action and care across communities that lead and facilitate social movements (see Santos & Iwamoto, 2016). Building on this place-based lineage, I ground this story through understandings of spatial histories at the intersection of stories and identities, which I argue allows us to situate Black experiences and stories as departure points for inquiry and curriculum to facilitate learning and spatial relations. As mentioned, Black geographies served as the cornerstone logic that guided the pedagogy by drawing from Black experiences within the design-build program curriculum because of the locations within the city the students were learning and designing in and for.

Framing concepts

The participatory design (not to be confused with participatory design research) that youth engaged with while completing this project was predicated upon several conceptual understandings: Black geographies, Figured Worlds, and space-making processes. To begin, Black geographic thought encompasses theory, methods and tool for analysis. The four themes of Black geographies are 1) spacemaking and the Black spatial imaginary, 2) racial capitalism, 3) cities, policing & carceral-ity, and 4) racism and plantation futures (Hawthorne, 2019). For this research design, I situate myself and work within the first theme, where the wide mechanisms of spacemaking and the spatial imaginary connect to addressing gentrification via learning experiences. I use an analytic tool baked into this first theme, a Black sense of place, to understand identities constructed in a Black geographic figured world as they emerge through spatial knowledge realized through spatial storylines; these are concepts nestled in the first theme (see graphic below). For me, legacies of Black spatial knowledge and architectural spacemaking practices are pedogeological tools to reconstruct spatial imaginings and possibility, specifically stories of space and aesthetics. Too often are Black spatial histories displaced from learning experiences and seldom centered as points of grounding pedagogy. Architectural projects have the potential to simultaneously support forces of resistance and liberation (Anderson et al., 2021). Learning through the ways Black folks

created a sense of place in Seattle is integral to the pedagogy and learning of the students. Specifically, the history and legacies of resistance to redlining and displacement experienced by Black communities in Seattle. Students were able to move from this grounding to uncover the ways space has been used to expel Blackness and spatial stories. Spatial production and spatial knowledge serve as key processes to understand design as a reclamation process, particularly as the students engaged their identities in relation to the Black geographic figured world. My driving research question for this paper focuses on the 10-week design program: how do youth engage & address anti-Blackness and displacement through their learning and constructions of identity in relation to place?

Black geographies as a figured world: Orientations to space and place

As McKittrick notes, "Black matters are spatial matters" (McKittrick, 2006, p. xiv). Critical definitions of space and place stem from human and cultural geographers and are useful departure points. Tuan (1977) describes spaces as ongoing movements over time, while places are moments in time accompanied by a meaning of a space. Similarly, Massey (2005) discusses space and place as a stories-so-far that are often in progress and ever evolving and being made. In my understanding and application, Black geographies extend these notions of space and place to uncover the who, what, how, why of Black stories and processes for cultivating places across time. For this project, youth spacemaking acknowledges the everyday spatial interactions within their communities, while a sense of place necessitates attention from youth's perspectives as they construct relations to places through their everyday spacemaking, and how they employ design to represent those assertations.

In this project, I position the Central District and Southend as a Black geography in a Figured World. Figured worlds are defined as "socially produced, culturally constituted activities" (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 40–41). Through conceptually and materially producing a space, youth cultivate understandings of their spatial relations to Black spatial stories, and in turn the "situatedness of identity in collectively activities" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 40). In Figured Worlds, people interpret themselves and others as particular actors, while in this project we positioned students as designers whose contemporary relationship to a place honors the temporal historical relationship of who's been in said place. This led me to viewing the youth as "historical actors" (Gutiérrez et al., 2019) as those who intentionally use their past, present, and future actions to transform their own circumstances and the world around them. Pulled from Urrieta (2007), Holland et al. (1998) describes Figured Worlds as having four (somewhat abstract) characteristics:

- "Figured worlds are cultural phenomenon to which people are recruited, or into which people enter, and that develop through the work of their participants.
- Figured worlds function as contexts of meaning within which social encounters have significance and peoples positions matter. Activities relevant to these worlds take meaning from them and are situated times and places.
- Figured worlds are socially organized and reproduced, which means that in them people are sorted and learn to relate to each other in different ways.
- Figured worlds distribute people by relating them to landscapes of action; thus, activities related to the worlds are populated by familiar social types and host to individual senses of self" (p. 108).

For the youth of color who are not Black learning through a Black community's history and experiences, I've found it concerning to addresses the longstanding questions of "Why use Black geographies if everyone is not Black?" My answer is grounded in the use of figured worlds "because figured worlds are socially organized and performed, they are dependent on interaction and people's intersubjectivity for perpetuation. In them people 'figure' how to relate to one another over time and across different time/place/space contexts . . . The significance of figured worlds is that they are recreated by work, often contentious work, with others; thus, the importance of activity, not just in a restricted number of figured worlds, but across landscapes of action" (p. 109). Black geographies allow for a deeper analysis of student's identity in relation to place, both interrogating conceptual and material understandings of the figured world, despite all the students not being Black. Students within figured worlds learn through perspectives of said world; in doing so they learn to utilize artifacts and actions for new understandings, connections and concerns that relate to their sense of place and self. Specifically, how their learning through Black geographic histories shape their design process and spatial relations. Our project allowed students to represent their speculative visions of the city through their designs, while working toward the consequentiality of their designs through building.

In the context of this project, youth use the design process to acknowledge historical actions as they are tasked with critically engaging issues of gentrification, youth and design, and community interventions/youth liberation practices (Gutiérrez et al., 2019). Since not all the students are from the neighborhood, nor Black, they construct and "figure" their own relations or as Urrieta (2007, p. 108) phrased it, their "personal social history (history-in-person)" to the Black Geography. Using Black geographies as a figured world details the ways students' relations between themselves and the Black geographical history, understandings of sense of place yields identity-in-place,

a flip on Urrieta's conceptualization of history-in-person to signal a relation between place and personal social history. Since this is the case, Urrieta (2007) offers more clarification for how people not of a figured world can engage "we may never enter some figured worlds based on social rank or position (or the lack thereof), while others we may ourselves deny to outsiders. Some figured out worlds we may learn fully and others we may miss by contingency. And, I would add, we may yet enter other figured worlds only temporarily, peripherally, while in others we may come to assume positions of relative power and prestige." (pp. 108–109). Therefore, the use of a Black geography and specifically a Black sense of place as a theoretical and analytic frame is necessary to address race neutral applications of figured worlds.

Moving with a black sense of place

Black geographies emerged out of a continued Black radical tradition that foundationally builds through collective liberation and action, thriving off relations across difference. Using a Black geographies orientation as a methodological and pedagogical anchor is but one orientation to understand issues of Black spatial stories in the wake of displacement and gentrification. Scholars continue to connect Black geographies to education through means of land relations (Nxumalo et al., 2021), addressing unbelonging in the education space (Jenkins, 2021) and Black family's spatial imaginings for their students (Nickson, 2022). Youth in this program engage in disrupting anti-Blackness and the exclusion of Black people from our learning experiences by engaging their spatial stories for the design process (Wynter, 2003). Kihana Miraya Ross (2020) describes how, "anti-Blackness is one way some black scholars have articulated what it means to be marked as Black in an anti-Black world. It's more than just 'racism against Black people.' That oversimplifies and defangs it. It's a theoretical framework that illuminates society's inability to recognize our humanity—the disdain, disregard and disgust for our existence" (Ross, 2020, para 5). Concepts tied to Black geographic thought have allowed me to connect a Black sense of place to understandings of learning, choosing a point of departure that aims to address anti-Blackness in different ways (McKittrick, 2011).

A black sense of place

As a framework, a Black sense of place acknowledges the everyday spatial practices for world building and identity constructions of the students as they engage and learn from Black spatial histories. Learning and identity development are parallel processes that inform one another (N. I. Nasir, 2011). As figured worlds are the construction of self in relation to others, a focus on spacemaking as an additional and simultaneous process to

learning and identity formation deepens the analysis of the ways construct identities in relation to place. A Black sense of place is an analytic tool to understand the intersection of spacemaking, learning and identity construction. McKittrick's (2021) definition below describes how:

> A black sense of place draws attention to geographic processes that emerged from plantation slavery and its attendant racial violence yet cannot be contained by the logics of white supremacy. A black sense of place is not a standpoint or a situated knowledge; it is a location of difficult encounter and relationality. A black sense of place is not individualized knowledge—it is collaborative praxis. It assumes that our collective assertions of life are always in tandem with other ways of being (including those ways of being we cannot bear). A black sense of place always calls into question, struggles against, critiques, undoes, prevailing racist scripts. A black sense of place is a diasporic-plantocratic-black geography that reframes what we know by reorienting and honoring where we know from. . . A black sense of place is a methodology and an analytical frame that believes in and believes black humanity. . . A black sense of place draws attention to uncomfortable relationalities yet understands these as a method through which we can wade through the horrific uneasiness of black death that is, as we know, posited as an easy resolution to a vast range of social problems. (pp. 105–106)

A Black sense of place offers multiple avenues to understand the complex and simultaneous processes that youth are engaging in as they design and build a physical space. I operationalize design (specifically architectural design) as a cultural practice. Specifically, a Black sense of place affords a lens to understand how youth engage Black spatial experiences in their speculative and imagined futures that address displacement. Utilizing two concepts to detail the anti-displacement strategies youth employ 1) a sense of identity-in place; I define as how students spatially anchored their identities and knowledge of self in relation to place via aesthetics, motifs and artifacts in their architectural designs; and 2) spatial storylines. Learning in this study then serves as a process where youth apply their knowledge garnered from learning and cultivating spatial stories through the design process to shift and insert theirs and the client's identities to disrupt histories across the city, particularly in a Black neighborhood and context.

Sense of identity-in-place

Spatial practices, including spatial stories can "introduce into the city new identities and practices that disturb established histories" (Summers, 2022, p. 48). Often in this study, identities reflect that of a dance "between individuals and their interactions with norms, practices, cultural tools, relationships, and institutional and cultural contexts" (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015, p. 190). Therefore, learning and design serves as a spatial reclamation and resistance process connected through a construction of identities connected

to spacemaking actions, and the use of aesthetics and motifs as artifacts. This connects to what Holland et al. (1998), detail as "psychological tools" to "evoke" figured worlds (p. 60). As students learn about the symbolism regarding aesthetics, motifs and stories, they embed them (physically and metaphorically) as tools for their architectural and speculative designs to develop a sense of place in relation to their identity. The aesthetics and motifs used in the design process, conceptually and materially, and the recognition of their importance to a sense of place allows the students to uncover a personal spatial history, or a sense of identity-in-place and what an aesthetic sense is and can be.

Spatial storylines

Thinking with Black geographies, I position "place stories as part of anti-colonial pedagogies and research practices that center Black and Indigenous land relation" as an effort to uncover and learn through Black spatial storylines (Nxumalo, 2019, p. 1193). Black geographies provide a framework for us to do so. Black spatial storylines are defined as "[disrupting] racial stereotypes, deficit narratives and white normative ways of teaching Black stories, histories, ways of being, and learning" as they engage in bringing "stories often deemed illegible via a dominant gaze into the fold, and serve as a means to help us learn, read and understand where we know from to build worlds we've not yet known" (Germinaro & Nickson, 2024, p. 3). The project's curricular design is grounded in the Black spatial histories within Seattle, namely the Central District and Southend neighborhoods. Black spatial storylines are both a methodological and pedagogical technique that serve as tools to understand figured worlds, allowing the students to realize their relationships to that world. The spatialization of anti-Blackness in education spaces includes needed attention to learning environments as sites of opportunity in disrupting unbelonging both in and outside of the learning space (Jenkins, 2021).

Continuing a lineage across points of departure

This work has underlined the necessity of cross-racial communities working together toward collective liberation by starting from entry points that disrupt our normalization of race neutrality and/or starting at whiteness. This orientation is not limited to academia, as organizers and activists on the ground have been engaged in collective organizing regarding space in Seattle across racial and ethnic boundaries. For example, we discussed the ways our geographies and spaces were shaped by systems of oppression and interlocked our communities by using the *Gang of Four* as an ethic to design the curriculum from. The Gang of Four (see the Santos & Iwamoto, 2016) details a story of four influential community leaders—Roberto Maestas, Bernie

Whitebear, Larry Gossett, and Bob Santos—who formed a powerful political alliance in Seattle during the late 1960's and early 1970's. Coming from diverse backgrounds—Native American, African American, Mexican American, and Asian American—they worked together to address social and political issues affecting their communities. Their activism spanned struggles for equal rights in education, employment, and housing, as well as advocacy for Native American fishing rights and the preservation of ethnic neighborhoods. The group was dubbed Seattle's "Gang of Four," playing a pivotal role in local civil rights movements, with each leader spearheading parallel initiatives within their respective communities. Over the decades, they continued to collaborate on various causes, forging deep personal and professional bonds. This project, in a way, serves as an ode to their cross-solidarity work that emerges when we engage starting points of learning with and through multiracial solidarity. This paper highlights the *Gang of Four*'s unique alliance and enduring impact on social justice in the context of the 5 youth in this project as they draw from this lineage.

Tying a black geographic figured world lens to place/space and learning

Learning and spacemaking have been well documented as having a symbiotic and critical relationship together (see Gordon et al., 2016; Ma & Munter, 2014; Meléndez, 2021; Radinsky et al., 2014). I will detail four specific studies that also engage the complexities of place/space scholarship and how Black geographies support a deepening of understanding.

Firstly, Rubel et al. (2016) interweave place-based education and critical mathematics to teach math for spatial justice, specifically focusing on the lottery as a critical spatial phenomenon. As a case, a curricular model called Local Lotto tasked students with analyzing the spatial distribution of lottery retailers, spending patterns, and revenue allocation in their neighborhood. As an approach to teaching through space and place, the authors argue the different levels of spatial scale prompted students connecting math concepts to their lived experience. Similarly, as a departure point for connecting design concepts to lived experience, we utilized the spatial history of the Black neighborhoods in Seattle, grounding our curriculum in a Black spatial storyline. This departure point goes further by explicitly applying a Black geographies framework, drawing attention to the historical and ongoing spatial injustices faced by Black communities, particularly through redlining and displacement. This lens provides a critical perspective on how space is racialized and how learning can be a tool for resistance and reclamation.

As we aimed to position the Black neighborhoods as a figured world, Jurow (2005) presented a similar orientation to an architectural design project. In the Antarctica Project, Jurow (2005) displays how activities

highlight youth's connection to architecture through a project-based mathematics curriculum for worldbuilding. Influenced by the designed artifacts, Jurow details students' engagement in the figured world as their approaches to math tasks change over time. As the students engaged this figured world, their approaches to math tasks shifted to using them for problem solving, addressing their positioning and the actualization of their spatial knowledge. Additionally, Jurow (2005) discussed figured worlds as being realized through activities that reemphasize spacemaking as a process that occurs as learning takes place. This connects to my previous theorizations of youth as urban alchemists, defined as those who unpuzzle spatial histories and make meaningful spaces. Therefore, I am exploring how spacemaking, learning and identity development are coexisting processes that occur simultaneously as youth disrupt oppressive spatial practices.

Similarly, regarding the specific technological facets of geospatial placemaking that student engaged with, K. H. Taylor (2017) grounds the notion of figured worlds by interrogating how geospatial technologies contribution building of spatial relations, specifically through a framework called "learning along the lines." The study involved minoritized youth participating in mobile mapping activities, such as GPS drawing, to create counter-maps of their neighborhood and share them with city stakeholders. Taylor further insinuates the ways the youth are part of the texts they create, negotiate inscriptions and place their embodied efforts along the scaled mobile lines of the city. Similarly, the project of this paper connects to Taylor's work by reemphasizing ways for youth to understand the city, specifically through design and spatial histories.

Takeuchi and Aquino Ishihara (2021) build off the notion that learning is not just a cognitive process but a deeply embodied and emplaced experience by speaking to spacemaking work. Takeuchi and Aquino Ishihara (2021) discuss mathematic literacy as an emplacement and embodied practice used by an activist collective, the Filipino Migrants Center (FMC), to address violence against migrant women in Japan. In the collaborative ethnographic project, the study analyzed FMC's work over 19 years and used data literacy to counter official data that displaced the voices of the migrant women. As argued, the mobilization of this mathematic literacy process was consequential and shifted the politics of the body as intertwined with community and local geopolitics. The activism showcased how the bodies of the migrant women were made visible and transformed a local place into a gathering space for those who'd been displaced. The youth in the current paper build on the consequentiality of connecting identity, place and learning to social change making. Black geographies offer us the analytic of a Black sense of place to further analyze the emplacement and embodied techniques detailed by Takeuchi & Ishihara. Specifically, a Black sense of place offers us to analyze how the students assemble their individual and collective identities

as an assemblage process, applying their spatial knowledge acquired from the neighborhood's history. In this project, youth utilize design to emplace past and future spatial stories into their design process and final design, one that further embodies the stories of the people that are occupying the space and the communities it's embedded within.

Students learn through their bodies, their movements, and their interactions with the physical and social environment. Learning in this project applies an ontological approach to architectural design, one that keenly engages the social, geographic, historical and cultural ramifications of design in a place. By integrating Black geographies with concepts of figured worlds and spatial justice, this paper contributes by showcasing how learning can be a powerful tool for addressing the spatial dimensions of racial inequity. Further, the project highlights the need for positioning youth to enact a deep attainment and connection to justice through place-based approaches that center on relations cultivated in space across difference. Design in this project is key to illuminating our interdependence through our design and making of worlds, as the youth highlight the ways design showcases our (people) similarities and differences regarding relations to space that came to light for them throughout the spacemaking process. Personal and social identities are discussed as processes of negotiating positions, spaces of authoring and spacemaking as designers in the Black geography.

Seattle context and connections to place

Employing Black geographies as a foundation in our program curriculum and writing of this paper, the focus is on the ways "we take for granted the [geographic] knowledges that black subjects impart, as well as the longstanding spatial politics—from segregation to incarceration to emancipatory strategies—that inform black lives" (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 6). I include the stories associated with those knowledges as contributions to learning. As Seattle considers what gentrified communities want, the voices of the neighborhoods discussed here are at the forefront of these analyses and organizing efforts. For our program curriculum, we grounded our introductions to the program in the place where we both learning and where the design was initially planned to be placed. During the publication process, the program was defunded by the City of Seattle, reminding us of ongoing displacement. As such, I place Black geographies at the forefront of my analysis to de-center the white gaze as the standard of spatial knowledge, learning and stories. The implication of this grounding is *understanding Black experiences as key entry points needed in learning environments*. As students learn about the racialization of space as they design, they operationalize their spatial knowledge to ensure theirs and other stories and knowledges are not displaced.

Gentrification & displacement in Seattle's Central District and Southend

As a key theme, Black geographies discuss capitalism as always dealing with race, including conversations of gentrification. The "improvement" of communities is embedded with anti-Blackness through racial capitalism, tying racialized bodies as placeless through capitalism (Robinson, 2020). Therefore, a need to reengage these stories through Black geographies in a learning environment to invoke Black spatial imaginings and futures (that also include other groups of people who are for Black liberation). The Black population in Seattle came over for through the Great Migration, and namely work, over the course of the 1930s to the 1960s. The great migration and the workers came because of defense industry jobs and the port, while escaping the oppressive practices of the Jim Crow South (Woods, 1998, pp. 91–93). In rhythm with their arrival, Seattle implemented racially restrictive housing covenants, namely in the Central District (CD), where this project takes place, see Figure 1 (Silva, 2009; Q. Taylor, 2022). Communities of Black families are being displaced from a now-trendy neighborhoods where they were forced to live. Over the past 50 years, the Black population in the CD has gone from 78.5% in 1970, to 58.5% in 1990, to 21.6% in 2010 and 7% in 2020 (see Q. Taylor, 2022; US Census 1970–2020).

Despite this reality, the area is historically Black and remains still, through community, elders, businesses, stories and ongoing spatial reclamation efforts. The CD has been the cultural and political hub of Seattle for the last 70 years (Q. Taylor, 2022). The Black Panther Party established its second chapter's headquarters and breakfast centers in the CD in the 1960's to combat discriminatory job access, increasing poverty and divestment. Economic frustrations in the neighborhood set the foundation for a civil rights movement that positioned the CD as a site of Black resistance and collective liberation for Seattle's Black community. Although just east of downtown, the CD was redlined and thus racially isolated, with discriminatory high rates of poverty and food insecurity for Seattle's Black community (including those displaced farther south) (Bjorn et al., 2008).

Attention to Black geographies makes visible the ways in which Indigenous genocidal land dispossession and anti-Blackness reinforce ongoing white supremacy (Guess et al., 2016; King, 2019). In Seattle, this interwoven history has allowed the emergence of cross-solidarity movements that address the ongoing displacement of Black, Indigenous in communities of color. Seattle is conducting its new Comprehensive Plan that has the potential to promote the ongoing displacement of communities, already being announced the closure of 20 schools due to declining enrollment fueled by gentrification (Pearman, 2020). The curriculum was grounded in

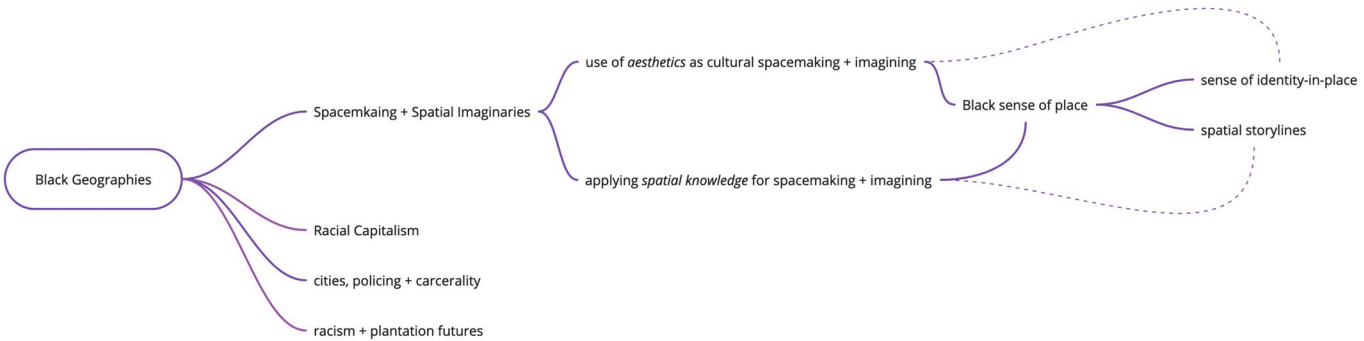

Figure 1. A representation of how black geographies, architectural elements (aesthetics), and spatial knowledge are connected in the paper.

the intersectional stories and how they relate to the displacement of the Black community from the Central District (CD) & Southend.

Method, data collection, and analysis

The design/build program, experiences & students

Two sites are pertinent to this project, the CD where the design was to be implemented, and Mount Baker, the homebase of where the curriculum and pedagogy was administered. The design-build program is run by Sawhorse Revolution (SR), a nonprofit organization that conducts youth community design & build programs for high-school age youth in SE Seattle. Their programs follow various themes and the assertion that "The design process forces you to step into someone else's shoes and understand the world from a new point of view" (from website). This program was a partnership between SR and the City of Seattle's Office of Arts and Culture to give surplus pieces of land back to communities who have experienced displacement. Therefore, the students have the role of reviewing submissions through a general RFP process, and choosing clients based on their proposal. The design and build portions are both in separate 10-week blocks, designing in the fall and building in spring. This decision-making process occurred in the middle of the first block of 10-week design program sessions (see Figure 2).

The students chose a community-based organization named Deaf Spotlight who represents Seattle's deaf community because they didn't currently have a physical space in the city. Youth displayed their understanding of how land and place connect to power to make change in their decision process and ensuring the emplacement of a community often omitted from public discourse. This paper focuses on the 10-week design program where students were exposed to different processes of enmeshing design with culture to be responsive to the needs of the client. Sawhorse Revolution recruits' students from the four remaining woodshop courses in Seattle Public Schools, the Seattle Housing Authorities programs and other partnerships they have with local youth serving nonprofits. The focal group of the students were 5 students (3 Black, 2 SE Asian) as they were the only ones to go through the 20-week design-build program. They did this through field trips, design activities and arts-based identity connections that engage the role of self and community in telling the stories of spaces.

Data collection

The data presented was collected through a humanizing approach through critical ethnographic research methods (Paris & Winn, 2013). The design

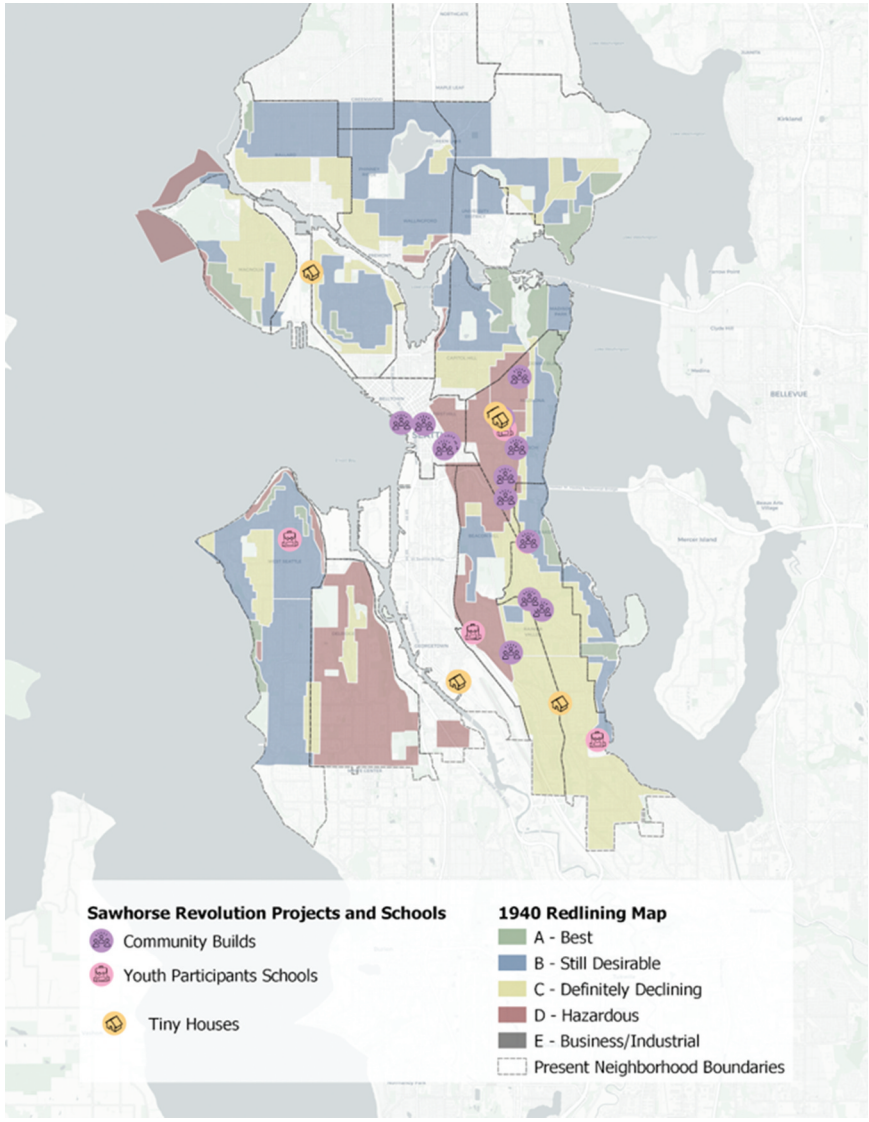

Figure 2. This map a redlined map of Seattle, where the students in the study go to school and the context of where sawhorse revolution has implanted projects. When compared to subsequent maps below, you'll notice the overlapping areas at high risk of displacement, the black community, red and yellow lines areas and where the focal group goes to school (pink on the east in yellow and red lined areas). Map created by and with support from Sofia Gulaid.

process was the main learning experience across multiple settings and activities. This study focuses on five students working on an architectural design project in a nonprofit community program. Based on the five students who

joined design and build program: Samira, Hailey, Carolyn, Halima and Thienvan. These five were not representative of the whole design program group as they were the students of color and/or lived in the neighborhoods where learning and designing in. Humanizing research is "'a methodological stance, which requires that our inquiries involve dialogic consciousness-raising and the building of relationships of care and dignity for both researchers and participants'" (Paris, 2011, p. 141). While serving many roles in this project, I aimed to both build insightful and lasting relations with the students, mentors and other community partners.

In the program, the focal group of students had engaged in SR programs previously, with the program manager, Sam, having run design-build programming for 3 years at the start of the project. Sam and I were in constant contact about the program, curriculum, pedagogy, and thinking about students. Sam and I met weekly to discuss curricular activities, redesigning some, and discussed the natural conversations captured by field notes and audio recordings we (and other mentors) were having with students (see Table 1 & 2). Primary data collected consisted of video and audio recordings of 10 weeks of 4–6-hour design program focusing on the focal group, participant observations in the format of field notes, examples and representations of students work, and post-design program interviews Figure 3. Analysis also included in-program natural conversations between me and the students (Bhattacharya, 2017). These conversations served as a member check with students to inform our adjustments to the curriculum and pedagogy to be responsive to students. The design programs began in Fall 2021 and the beginning of Winter 2022.

Table 1. For adult participant information.

Participant Name	Role	Specialty	Racial/Ethnic Background
Sam	Program Lead + Mentor	Architecture + Carpentry	White
Daví	Mentor	Landscape Architecture	Latine
Sergio	Mentor	Architecture + Interior Design	Afro-Cuban and Pacific Islander
Rebecca	Mentor	Architecture	Asian
Belén	Mentor	Planning	Latine
Kaleb	Connector + Mentor	Education	Black-mixed race
Patty	Deaf Spotlight ED	Arts + Film	Mixed race

Table 2. Participants & Mentors gave permission to use real names.

Participant Name	Role	Grade + Pronouns	
Hailey	Student Designer	11th, she/her	SE Asian, Filpina
Carolyn	Student Designer	12th, she/her	Black
Samira	Student Designer	9th, she/her	Oromo, Black
Halima	Student Designer	10th, she/her	Oromo, Black
Thienvan	Student Designer	11th, she/her	SE Asian



Figure 3. Is the project and curricular timeline for key events and learning moments to provide context of process, as this project focuses on the taste activity (W5), build site visit (W8), and hood famous visit (W6).

Analysis

A Black sense of place is a useful concept for illuminating how the students process learning, identity constructions and spacemaking to allowed for antidisplacement strategies to emerge. The Black sense of place is concept is complex and allows for interpretations of how youth address anti-Blackness through space as they develop their own designs. Aesthetics, stories and relations place central roles in a sense of place, particularly as they are put into conversation and necessitate individual and collective assertations of place (McKittrick, 2021). This orientation to sense of place through understanding Black folks' sense of place in the CD allowed for youth to build a sense of self and story in relation to their spaces (Jurow, 2005). Through extensive engagement with different communities' spatial stories and other in conversation with their own experiences, students learn from spacemaking processes and what they mean for our future interwoven spatial imaginings. An analysis of how students engage a Black sense of place over the program helps us understand how they disrupt anti-Blackness and displacement of communities and their stories through their experiences. To identify the through lines of the students simultaneous learning, identity and spacemaking processes as it pertains to a Black sense of place and it's privileging of analysis to the voices of the students, their positionalities, dialogs and its conjunction with my own reflexivity and stances to disrupt hegemonic power structures regarding space (Madison, 2011).

I began analyses by creating logs of the audio and video recordings with timestamps associated with student design activities, field trips and workshops. The content logs included short descriptions that summarized what the activity was, who was there and what transpired as it connected to a Black sense of place. Memos were written after each design session with accompanied participant observations in the form of field notes, also documented in accordance with the audio and video recordings. These memos led to the building of analytic categories that connected the theory to the events that transpired during the program. Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I engaged ongoing categories as themes crystalized and their validity verified, or not, through referencing videos, interviews, natural conversations, field notes, and artifacts. Selected design process moments detailed in the findings were transcribed to analyze the learning, identity development, and spacemaking processes through the selected design processes and moments during the program for the focal group of students. The analysis of design process moments led to thematic codes reflecting and connecting to a Black sense of place definition: spatial knowledge, culture, identity and community, memory, and relationships. In moving forward with these codes, I further analyzed and compared them in relation to the ways students detailed their identities, relationships, and stories to the spaces that influenced their process.

I moved back and forth between the data sources to make meaning and refine the larger themes, which are reflected in the vignettes below. The initial phase of coding yielded large codes and led to more granular codes that connected to the youths' learning experiences as acts of preserving stories and anti-displacement strategies. For example, as the large codes of relationships to and between spaces repeated themselves in the coding process, it emerged that the relations were both being disrupted and yearned for reconnecting through the design process to places of significance to the students. In their design process, youth engaged in wanting to rekindle relationships to places they wanted to see across time as a process of reclaiming spatial stories through design. The next phase of analysis allowed me to focus attention on the identity development process and spacemaking as it pertained to the design process. After memoing about the design sessions, I was able to carve out the vignettes to detail the stories associated with each activity selected to illustrate the qualitative nature of the work (Toliver, 2021). Activities that were selected for the vignettes were the 1) *Taste Activity* which connected aesthetics, identity and learning of self as connected to place, 2) *Build Site Visit* and how it facilitated spatial stories and relations to neighborhoods and 3) *Hood Famous Visit* for the purpose of learning and connecting to spatial storytelling through aesthetics, motifs and designs. The vignettes serve to honor the complexity of the learning environment, its implications and connections to how centering Blackness in Seattle as an anchor point of the learning experience and design process shifted the mechanisms for strategies for anti-displacement work.

Who am I in this work?

I find myself challenged in various ways when wanting and being asked to engage a positionality statement where there's often not the requirement of non-Black and Indigenous scholars to do so when they use and/or conduct research with Black and Indigenous communities using our theories. I aim to build onto the work on positioning presented by Boveda and Annamma (2023) that attends to "(1) the onto-epistemic that recognizes how embodied experiences shape understandings of intersectional oppressions, (2) the sociohistorical that engages historicity, and (3) the sociocultural that concedes whiteness and ability as property" (p. 310). With that said, as a mixed race Black disabled scholar, I've found it intriguing the ways various scholars from dominant identities and positionalities have evaded questioning and positioning in this process, particularly as it pertains to how they acknowledge where they know from, how that influences their scholarship, and the reasons they rarely address their own anti-Blackness and/or anti-Indigeneity when researching Black and Indigenous people. As for me, I grew up as a low-income Black boy in a white community on Tohono O'odham lands

(Phoenix). At the time of my upbringings, although challenging, I saw the changes of my community shift and force my family and I to be displaced, moving multiple times and losing homes, but my mom doing her best to keep us in the district for academic and athletic opportunities. I was also fortunate in many ways to spend my summers growing up in the South with my dad's side of the family, particularly in the Black agrarian South. Here, Black land traditions and spatial matters are ever present, specifically as it pertains to opportunities for learning and development. For example, my grandmama was an educator in the Jim Crow South and worked in special education and ensured Black students with disabilities had a myriad of informal educational opportunities outside of school that were grounded in social and spatial relations and cultural ways of knowing.

As an opportunity to detail the storyline of my family and lineage of where I know from, I can spatially orient and locate my biases, approaches and understandings that guided my decision-making in this project. I also move with an ethic "to refuse traditional separation between the researcher and the researched" (Toliver, 2021, p. xx). In understanding where I know from, my experiences with displacement and gentrification, I naturally gravitated toward working with Sawhorse Revolution and their work. When meeting them, I was (and still am) stewarding a nonprofit social justice library and bookstore in the Central District neighborhood on Occupied Coast Salish lands (Seattle). We were displaced from another neighborhood, and Sawhorse Revolution was the organization that allowed for us to create and build a new space. Their youth picked us through a grants program that aimed to address displacement. The youth then designed and built our space, and as a result detailed the illustrious process of spacemaking and the power of youth as they design, build and make space for themselves and others. Now I regularly serve as a mentor with Sawhorse Revolution through their programs, I advocate and serve on public and private boards to combat displacement on Occupied Coast Salish lands, and regularly advocate for youth education and involvement in that process. As someone who's experienced displacement in many forms, yet orientated to life through a spatial process, I bring those lens' that end up providing me context to communicate my hopes and realities for the world.

For this program, I wore many hats. I was integral in the early planning stages of the curriculum with Sam (program manager from SR). We met weekly starting in the Spring of 2021 to plan out the curriculum as they were interested in building out more contextual grounding into the curriculum. This contextual grounding provided me and Sam the opportunity to design the early meetings and curriculum to share the stories of the communities in Seattle, particularly the ongoing histories of the Black and Indigenous communities where we work working. The mentors recruited for the program were also decided on by me and Sam, as they were designers, builders and

folks of color from the city and in our personal networks. In this program, I also served as a design mentor while collecting data, picking up food, and sweeping the floor (see Bang et al., 2016, and the roles researchers need to take up in research settings). I wore multiple hats during this project and therefore, my investment in this work is central to the story I am telling.

Findings: Building a sense of identity-in-place through spatial storylines

To weave together these identity constructs I orient this section around the trajectories, relationships across individual identities and mechanisms for spatial storytelling through design from a Black sense of place logic. A sense of identity-in-place for themselves, the client and community is what students centered in their designs as they went through the program. A sense of identity-in-place then serves as a key component of a place as it builds on a Black sense of place and concepts of belonging through cultural spatial design practices and aesthetics (Hooks, 1996, 2009; McKittrick, 2021). The students engage complexities of race, power, place and space while bouncing between their individual, collective and the community's spatial realities as they design for anti-displacement and emplacement (Takeuchi & Aquino Ishihara, 2021). Each section will start with a setting of the scene, followed by the design activity youth engaged, then data associated with the design activity and quotes from video during sessions and interviews with participants. This will be supported by the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Taste activity: Connecting personal aesthetics to spatial stories across the timespace

This scene, from the first half of the design program, illustrates complexities and engagement of design as a process to uncover identity relations to space through aesthetic choices. Data for this section consists of post-program interviews and reflections, photos and artifacts from the *Taste Activity*, and support from field note observations.

Scaffolding aesthetics to identity and space

In connection to the youths' ideas of identity-in-place, we conducted an activity called Taste. This activity requires a participative orientation to identity, guided by the narrative they are tasked at building that's represented by images. As a connection the literature and the Black sense of place presented by McKittrick (2021) students engaged this activity as a process of engaged relationality and difference across time through their experience. They build aesthetic representations of their individual and collective identities (when they collage their aesthetic choices together) across time.

Specifically, students engage how and where they know from, a Black sense of place framing allows us to read and learn about the ways youth are thinking about place as they learn in relation to theirs, and others, identities as a collaborative praxis. This activity allowed youth the opportunity to curate a set of 10 images represented themselves, their wants and aesthetics for a design. The setup was within our classroom site with five hexagonal tables and printed images in the hundreds consisting of designs, colors, features, structures and inspirational architectural elements.

Youth and mentors took 20 minutes to curate what can be described as a personal Pinterest board of design aesthetics. After the 20 minutes, everyone posted their 10 images together in a mood board style around the classroom, reflecting a poster presentation at a conference (albeit more accessible and better curated). We went around in a gallery walk to take in and assess one another's choices before sharing. Students went around clockwise, storying their design aesthetic boards, naming the reasonings behind their choices. By walking through, we embodied the importance of remembering and not forgetting our design importance. Some had reasonings such as color, feelings of openness, coziness or the way the shadows looked; others had more personal reasons such as "my younger self would have wanted something like this" or "I want more greenery in my future house to help out animals" or "I want to use this for my room now." Every youth participant noted some element of themselves across time connecting to their spatial storyline, specifically those memories and futurities connecting to their feelings of identity in place. Youth were able to author their space and hopes for the futures of their home guided by prompts of identity represented by aesthetics in a space.

Aesthetics illuminating connections of identity to space

As an aesthetic of the neighborhood, color in the form of murals, public artwork and community events in public space are represented as key aesthetics. Thienvan touched on this idea by describing "… there's the people who cause this, you don't see them. Like, you can't be mad at the people who move in. And the people who, like are tearing down businesses, they're not there to like, experience like the lash. So I don't know, I'm not really angry. I'm just, I'm scared that, like, say, I leave Seattle for a while, and then I come back, and it's just something I can't recognize." Thienvan expresses a sense of fear and uncertainty about change, emphasizing that those responsible for reshaping communities often remain invisible, while those directly impacted bear the consequences. They don't harbor anger toward newcomers but worry about losing the familiarity of their home, fearing it may become unrecognizable after a period away. Here, Thienvan engages the larger conversation of who and how gentrification occurs connected to the story of her community, the relations she and others have to the

space, and the reality that what represented her community may not be there any longer. She built on their design aesthetic elements form her neighborhood that she wanted to include and highlighted the larger issue of gentrification and her personal aesthetics as a way of ensuring longevity of communities' story there. Thienvan's individual *Taste Aesthetic* is below, and you will see Images 1 and 2:

Halima: "when I've had memories in that place. I remember like past stuff. And it makes me want to, like go back to those times. And then yeah, it



Image 1. Thienvan's images above are visibly colorful and give context to her neighborhoods she spends time in (Mount Baker and Beacon Hill) where Southeast Asian immigrants and Black folks have lived in community for generations.



Image 2. Halima on the left and Samira on the right have their taste aesthetics represent places for people to commune. As described, Halima's aesthetic connects to past places and the stories associated with them, while Samira below describes the changing public space landscape and new people and stories disrupting her spatial relations.

makes you remember them and it makes you feel good. And the qualities like, like, it has your favorite places and the stuff that you did in there."

Halima details a unique process as she described her personal aesthetics, this connects to what bell hooks describes as the aesthetics of intervention (Hooks & Hooks, 1996). Halima engages in a conversation of "showing us that all art is situated in history, that the individual choice of subject matter reflects that situatedness" (hooks, p.162, 1996). This centers her own history and story of a place, how it's changed and unfortunately will change.

Samira: "That can be a good change in a bad change. Like some in our communities, like, especially where I live, there's a lot of new buildings being placed. And it's kind of weird, because every day when you look outside, it's always new construction and all the good stuff that used to be there is gone now. And it makes you want, it just makes you rethink and remember, what you got, like how it used to be. And sometimes it's for the good, sometimes it's bad, because you don't even notice your community around you anymore. Just looks like a whole bunch of buildings. So, it's also a new place for new people to live. But at the same time, it's like, it doesn't even feel like it's your house anymore. It just feels like a whole different place. And you can't imagine being your best friend when you first live there …. I mean, I remember how it used to be and it makes me sad, because how it used to be was just like a complex is really quiet. And now it's just a lot of construction. A lot of new places. More people like coming in and taking people out of their homes and stuff. Yeah. So yeah, it's not really always a good thing."

Samira here describes the intense complexity of gentrification as connected to her aesthetics of her neighborhood and the continued story of gentrification. She's describing the suppression of the stories of the folks who are currently being pushed out of their homes. Samira engages in the act of recognizing those stories and enhancing the larger spatial storyline of the people in her community by centering their experiences of displacement and bringing it to light via her aesthetics that connect to how her neighborhood used to be. She's mourning the loss of her community in real time while highlighting the need for complex understandings of how the disruption of stories occur. This in turn noticeably has effect Samira's emotional and social relations that are facilitated by her community, suggesting it doesn't feel like home any longer. Emotional and social relations embedded in the spatial story of the community are aesthetic differences grounded in the built environment. Her interpretation notes an interwoven understanding of the spatial stories at play in her neighborhood and how spatial relations are stories embedded in the built environment, as they shift and change, so too does the sense of place.

The connection to the final design

Young people have deep ties to their neighborhoods, their communities and the relationships they carry within those spaces. They are also one of the few demographics that largely depend on the public good and others making decisions for them. These quotes point to an unease with, not just change, but change resulting in displacement due to white, monied people moving in. When prompted to think about what belonging meant to them and how it emerges in their world, they describe it in a way that invokes feelings across time and space. They highlight nostalgia before it happens, fear of forgetting, hopes for community and a key component of identity-in-place, a relational memory to a place. In relation to spacemaking, students situated their aesthetic identification process as a process of building relations to space through placing oneself in a spatial history that spans time and space. Barnd (2017) describes this as a process of inhabiting or "differing notions of relations to land … and the related processes of legitimization for bodily presence in specific locations" [page 7]. Thinking with this process, we see students weaving together the variations and complexities that encompass a sense of place, while connecting to their communities and where we are building. In doing so, the young people are centering spatial relations, and acts of learning to emplace identity in place as spatial praxis, a praxis that details their own aesthetics as building toward a sense of identity-in-place in an imaginative sense tied to their current realities. Below is the sequence of how students' aesthetics from the activity went to sketches and layouts and led into the

design rendering and design that was framed and built before the city of Seattle pulled funding See Images 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Build site visit: Relations of gentrification and displacement across spatial storylines and identities

This scene, from the first half of the design program, illustrates complexities and engagement of uncovering the spatial stories and coming to realize personal relations to the community across time. Data for this section consists of natural conversations and field notes recorded and documented during the *Build Site Visit*, and direct quotes are from that conversation. Hailey's final quote was from our conversation later in the day while waiting to get picked up.



Image 3. Group taste aesthetics, a resembling of the different ways students care to represent themselves and what they collectively hope to see in their communities, places they want to be in.



Image 4. the final rendering of the space students designed, adapted from their paper designs and aesthetic choices. Made by mentors.

Recognizing disrupt spatial relations

During a sunny winter day, we ventured to the build site in the Central District where the space youth were designing was going to live after it was built. We planned to do this to get official site measurements and envision where and how the building would fit onto the land. We also aimed to collect more data on the natural elements, where the sun was, how much traffic (both cars and humans) was going on, and to get a feel for how the building site may shift our design. As we waited for the van to pick us up to take us back to HQ to codify our data, the students engaged in a conversation about their noticing's about displacement, gentrification and how their building would help counteract that in the Central District neighborhood. They displayed knowing of how their personal relationships with space also connected them to their design, the people they were designing for, the neighborhood, and ultimately, each other.

Black sense of place framing the ways relations shift through gentrification as it "calls into question, struggles against, critiques, undoes, prevailing racist scripts" (McKittrick, 2021, p. 106). Those who stayed back and who waited for the second shuttle consisted of myself, Hailey, Halima, Samira and Thienvan who all live in red or yellow lined areas. Below is a displacement risk map presented by the City of Seattle. The neighborhoods the students are referring to are the three lower purple outlined areas. Those are also the areas with the largest concentration of



Image 5. an in process photo of the first building being framed, allowing for the students to engage and experience the consequentiality of their learning, actualizing their spatial knowledge.

Black people, with three census tracts hovering above 30% (Gregory, 2023).

Some of the key storylines the youth engaged in were related to the relationships they have to their neighborhood, the people within that neighborhood and how the relational aesthetics of gentrification shift the neighborhood. As the conversation ensued, students made connects to the stories of the space, their learning and personal relations when prompted with a question (by myself) of some of the shifts they're seeing in their neighborhoods.



Image 6. Is Carloyn as she's framing one of the walls together, again in process of the build portion.

Student expressions of relation aesthetics across political, social and cultural histories

Thienvan: Because there's like a history of redlining. So like, on the other side of Franklin, that's like we're like a really wealthy community lives and then on the other side is where the like the lower income and it's just I grew up like walking down to the train station with my mom all the time and seeing like all these new people at a big apartment complex a few blocks away from my house. I kind of have like, mixed opinions, because obviously, I'm happy that there's like new people coming in. But there's buildings around me that are being like, torn down that I grew up around and walking by every day. And I'm just scared that one day, like that part of my childhood is just gonna be gone. And there's like a new apartment or something.

Samira: And I just, like, don't want it to change because of all the good memories that happened there. And, like, if it changes, then sometimes change is not always as good as people make it. You know?

Halima: Yeah. Like meeting new people is good for like every other week, its is not as good as the people you've known for a lot of years.

Hailey: So being in South Seattle, this is really important. Because if you grow up in a diverse community, it's more ethnic. And you're not trying to erase your culture, I didn't realize the importance of growing up in South Seattle until I had gone through this one school. I forgot where it was [in north Seattle]. And it was like a white school. But it's like the kids that weren't racist, but they were just so clearly ignorant.

In this exchange, these four students are describing the different spatial stories that revolve around the line surrounding gentrification in their respective neighborhoods, disrupting their relationships with the neighborhoods. They highlight their relationships and identities-in-place by describing their feelings of seeing themselves and their people being rendered placeless (McKittrick, 2011). They also begin to describe the relational aesthetics of gentrification and displacement, what it feels, looks and how it happens in real time. It's the severing of relationships to a place that's historicized. Black Geographies concepts and ideas served as a key point of inquiry, meaning gentrification in the Central District, and displacing Black people (including some students), and how it connected to the techniques they were witnessing in their own neighborhoods. The spatial storylines emerged as a collective experience, albeit taking shape in context-specific ways, yet also built their own relationships to one another through the shared experience. Later in the day, Hailey touched on some of the ways the relational aesthetics of gentrification and displacement connect to the overall timescape and

mission of oppression through space by rendering those in a community as placeless:

Hailey: But I do know when everything started happening, before it was very family oriented. And us kids in the neighborhood would always just be riding our bikes together and playing outside. And all the parents would be talking. But now a lot of those people moved out. And it's like, I always be seein white people walking their dogs every single morning, which is like something I never had seen before.

Hailey, noting the layered political, social and cultural issues, reflects on changes in her neighborhood due to gentrification, highlighting a shift from a close-knit, family-oriented community where children played together and parents socialized, to a more detached environment marked by new residents, notably described as predominantly white, with different routines, such as walking dogs in the mornings—something she had not seen before. In particular, she identifies the shifts in relational aesthetics and experiences as a result of displacement and disruption of place.

Cultivating spatial relations through design and learning the city

For context of the risk's students are highlighting and the shifts they're noticing, the maps below share the story of how the city views their neighborhoods, as at high risk of displacement. This doesn't necessarily mean their protections in place to preserve their neighborhoods and communities. For example, as Seattle conducts its Comprehensive Plan, which the prior plans resulted in the gutting of the students' communities, the plan reflects similar redlined maps pertaining to where resources like affordable housing are going and the preservations of blue and green lined areas, or racial and economic enclaves in the northend of the city. As the city omits youth voice in this process, particularly youth of color, they are engaging in missed opportunities to support youth in designing a city that addresses anti-Blackness and displacement from their design hopes for the future of their communities. The proposed plan (at this moment in 2024) socially reproduces the historical redlined map and is expected to continue to displace communities of color, which the youth are being forced to deal with these decisions see Figures 4 and 5.

The relationship between place, self, and community ends up being severed and a point of inquiry to understand how the youth used their identities and spatial knowledge of their relationships of space to reclaim parts of themselves through their design (Summers, 2021).

Students regularly made their design decisions that metaphorically represented a process akin to creating a potion. As they gathered and learned information noticing's of gentrification and displacement, they adjusted and shifted their design, reflecting the processes of creating a potion in the form of

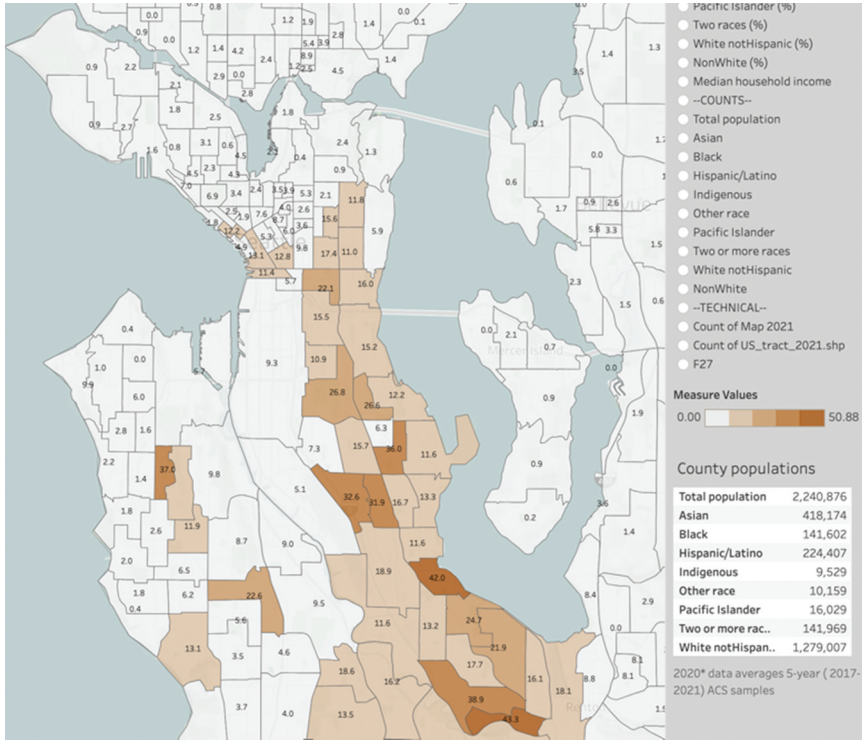

Figure 4. Is a map showcasing the racial demographics basedon a five-year average of ACS samples from 2017–2021 in Seattle for Black residents to provide context to where students are speaking from, provided by Gregory (2023).

a building that would fight the displacement of stories in space. Storytelling interwoven into space is then seen as a cultural practice that illuminates key, small, big and integral components essential to in a spatial reclamation process. As Massey (2005) highlights space as stories-so-far, and the students take this understanding to another level as they apply it to physically enacting stories in a design/build to disrupt gentrification and displacement. Therefore, identity understanding, and activation of spatial knowledge of the role of the stories across their individual, communal and neighborhood learning allows us to take up space by designing for reclamation in the face of active and rapid displacements of spatial storytelling. Black sense of place helps us see how students engage sense of place logic to wade through the uneasiness of Black death through space, meaning the death of spatial and social relations to engage uncomfortable relationalities via their activation of learning and promoting Black humanity. Relational aesthetics are being disrupted, co-opted and replaced with white affluent aesthetics of family and place that are a longstanding effect of urban renewal. Spatial storylines complicate the

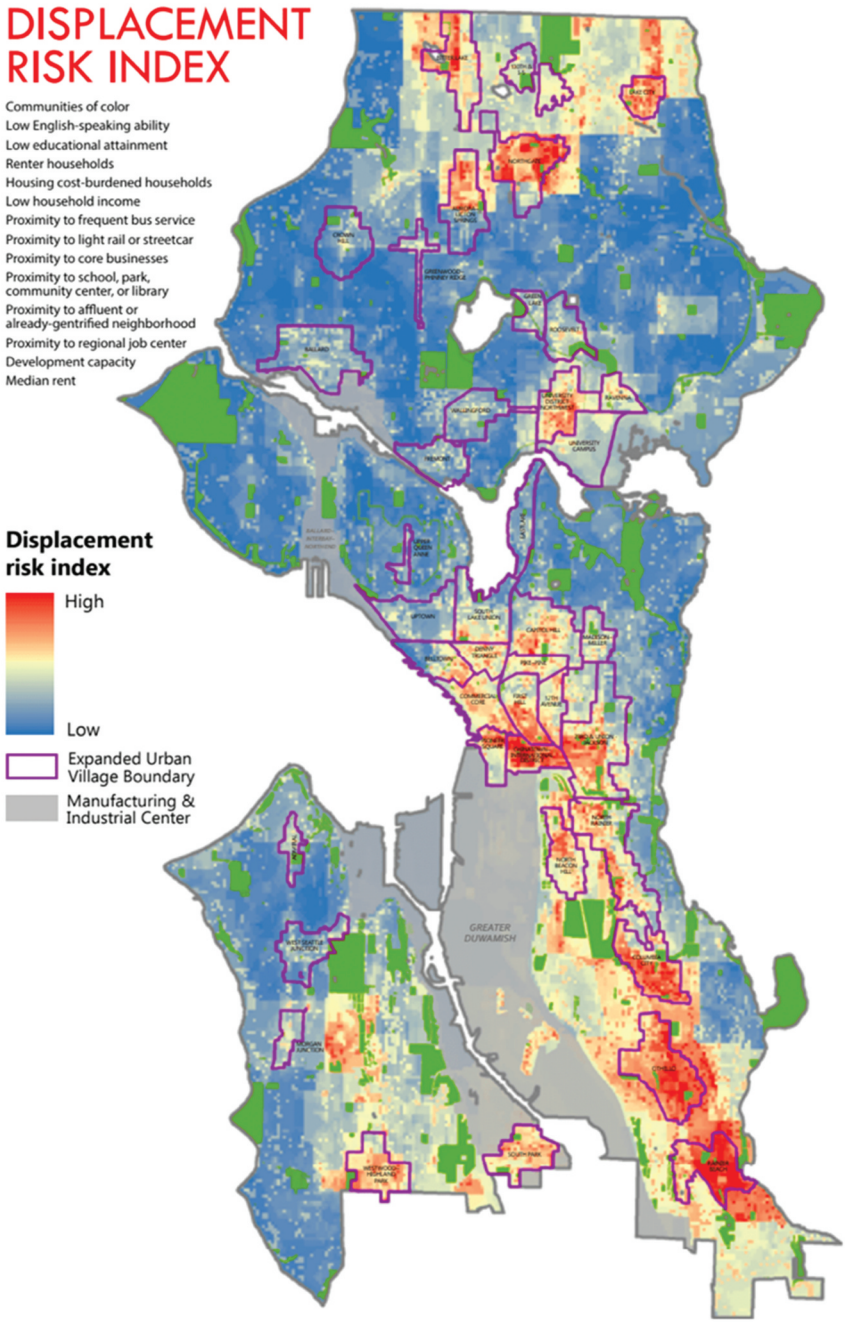

Figure 5. Is a city map that guides their decision making by identifying high risk of displacement areas, routinely in line with redlining histories and the Black populations of the city. Students communities are largely the dense red areas surrounds by purple borders in the central and southeast part of the city.

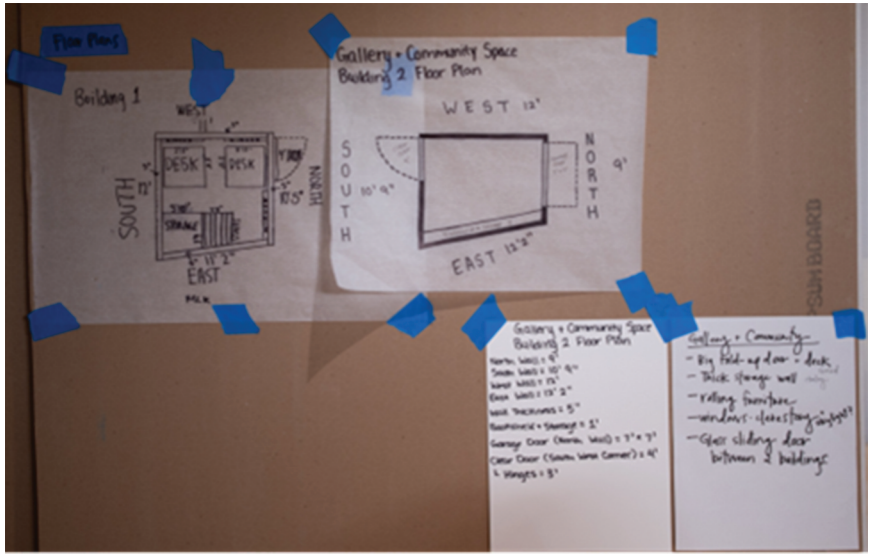

Image 7. This is the result of the site visit that occurred later in the day, students sketched a site plan that oriented around building a communal space.

timescape, serve to connect identities across stories, and provide a point to analyze and design for resistance to being rendered placeless. Below is the result of the site visit that occurred later in the day, students sketched a site plan that oriented around building a communal space (see Image 7).

Hood famous visit: Reclaiming spatial storylines through a sense of identity-in-place + learning

This scene, from the second half of the design program, illustrates complexities and engagement of uncovering how to tell a community's story in a space through design. We visited *Hood Famous*, a Filipinx bakery designed by Sergio & Sonia at La Union. Data for this section consists of natural conversations and field notes recorded and documented via video during the *Hood Famous Field Trip* and direct quotes are from Sergio tasked students with designing a feature wall. Sergio's quote is from a post-program interview and reflection on his time being a first-time mentor for the program.

Mentors modeling a black sense of place in design

Going from something considered a space to the culture of a place is a process of cultivating identity in place. Youth have an intrinsic way of showcasing and communicating their connections to place through spatial aesthetics, design elements and choices they make. For our field trip day, we took the link light rail (local train) from Mount Baker to the Chinatown/

International District (CID) to visit Hood Famous. One of our mentors, Sergio, took us on tour to highlight how they employed design to promote connections between cultural, identity, stories and space. Sergio carries his Blackness and Pacific Islanderness in tandem through his design practice. He uses space as a storytelling process, a way that Black sense of place logic and Black geographies allow us to read a physical space and our material world. This form of designing became apparent to the students as they engaged in the space. This further engages the expansiveness of Blackness and the ways it engages other communities through his own pedagogy and detailing of his design process. A Black sense of place here allows us to see how this relational approach allows for the centering of groups of people's humanity, while the students engaged in design activities that allowed them to apply their knowledge and centering their own humanity. The client/owner of Hood Famous sat with us to detail how they aimed to pay homage to the folks who've had relations in that building and community, while also connecting to various parts of the Philippines with diasporic elements of cultural history through motifs and aesthetics for reclaiming space and stories. The owner noted how much people who came in felt represented and connected to the larger building, neighborhood and now, Hood Famous. The design itself provided youth designers the opportunity to see aesthetics of repairing relationships to a space through a spatial storyline. One design element that stood out was the owner mentioning, "everyone tells a story, and design tells a story." For example, the owner mentioned how the current shop is physically located in what was called Filipino Town. The building used to be a place where day laborers from the Philippines would stay. They were the first Filipino restaurant back in this area after experiencing displacement, and thus invoked a reclaiming of space and honoring those who came before. They also aimed to reclaim and continue stories of resistance through the design. For example, as a designer, Sergio and the owner had specific goals of promoting feelings of "a) If you're from the Philippines or Filipinx you feel seen and heard, b) I feel at home because I've never seen this in a public space and c) people will be able to spark curiosity and learn something about the Philippines if there isn't a prior connection. Thus, the intentionality of every detail in a space has a story about it" [video data citation, 11/7/2022].

Designing the feature wall

The design elements below highlight the ongoing spatial storylines of reclamation that provided youth with ideas for how to story a space for themselves see Images 8 and 9. After learning about the different motifs, we tasked the youth with designing their own "feature" wall, modeled after the one in hood famous, to represent themselves. As we went around to share, Carolyn detailed a key element to her wall:



Image 8. With persmission from Sergio and the La union studio team, these images showcase the feature wall and key aesthetics and motifs used in the feature wall activity prompt in Hood famous, where we facilitated the spatial storytelling efforts implemented in the form of aesthetics and motifs. The scales in the form of tiles and light fixtures represent relations to the sea, fish and knowledge's of such practices, while the wicker wall represents traditional filipinx tattoo designs.

> In my wall I decided to make these fixtures [while making a jetting out of the wall motion of the hair motifs] that represent my hair when it's curly. I feel like it kinda tells the story of my relationship to my hair, and like, how my hair is important. Not a lot of people see the beauty in Black hair when it's coarse, so I wanted to put something that represented me and people like me.

Carolyn describes the need to tell the story of her hair because of the anti-Blackness often ascribed to critiques of Black women's hair. Students presented information similar that continued spatial stories across their designs. Carolyn's explanation and wall from her sketch



Image 9. With persmission from Sergio and the La union studio team, these images showcase the feature wall and key aesthetics and motifs used in the feature wall activity prompt in Hood famous, where we facilitated the spatial storytelling efforts implemented in the form of aesthetics and motifs. The scales in the form of tiles and light fixtures represent relations to the sea, fish and knowledge's of such practices, while the wicker wall represents traditional filipinx tattoo designs.

journal is not pictured because of ethnographic refusal (see Ortner, 1995) and artist ownership. The quote describes an artistic decision to create fixtures resembling Black curly hair as a representation of her identity while providing representation for herself and others who share similar experiences. Her representation interrogates larger societal issues and ways Black people, and specifically Black women, are excluded from belonging to spaces because of their hair when not fitting into the white gaze. As detailed here, she builds on her own spatial knowledge and experiences relating to her identity in the social world as a young Black woman. She engages a form of aesthetics where her story and humanity is centered as it addresses anti-Blackness through centering Black life and experiences, embedding identity in place. By doing so, she is also offering us an opportunity to understand how a learning experience activates a sense of identity-in-place through a design she wants to see in our world. When introduced a project by Curry Hackett, a Black, educator, designer and architect, Carolyn approved the representation of his Black hair series as it pertained to her work. This was a hindsight connection

made by me as both an ethnographic refusal and balancing the opportunity to represent ways Blackness can be celebrated and tell stories in the ways Carolyn felt aligned with her view. After reaching out to explain this relation to Curry, he sent the images over to support the illumination of Black spatial imaginings and bring to life the aesthetic activism Carolyn is inviting us to engage with an aesthetic illustrated below see Image 10:

She's also displaying her understanding of techniques used to render folks placeless grounded in her identity as a Black woman that connects spatial storylines across the timespace. In doing so, she's reclaiming space through building a sense of identity-in-place with her design.

Further, there is a need to provide moments for students to "engage with excluded and marginalized perspectives that have the potential to challenge oppressive practices (Philip et al., 2013, p. 113)." This spatial story inquiry process was enhanced by the facilitation of mentors who employ unique skill sets and ways of connecting identities and place. As a component of belonging, this axiological element promotes a collective approach to design, adding a healthy dose of complexity to how we approach and think about space through a narrative identity perspective (Curnow & Jurow, 2021; Martin, 2000). Identity in place fluctuates between the design features of the self to the physical elements of a space and extends to future designs and justice through design.

During the task of designing a feature wall, Samira and Halima decided to draw a sycamore tree that represents the Oromo people, their people, an ethnic group from Ethiopia. In their illustration, they detailed the tree, where they included it to tell the story of their people and to teach others about their people. The tree itself also represents "the culture of Oromo people and represents their identity. Sycamore tree is presumed as a hall of Oromo Gadaa institution under which different socio-cultural affairs are performed. It is a sacred site" (Roba & Lu, 2021, p. 7). This was a constant storyline throughout their designs, that also connected to their cultural histories that connect to different lands. Halima and Samira both consistently drew and tied aesthetics represented by the Sycamore tree to their final design. This insurgent aesthetics allow them to both design for community building while infusing their culture into the design, ensuring the design reflects the socio-cultural affairs Deaf Spotlight wanted to engage in. Insurgent aesthetics here shows up as a mending of cultures and aesthetics that are interwoven and they made connections between the tree site and the space Deaf Spotlight aimed to create (Summers, 2021). Halima explained this concept when we were sharing when back at HQ:



Image 10. This rendering was created by Curry Hackett using mid journey in an exercise to dream up a black hair museum. I've reached out to Curry and Carloyn about using this as a representation of her work to exercise ethnographic refusal to share her conceptualizations. This is a further rendition of how racial identity shows up as an activation of spatial knowledge for how black sense of place connects to identity and the stories of a space.

> See the Tree lets people know this is Oromo. It's really important in our culture. See it's on our bracelets too! We do a lot of ceremony and meetings around the tree. This summer I get to go check one out too!

In Samira and Halima's design process of including themselves throughout the design iterations, they advocated for a wall of the final building for Deaf Spotlight to include a feature that had Deaf Spotlight in multiple languages out front, including Oromo. The students are connecting points of stories across their spatial and temporal experiences, weaving together cultural stories of the tree, bouncing it back to the learning environment, integrating it into the design process and then bouncing it to the integration of designs to be included in the neighborhood, this storyline is cultivating a black sense of place and particularly recognizing the ways identity is integrated in the fabric of a place, especially as it figuratively connects Black worlds. Here we look at the expansiveness of Blackness and its connections across the diaspora. A Black sense of place, and particularly a sense of identity-in-place emerges as a connection point across Blackness and across place through design as the students learn. Through this process, they're casting design aesthetics to enhance the storylines of the building so that it connects to the cultural dimension of their spatial storylines as they reclaim space within their neighborhood. By ensuring their sense of identity-in-place is actualized in the design, as they building is going into their neighborhood, they are both reclaiming their individual and collective storylines to continue.

Sergio's reflection

As detailed through the field trip to Hood Famous, designing and storying a space is a cultural practice. The pedagogy students were able to experience in these learning settings promoted a culturally responsiveness that centered their racial, cultural and ethnic humanity in relation to place. A Black sense of place allows us to see the different ways this pedagogy is actualized through design. By valuing the production of space by those who learn and cultivate spatial knowledge by remembering and infusing stories within the design, belonging can exist. As an axiological practice, identity inquiry, remembering and building stories into space is a cultural, historical and spatial practice. Further, as an experience, learning how the intentional design of a space calls attention to the designers and their learning and storytelling process as well. Learning from and with youth as they learn to disrupt spatial injustices allows us to learn to see a world anew, particularly one we've seldom had the privilege of witnessing. In a follow-up conversation and interview with Sergio, he reflected on his experience in the program and detailed something that resonates:

> I think I learned just the power of that sort of authentic curiosity that young people have, and how that can be such a powerful tool in the design process as a design prompt, you know? Often in architecture and design it's all experience and how long have you worked in the industry. And that is how we view credibility, right? But there's something beautiful and unique about the youth perspective, and the ability to dream big. And harness that as, as an inclusive tool within design, I think is immensely powerful. We [La Union Studio] are

> trying to find more opportunities to bring young people on, you know, onto our projects. I think it's just really cool to have and invite students to create and craft their futures in real time. (interview, August 10, 2022)

As noted by Sergio, the pedagogy allows for the positioning of students as designers, knowledge holders and producers of spaces of freedom and justice for care (Reese & Johnson, 2022). Seeing youth, girls, and specifically, girls of color as spatial producers and designers is essential to building care into the design and the built environment by centering remembering as a way of being (Bang, 2017). A pedagogy grounded in Black sense of place and Black experiences furthers the disruption of anti-Blackness in place inquiry broadly, while facilitating relations across spatial stories. By focusing on youth, we get to understand the ways learning promotes the reclamation of space through identity development and uncovering, learning and centering spatial storylines through design aesthetics.

Discussion: Addressing anti-Blackness in studies of learning through the emplacement of Black spatial stories

Through the process of learning to design, youth are building a place for themselves, their collectives and other groups of people. By allowing identity-in-place to be a goal in learning and spacemaking, youth allow us to learn how they do cultivate spatial relations, why it matters and how to radically design spaces. Youth invites us in the "redrawing and remapping" of space they strategize around as they design for omitted stories from places (McKittrick, 2021, p. 182). Often, learning spaces omit the foundations of Blackness and Black spatial relations as key pillars of social justice movements. This has similarly occurred in climate and environmental justice efforts as a default white space while glossing over the frameworks and foundations set by Black and Indigenous peoples for those movements to take place (Curnow & Helferty, 2018). When we engage an often-omitted story, we open the doors for ample and critical engagement to understand how we all relate to the story and others. As Reagon (2015) noted "coalition work is not work done in your home. Coalition work must be done in the streets. And it is some of the most dangerous work you can do" (p. 117). Understandings of both oppressive and anti-oppressive practices in studies of learning through design are deepened by interrogating anti-Blackness across time, space, and place through coalitional work. Relations to place and those within them, including more-than-human relations, affirm that "place is always in the making through our movements and relations, through our ways of coming to know and be together" (Bang, 2020, p. 1). As I've previously stated, "spatial storylines [grounded in Blackness] allow us the opportunity to enact restorying as a means of cultivating such relations to

place and more than human kin through sampling realities and connections across space and time" (Germinaro & Nickson, 2024, p. 3) thus spatial storylines are forever in process and being cultivated. Throughout the program, spatial storylines emerged as a technique catalyzed by the youth to make sense of their role as designers in a collective action process based on who has rights and access to space (Curnow & Jurow, 2021).

Black geographies as a pedogeological and design anchor point for disrupting anti-Blackness in Learning Sciences is being put forward as a contribution to this larger effort (Germinaro & Nickson, 2024). The geographies of anti-Blackness of concern in our program concern in the literal (living in the community) and sociocultural (spatial stories) absence of Black people. As Patel (2016) noted "learning as resistance within a context that creates and contains Black and Brown student bodies and accumulates property rights for a few, cannot be sufficiently described without addressing the intermittent departures from those structures" (p. 399). Youth's design efforts showcase how Black geographies can prompt disruptive, speculative, and liberatory designs of learning experiences as they engage in anti-displacement strategies through spatial storytelling, cultivating spatial relations and aesthetic representations. It promotes, for example, that both learning environments and our studies of them can be rejuvenated by Black geographies and the teachings of Black spatial relations and knowledge (Nxumalo & Cedillo, 2017). This research also underlines the pedagogical and methodological implications of Black geographies in orienting the design of learning environments and the Learning Sciences to seek out Black places and Black spatial storylines (Germinaro & Nickson, 2024). Youth in this project reinforce notions of themselves as historic actors and builders of our possible futures as they learn with Black spatial stories for the futurity of a neighborhood to embrace and center these stories. Notably, this work furthers the need to address the interlocking forces of settler colonialism and anti-Blackness in critical engagements with space, place and land.

It points to the power of sharing spatial stories and allowing youth to build spaces to reflect ongoing "stories-so-far" (Massey, 2005). Youth can engage the spatial imaginaries and speculative futures, both real and fictional, as ways of making visible those who have experienced displacement and erasure as a result (Takeuchi & Aquino Ishihara, 2021). Black geographies' inherent transdisciplinarity holds potential for bringing to Learning Sciences stories of Black humanity and experiences that build onto our understandings of figured worlds connected through spatial orientations. For example, Samaria and Halima's stories of the sycamore tree connect with what Love (2019) highlights as "the often radical act of (re)membering in our present lives and work, that is (re)membering as an act of decolonization." (99). Young people's expressions of spatial relations through design are themselves modes of spatial knowledge that are worthy of attention to understand

how they produce new understandings of our world and engage spatial imaginings and stories for our collective liberated futures (Gutiérrez et al., 2019). Putting Learning Sciences into conversation with Black geographies promotes speculative and the actualization of futures for the spatial stories connected to youth's constructions of self in relation the production of spaces based on their relations to others. This supports the need to answer the call to study social movement spaces to reimagine our collective efforts (Curnow & Jurow, 2021). The mechanisms of constructing and learning through spatial storylines are resonant with spaces that utilize learning as a fugitive act to address social problems (Mims et al., 2022). The stories themselves are where the production, and continuation, of spatial knowledge comes from within and between the students cultivating spatial relations as they design.

In conclusion, how can we better move with youth?

Learning and spacemaking are parallel processes interweaving and informing one another. Learning and spacemaking are cultural practices to be understood and leveraged for justice. Architectural design itself, and the aesthetics embedded in a design, are cultural symbols and motifs that tell a story of a community, people and history. Youth learning to design employing the cultural practice of learning and spacemaking as an anti-displacement technique in Seattle for the Central District and Southend community. A Black sense of place has been put to work to understand the ways youth's learning, identity and spacemaking processes disrupt anti-Blackness and displacement through architectural design. They showcase the ways to engage entanglements that fuel the erasure of Black places, including their connections to other communities' place and land-based dispossessions. As for pedagogy, this work has implications for curricula that engages places as a means for disrupting anti-Blackness and connecting it to settler colonialism through interwoven spatial storylines. This means that educators must critically interrogate spatial learning and what places and stories are emplaced in the learning environment.

To connect storytelling to space, by understanding and centering Blackness, the youth worked to unearth what it means to resist belonging to places that actively are displacing their stories, and how that knowledge can invite pedagogy and ways of being that center their identities (Jenkins, 2021). They activated learning by building a sense of identity-in-place through relations to places, identity trajectories and practices together. Designing spaces with the intention of emplacement, or the process of designing a space for oneself, emerged through learning how to produce a space (Takeuchi & Aquino Ishihara, 2021). Further, the spatial storylines resemble a form of embodiment as told through aesthetics, where the space

and design itself embody the identities of those who designed it. Takeuchi and Aquino Ishihara (2021) described this process of embodiment through the making previously hidden bodies, visible. The youth then engaged processes to make their stories, and others, visible.

Through this process, youth provided us insight and examples of the power of aesthetics as an act of resistance through how they notice and design for relationship shifts (Summers, 2021). By giving us glimpses of how to design places for intentional relational aesthetics to be cultivated as a form of resistance, they also are reorganizing our understandings of geography, place and spatial relations. Particularly they show how the aesthetics and their facilitation of relations mediates storylines through " . . . representation and nascent experience of the future in the present" (Vossoughi, 2011, p. 184). Young people remind us to pull from our histories and experiences to inform our desired futures in real-time (Nasir et al., 2020). Identity-in-place then is a cyclical everyday analytic frame to build futures that center our humanity through addressing uncomfortable relationalities (Gutiérrez et al., 2019; McKittrick, 2021). As students learning, they work toward liberation of themselves, and others are engaging in social movements addressing the displacement of people, cultures, relations, knowledge and stories. Students being able to shift, design and author identities and communities through spatial storylines is integral to building just futures. As told through these stories, youth undergo an illustrious process of rehumanizing themselves and their complex identities from the context of being othered (Langer-Osuna & Nasir, 2016). Through their praxis of interweaving learning and identity, youth interrogate the power of space, how it is used to harm, and how they can, want, and will use it to liberate. Youth are paving the way for us as adults to learn from and facilitate their brilliance. In abundance, we need more of an insurgency for how we engage and think about space. This would lead us to acknowledge that we are not static in our needs and concerns regarding places, but rather our movements reflect our knowledge building and learning (Hooks, 2009). Youth invites us to be a part of building the world they want. How will we respond?

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ORCID

Kaleb Germinaro http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4602-3374

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