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# The Black Spatial Imaginary

A geographical imperative lies at the heart of every struggle for social justice.

—RUTH WILSON GILMORE

In the painting *Inkwell Beach* that graces the cover of the paperback edition of this book, Juan Logan calls attention to the racialization of space and the spatialization of race. Part of a series titled *Leisure Space*, and directly related to the representations that make up the artist's equally brilliant *Unintended Relations* series, *Inkwell Beach* memorializes the ways in which Black people turned segregation into congregation during the Jim Crow era. In those days, whites attempted to inscribe on the landscape the artificial divisions between the races that the pathologies of white supremacy instantiated in social life. Assuming that beaches and the oceans that touched them belonged to whites unless otherwise specified, whites took favored swimming spots for themselves and relegated Blacks to less desirable roped-off portions of sand and surf. Whites ridiculed and demonized these spaces that white supremacy created, derisively describing them as inkwells, as if the color of Black people might wash away in the water and pollute it. Yet as Logan's brilliantly colored bold images clearly convey, Black people transformed these resorts of last resort into wonderfully festive and celebratory spaces of mutuality, community, and solidarity.<sup>1</sup> Like the escaped slave known to the world as Harriet Jacobs hiding in a tiny garret room above her grandmother's house for six years and eleven months who transformed that tiny space into a spot where she watched and judged the white world, like the first generation of free Blacks who combated hunger and malnutrition by taking the fatbacks and intestines of pigs discarded by whites and blending them with collard greens to make savory and nutritious meals, and

like the many unheralded conjurers in twentieth-century Black communities who provided health care for impoverished people by turning the roots of plants into medicines, the patrons of these beaches turned humiliating and dehumanizing segregation into exhilarating and rehumanizing congregation. As art historian Laurel Fredrickson astutely observes, many of Logan's paintings and installations revolve around African understandings of land as shared social space rather than as disposable private property, and of identity as the product of interpersonal connections rather than individual differences.<sup>2</sup>

One reason racialized space goes largely unnoticed is that it has been produced by the long history evoked so powerfully in Juan Logan's art. Racialized space has come to be seen as natural in this nation. Spatial control, displacement, dispossession, and exclusion have been linked to racial subordination and exploitation in decisive ways. From the theft of Native American and Mexican lands in the nineteenth century to the confiscation of Black and Latino property for urban renewal projects in the twentieth century, from the Trail of Tears to the Japanese Internment, from the creation of ghettos, barrios, reservations, and "Chinatowns" to the disproportionate placement of toxic hazards in minority neighborhoods, the racial projects of U.S. society have always been spatial projects as well. Although all communities of color have experienced social subordination in the form of spatial regulation, the particular contours of slavery, sharecropping, and segregation in the United States have inflected the African American encounter with the racialization of space and the spatialization of race in unique ways.<sup>3</sup>

The plantation, the prison, the sharecropper's cabin, and the ghetto have been the most visible and obvious manifestations of white supremacist uses of space. Perhaps less visible and obvious, but no less racist, have been the spaces that reflect and shape the white spatial imaginary—the segregated neighborhood and the segregated school, the all-white work place, the exclusive country club, or the prosperous properly gendered white suburban home massively subsidized with services, amenities, tax breaks, and transportation opportunities unavailable to inner-city residents. African American battles for resources, rights, and recognition not only have "taken place," but also have required blacks literally to "take places." The famous battles of the mid-twentieth-century civil rights movement took place in stores, at lunch counters, on trains and buses, and in schools. These battles emerged from centuries of struggle over spaces, from fights to secure freedom of movement in public and to enter, inhabit, use, control, and own physical places. This long legacy helps account for the power of the Black spatial imaginary and its socially shared understanding of the importance of public space as well as its power to create new opportunities and life chances.

Enslaved Africans in America quickly recognized the connections between race and place. Because they had been mostly free in Africa but enslaved in America, because racialized permanent hereditary chattel slavery differed in every respect from the nature of the slavery they knew in their native continent, slaves sought to keep alive memories of the motherland through a broad range of spatial practices. They buried their dead in African ways, decorating graves with household items, breaking plates, cups, and utensils to symbolize the ruptures between the living and the dead, between their North American present and their African past. They placed jars of water outside their homes and nailed mirrors onto their walls to capture “the flash of the spirit,” alluding to streams and rivers as metaphors about flow, continuity, and connection between worlds.<sup>4</sup>

Africans in America constantly found themselves forced to negotiate spaces of containment and confinement in the land of their captivity. One New England slave named Caesar displayed a special commitment to movement across space when he made a remarkable escape from bondage in 1769. It was neither unusual nor unexpected for some slaves to flee to freedom, but Caesar’s flight was especially dramatic. An accident made him lose both of his legs, yet somehow, he still “ran” away.<sup>5</sup> This was a man who really wanted to be free. Henry “Box” Brown executed a particularly imaginative escape from slavery in Richmond, Virginia, in 1848. Disconsolate because his wife and children were sold to a North Carolina slave owner, Brown decided to flee to freedom. Packing his body into a box three feet long and two feet deep, he “mailed” himself by Adams Package Express to freedom in Philadelphia, some twenty-seven hours away by wagon travel.<sup>6</sup> Some antebellum fugitives from slavery found they could even hide themselves in plain sight of their oppressors. In the Deep South especially, where large plantations were plentiful, escapees made their way north by moving from plantation to plantation. They secured food and shelter in the slave quarters at night, but mixed freely among the field slaves at work during the day. Although they could be seen, they remained unnoticed by the masters and overseers on large plantations who often could not really distinguish one slave from another.<sup>7</sup> These enslaved Africans in America found it necessary to address the injuries of race by fashioning new understandings of space.

Caesar and Henry Brown expanded the *scope* of space, moving outside the terrains controlled by the slave masters. They branched out. The underground “outliers” and field-laboring runaways reduced the *scale* of space, carving out limited zones of freedom too small and too hidden to be vulnerable to their enemies. They burrowed in. Other freedom seekers changed the *stakes of space* through schemes that turned sites of containment and confinement into spaces of creativity and community making. Slave women who served

food and worked as maids or slave men working as drivers and butlers could eavesdrop on conversations and report important information back to their communities.<sup>8</sup> Religious ceremonies, songs, and conjuring rituals in isolated “brush arbors” enabled worshippers to summon into their presence the God of the oppressed, not as a figure to console them in their oppression, but rather as a real living force whose commitment to their emancipation was clear and unambiguous.<sup>9</sup> They turned the coping religion handed to them by their oppressors into an enabling religion of their own design. While others branched out or burrowed in, they built up.

Many former slaves who fled to freedom maintained contact with the spaces of slavery. Harriet Tubman lived as a slave for twenty-eight years. Her personal escape to free territory brought her freedom, but she did not sever her ties to the South completely. Thinking constantly about Southern bondage even while living in apparent freedom in the North, she concluded that neither she nor the land in which she lived could be free unless slavery ended. Tubman returned surreptitiously to the slave South nineteen times, leading more than three hundred slaves to freedom. During the Civil War she conducted reconnaissance missions for the Union army in Confederate-controlled territory in South Carolina and helped lead the Combahee River Expedition which blew up enemy supplies.<sup>10</sup> Other free Blacks joined the abolitionist cause, putting perpetual political pressure on their former owners.

Over time, these spatial relations produced particular understandings of racial identities. Those understandings did not simply reflect the existence of racialized space in society; they come to function as a part of it. Urban historians and sociologists have done excellent work revealing how decisions about zoning, taxation, social welfare, and urban renewal have had racial causes and consequences, but they have been less sensitive to the ways in which prevailing cultural norms and assumptions, what I call the dominant social warrant of the white spatial imaginary, have functioned to make the racialization of space ideologically legitimate and politically impregnable. Under these conditions, struggles for racial justice require more than mere inclusion into previously excluded places. They also necessitate creation of a counter social warrant with fundamentally different assumptions about place than the white spatial imaginary allows. Race-based social movements that have often seemed to social-movement theorists as expressions of unthinking racial essentialism, nationalism, and parochialism, as evidence of immature and unreflective allegiance to shared skin color and phenotype, in reality owe much of their existence to the ways in which those skin colors and phenotypes become meaningful in the United States largely through shared experiences with racialized places.

Black people pay an enormous price for the couplings of race and place that permeate society. Pervasive racial segregation creates a geographically organized vulnerability for Blacks. Not only are they concentrated demographically, but the processes that turn white privilege and power into property, into the accumulation of assets that appreciate in value and can be passed down across generations, also leave Black people with little control over the economic decisions that shape their lives. Discriminatory lending and investment practices mean that outsiders own most of the businesses in Black communities. As Malcolm X used to rhyme, “When the sun goes down, our money goes to another part of town.” Banks and business establishments take more money out of Black communities than they put in. “Middlemen” entrepreneurs unable to open businesses in white neighborhoods can secure loans to open businesses in Black neighborhoods, but Blacks cannot. Blacks who do own businesses experience impediments to selling their products to people who are not Black. Millions of dollars are made by businesses in Black communities, but the profits made from them are invested elsewhere.<sup>11</sup>

The trajectory from these unequal spatial relations to place-based and race-based social movements emerges clearly in the insightful scholarship of John Logan and Harvey Molotch. They explain that without control over the exchange value of the neighborhoods in which they live, Blacks are largely denied access to the forms of place-based political mobilization based on protecting property values that enable other groups access to and influence in the political system. Inner-city Blacks may inhabit a neighborhood, but they are generally not owners of it or investors in it. Their powerlessness produces profits for others. They must move more often than homeowners do, depriving them of stable social networks and long-term attachments to place. Yet segregation also promotes new forms of congregation, what Logan and Molotch describe as “an extraordinary coping system built upon mutual exchange and reciprocity.”<sup>12</sup> This system goes beyond hostile privatism and defensive localism to envision and enact broader affiliations and alliances. Race-based mobilization enables dispersed groups to find common ground, to inhabit the same politics even though they do not inhabit the same neighborhood. They make broad social demands on behalf of not only all Blacks in the region, but also on behalf of other deprived places and the people who live in them. As Logan and Molotch argue, these demands require “a more profound ideology than that behind the immediate and concrete interests of protecting one’s property values or daily round.”<sup>13</sup>

Spatial imaginaries honed in inner cities persist when Blacks move to suburbs, and for good reasons. The division between cities and suburbs does not conform exactly to the demographic concentration of whites and Blacks. Since the 1970s, Blacks have gradually started moving to suburbs. Yet Black

suburbanization is largely concentrated in areas with falling rents and declining property values, most often in older inner ring suburbs. For example, census tracts that had more than 25 percent Black populations in St. Louis County in 1990 were concentrated in one corridor adjacent to the city's north side. Suburbs with Black populations above 60 percent (Bel Ridge, Berkeley, Beverly Hills, Hillsdale, Kinloch, Northwoods, Norwood Court, Pagedale, Pine Lawn, Uplands Park, and Wellston) lay in contiguous territory outside the city limits. Seven of these 9 municipalities reported median household incomes of \$27,000 or less compared to the county median income of \$38,000.<sup>14</sup>

African Americans and members of other aggrieved communities of color have been largely unable to control the exchange value of their neighborhoods because of the power of the white spatial imaginary and the policies that flow from it. Yet in response, they have developed innovative ways of augmenting the use values of the spaces they inhabit. They pool resources, exchange services, and appropriate private and public spaces for novel purposes. These practices have been vital to the survival of Black people and Black communities, but they also offer a model of democratic citizenship to everyone. Relegated to neighborhoods where zoning, policing, and investment practices make it impossible for them to control the exchange value of their property, ghetto residents have learned how to turn segregation into congregation. They have augmented the use value of their neighborhoods by relying on each other for bartered services and goods, by mobilizing collectively for better city services, by establishing businesses geared to a local ethnic clientele, and by using the commonalities of race and class as a basis for building pan-neighborhood alliances with residents of similar neighborhoods to increase the responsibility, power, and accountability of local government. Black neighborhoods generate a spatial imaginary that favors public cooperation in solving public problems.

The radical solidarity at the heart of the Black spatial imaginary stems not so much from an abstract idealism as from necessity. Pervasive housing discrimination and the segregation it consolidates leave Blacks with a clearly recognizable linked fate. Because it is difficult to move away from other members of their group, they struggle to turn the radical divisiveness created by overcrowding and competition for scarce resources into mutual recognition and respect. Cross-class affinities are an important outcome of these practices. According to sociologist Lincoln Quillian, a majority of Blacks, but only 10 percent of whites, at some time in any given decade will live in a poor neighborhood.<sup>15</sup> African Americans in households headed by males whose income places them above the poverty line are more likely to live in an area of concentrated poverty than poor whites in female-headed households.<sup>16</sup> The

average white family earning less than \$30,000 a year lives in a neighborhood with higher educational achievement and a lower rate of poverty than a Black family that earns more than \$60,000 annually.<sup>17</sup> As a consequence, cross-class alliances mean something different in Black communities than they do in white residential areas.

The ideology that emerged from these spatial realities accounts for much of the radicalism championed by Dr. King and the civil rights movement (see Introduction). In his famous “Letter from Birmingham City Jail” and on many other occasions throughout his life, King proclaimed, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”<sup>18</sup> Of course, King drew on a broad range of sources for these ideas, ranging from the Bible to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. But his words resonated with the masses because they spoke to the consciousness they had learned in racialized spaces. This was the consciousness that responded to the radical divisiveness of racialized capitalism with radical solidarity, that united the chitlin’ eaters with the chicken eaters, that cared as much about the town drunk as the town doctor, that motivated Ella Baker to urge educated entrepreneurs steeped in the culture of uplift to work with bootleggers and pool hall hustlers immersed in the culture of the blues.<sup>19</sup>

These ideas directly contradict the political logic produced by the white spatial imaginary. As Logan and Molotch explain, simple self-interest should lead members of aggrieved groups in another direction, to reject radical democracy in favor of hierarchical plutocracy. to disidentify with the non-normative and powerless people in their own ranks. A system of triage might enable well-off and moderately wealthy members of aggrieved communities to secure significant concessions from the system in return for buying into it. When confronted with egalitarian and democratic social movements, people in power always hold out the lure of individual escape for selected individuals. The logic of the system encourages potential rebels to instead seek positions as administrators of austerity, apologists for corporate power and white privilege, or political shells for redevelopment schemes certain to exacerbate the very problems they purport to solve. There is never a shortage of Black people auditioning for these roles. Yet given the enormous rewards potentially available to those who identify with whiteness, the enduring popularity and power of Black radical democracy needs explaining. The explanation is not so much a matter of race as a matter of place.

Because Black people have different relations to places than whites, the Black spatial imaginary continuously generates new democratic imaginations and aspirations. On the one hand, embracing the ideals of the white spatial imaginary does not work as well for Blacks as it does for whites, because the

whole system is premised on their subordination. A study of Black homeowners in the one hundred largest metropolitan areas, for example, discovered that they received on average 18 percent less return on their housing investment than whites obtained.<sup>20</sup> Research by Chenoa Flippen reveals that even when Blacks obtain assets that appreciate in value and can be passed down across generations, they obtain them on terms that impede wealth creation. It is not just that homes owned by Blacks are worth substantially less than homes owned by whites, and that homes in Black neighborhoods appreciate in value more slowly than homes in white neighborhoods, but that mature Black homeowners actually experience depreciation of home values more than appreciation. Because of residential segregation, mortgage redlining, direct discrimination, and a whole host of neighborhood race effects, decisions that make economic sense for whites do not make sense for Blacks.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, research by Camille Zubrinsky Charles demonstrates that directly contrary to the experience of whites, homeownership actually has a negative effect on Black residential outcomes. Black renters can inhabit less segregated and more affluent neighborhoods than Black homeowners. In fact, because of segregation and its attendant social consequences, Blacks are the only group who find themselves economically *penalized* for homeownership.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time that systematic residential segregation inhibits Black access to the prosperous private home, it augments the public value of some seemingly private spaces. In Black neighborhoods where most businesses are owned and controlled by outsiders, those that Blacks do own can become important sites of solidarity and mutuality. In his research on the origins of the civil rights movement, Aldon D. Morris explains that beauty parlors sometimes served unexpected purposes. As sites owned by Blacks and almost never patronized by whites, beauty parlors could host freedom schools and function as meeting places for strategic discussions. Recent scholarship by Melissa Harris-Lacewell, Vorris Nunley, Ingrid Banks, and Adia Harvey Wingfield (among others) further elaborates the uncommon roles played by these seemingly common sites up to the present day precisely because of the politics of place and race.<sup>23</sup>

This imagination has not been confined to the hair salon. Faced with uncertain access to public meeting halls, vexed by aggressive police surveillance, and deprived of spaces they controlled themselves because of systematic impediments to asset accumulation, Blacks had to learn to recognize the public possibilities of privately owned places, to perceive potential new uses for any arena open to them. During the 1950s, St. Louis politician Jordan Chambers turned the back room of a nightclub he owned into his unofficial ward headquarters. When Malcolm X visited the city to deliver a public address in 1963, he spoke at a roller rink on Finney Avenue. In 1970, St. Louis activist Ivory

Perry coordinated activities by doctors, nurses, and medical students screening and treating children poisoned by toxic lead from a command post that he set up in a neighborhood tavern, Maurice's Gold Coast Lounge.<sup>24</sup>

The white disdain for Blacks that extended even to the dead meant that funeral homes operated by whites generally refused to serve Black customers. Even as corpses, Blacks were unwanted by whites. Yet this discrimination created openings for Black entrepreneurship in the mortuary industry. Suzanne Smith's fascinating history of African American funeral directors reveals that these businesses served the living in many creative and unexpected ways. The Detroit Memorial Park Cemetery raised sufficient capital for its Black owners to enable them to offer home mortgage loans to Blacks at a time when white lenders would not. The building housing the offices of the Metropolitan Funeral System Association's burial insurance business in Chicago also featured the Parkway Ballroom that enabled Blacks to attend dances and concerts free from the indignities of Jim Crow segregation that prevailed elsewhere in the city. Preston Taylor, a Black undertaker in Nashville, opened a private recreation park for Blacks featuring a skating rink, clubhouse, picnic grounds, and an amusement hall adjacent to the cemetery he owned. During the 1950s some Black funeral directors aided the emerging civil rights movement by placing voter registration information on the back of funeral fans.<sup>25</sup>

Although nearly every aggrieved immigrant, ethnic, and racial group has drawn on the resources of fraternal orders and mutual aid societies, these organizations have been even more important to Blacks because of the many obstacles to capital accumulation they have faced. By the 1920s Black fraternal organizations owned \$20 million worth of property that housed banks, hospitals, and social welfare agencies.<sup>26</sup> The Knights of Tabor and the Daughters of Tabernacle attracted fifty thousand members to nearly one thousand lodges in the 1940s and 1950s largely because those groups operated a hospital in Mound Bayou, Mississippi, at a time when most hospitals in the south refused to treat Black patients.<sup>27</sup> For many years Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference housed its national headquarters in The Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Georgia building in Atlanta.<sup>28</sup>

The Black spatial imaginary turned sites for performance and prayer into venues for public political mobilization. Scholars have long recognized how religion and music play central roles in African American culture, but for the most part they have been insufficiently attentive to the ways in which these cultural practices have loomed so large because they take place in spaces over which Blacks exercise some control. Places designed for prayer and performance frequently become sites for politics, while political gatherings signal their legitimacy by incorporating elements of prayer and performance inside them. Civil rights groups in the 1960s staged fund-raisers at

entertainment venues, including the Village Gate nightclub in New York's Greenwich Village and the Comiskey Park baseball stadium in Chicago.<sup>29</sup> In the 1970s, Jesse Jackson's Operation Breadbasket organization staged weekly meetings on Saturday mornings in a six-thousand-seat motion picture theater in Chicago that featured performances by choirs and orchestras, sermons by Reverend Jackson, and display tables advertising merchandise for sale by Black-owned businesses.<sup>30</sup>

People who do not control physical places often construct discursive spaces as sites of agency, affiliation, and imagination. One of the most important yet least known dimensions of Black expressive culture is its consistent preoccupation with place and power. Both canonized works of art and a variety of vernacular expressive practices in Black communities speak to the spatial aspects of racial identity. These works of expressive culture function as repositories of collective memory, sources of moral instruction, and mechanisms for transforming places and calling communities into being through display, dialogue, and decoration. Like activists, artists committed to Black freedom proceed by promoting new understandings of the scale, scope, and stakes of place and space, by burrowing in, branching out, and building up.

African American artists and intellectuals have created a distinct spatial imaginary in a broad range of cultural expressions, from the migration narrative that Farah Jasmine Griffin identifies as the core trope within Black literature, music, and art, to the celebration of city streets in the imagery and iconography of hip-hop where streets become performance spaces for graffiti writing, mural art, and break dancing. Photographs by Roy DeCarava and Teenie "One Shot" Harris lovingly delineated the contours of Black urban life while works of fiction by Ann Petry and Toni Cade Bambara memorialized women's negotiations with both domestic and public spaces. Geographer Clyde Woods shows how that the expressive culture of blues music grew directly out of the politics of place in the Mississippi Delta, that the blues constitute a key component of a distinct African American ethno-racial epistemology. His evidence and argument brilliantly demonstrate that this *ethno-racial* epistemology is also an *ethno-spatial* epistemology.<sup>31</sup>

Understanding racialized space requires us to stage a confrontation between the moral geography of pure space expressed by the hostile privatism and defensive localism of the white spatial imaginary that permeate segregated spaces in the United States on the one hand, and the moral geography of differentiated space as it has developed in the Black spatial imaginary on the other. This conversation will show that the national spatial imaginary is racially marked, that segregation serves as a key crucible for creating the emphasis on exclusion and augmented exchange value that guides the contemporary ideal of the properly gendered prosperous private home. Changing

the racialized nature of opportunities and life chances in the United States requires policies, practices, and institutions that reject the white spatial imaginary and constitute a new social charter along the lines embodied in the Black spatial imaginary. Our primary goal should be to disassemble the fatal links that connect race, place, and power. This requires a two-part strategy that entails a frontal attack on all the mechanisms that prevent people of color from equal opportunities to accumulate assets that appreciate in value and can be passed down across generations, as well as a concomitant embrace of the Black spatial imaginary based on privileging use value over exchange value, sociality over selfishness, and inclusion over exclusion.

Black expressive culture has long been one of the sites where a counter warrant against the white spatial imaginary can be found. For example, street parades held a powerful allure for the young Louis Armstrong in segregated New Orleans at the start of the twentieth century. Later in life, the trumpeter's unparalleled virtuosity would enable Armstrong to travel across countries and continents, but as a child he needed the street parade merely to move freely across town. Most of the time it was dangerous for a Black child to venture out into unknown areas. White thugs and police officers routinely attacked Blacks who wandered out of the ghetto and into places where whites lived. Armstrong discovered, however, that by volunteering to tag along with brass bands helping Bunk Johnson or Joe Oliver carry their horns when they got tired, he could see the rest of the city safely. Recalling those excursions fondly in his later years, Armstrong noted that marching along with the brass bands granted him "safe passage throughout the city." When he grew up and assumed a role as a full-fledged member of one of those bands, it meant that, at least on parade days, "I could go into any part of New Orleans without being bothered."<sup>32</sup>

More than four decades years after the end of slavery, Blacks like the young Louis Armstrong still did not have freedom of movement. Chains no longer bound them to plantations. Fugitive slave laws no longer put the full force of the federal government behind tracking them down. Yet a whole new set of practices and rules constrained their mobility. The names had changed, but the game was the same. The sharecropping system tied Black workers to the land. Laws against loitering and vagrancy made every Black person subject to arrest on the whim of whites. These "criminals" found themselves incarcerated inside newly created prisons that replicated the social relations of slavery. Legally constituted authorities winked at vigilante violence designed to keep Blacks "in their place," figuratively and literally. Jim Crow segregation shaped the spaces African Americans could occupy in stores or on streetcars. Even cemeteries were segregated. White policing of public space forced Blacks to step off of sidewalks and into the streets to make room for whites

when they passed. Racial zoning and restrictive covenants relegated Black people to crowded, dirty, and dangerous slums. Politically motivated policing prevented African Americans from leaving the spaces to which they had been assigned, yet rendered them powerless to protect their neighborhoods from outside assaults, attacks, and rampages.

Blacks prevented from traveling freely through space on their own accord, however, often found themselves forced to move quickly to flee from white oppression and violence. The downtown Black neighborhood in New Orleans where Armstrong was raised was populated by refugees from waves of anti-Black violence in the Louisiana countryside during the late nineteenth century. When the white supremacist counterrevolution against Abolition Democracy succeeded in restoring the social relations of slavery in the Louisiana countryside after 1880 through sharecropping and Ku Klux Klan terrorism, tens of thousands of Blacks left the hinterlands, gathering together for mutual protection in New Orleans.<sup>33</sup> The 2007 film *Banished* by Marco Williams documents the well-known practice of “whitecapping,” through which jealous whites used violence to force Blacks from homes and farms that whites wanted to own. The cities of Harrison, Arkansas, and Pierce City, Missouri, as well as most of Forsyth County, Georgia, became locales inhabited only by whites once Blacks were forced out. Whites then used the legal fiction of “adverse possession” to claim title to lands they had never purchased, to occupy and own them, to pass on the unfair gains and unjust rewards they secured in this way to future generations. Black families, however, lost control of their assets and the ability to transfer their wealth to their descendants. Yet even when Black property was not stolen as overtly as it was in Pierce City, Harrison, and Forsyth County, Black communities suffered continuously from displacement, dispossession, and decapitalization. White mob violence destroyed Black homes and businesses in East St. Louis, Illinois, in 1917, in Chicago in 1919, and in Tulsa in 1921. Highway building and urban renewal in the mid-twentieth century destroyed some sixteen hundred Black communities.<sup>34</sup>

For the young Louis Armstrong, street parades served as his first introduction to Black peoples’ struggles over space. They functioned as one small part of a broader cultural and political negotiation with couplings of race and place. Participants in street parades used the spaces of the city to create new social relations among themselves. Musicians, dancers, and spectators learned to communicate effectively with one another in public, to anticipate each other’s moves and energies. Musical patterns of antiphony featured “call and response” between lead instruments and the rest of the band. “Second line” dancers and drummers joined the processions in answer to the invitations, challenges, and calls of the marching bands. Going out into the city

alone without being harassed or constrained by whites was practically an impossible achievement for a Black man in turn-of-the-century New Orleans, but going together as members of a band provided protective cover and mutual support.

Parades provided Black people with opportunities to enter new spaces. Even more important, however, inside the space of the parade itself musicians and their followers could bring the spatial imaginary of their neighborhoods out into the rest of the city as they marched along. Their music, marching, sartorial styles, and speech displayed the local neighborhood inflections and accents that they applied to mass-produced music, clothing, and culture. The dialogues they created among musicians and between musicians and marchers brought performances of African antiphony (call and response) and sanctified church heterophony (multiple versions of the same melody) into public places previously marked as white spaces. Musicians in street parades engaged in dialogic and democratic relations with audiences and spectators. These practices differed sharply from the monologic displays of virtuosity that dominated the conservatory and the concert hall. As Thomas Brothers observes in his splendid book on Armstrong's youth in the Crescent City, "Parades thus offered disenfranchised Negroes a chance to assertively move their culture throughout the city's public spaces, the very spaces where African Americans were expected to confirm social inferiority by sitting in the rear of trolley cars and by stepping aside on sidewalks to allow whites to pass."<sup>35</sup>

Street parades reversed the maps of inclusion and exclusion in New Orleans. Musicians who would have been shunned as unwelcome outsiders on any other day were welcomed and celebrated as guests of honor on the days when parades were held. Parades changed the meanings of inside and outside space. Music played inside concert halls or nightclubs entailed high overhead costs, necessitating admission fees. Music played for commercial consumption in clubs needed the approval of those who owned the property. But music played outside at parades, picnics, and lawn parties created democratic spaces for cultural production, distribution, and reception. The music was free. Outside music proved especially effective in rearranging cognitive mappings of place in New Orleans because the city's humid air, low altitude, and low-rise development allowed music to be heard over great distances, sometimes as much as a mile and half to three miles.<sup>36</sup> Street music also encouraged openness and improvisation. Bands responded to sounds they encountered accidentally, to the rattles of junk collectors' wagons and streetcars, to the sounds of street musicians playing on tin horns, to church bells, and to music emanating from storefront churches, dance halls, and taverns.<sup>37</sup> Because they did not control the neighborhoods in which they lived,

and because traversing putatively public space could be dangerous for them, marching in the streets took on different meaning for Blacks than it did for whites. Taking to the streets was a quintessentially political act that deployed performance as a means of calling a community into being and voicing its values and beliefs. Of course, whites paraded too, but because they controlled private spaces and had routine access to public places, they did not develop the same kind of collective and communal cultural politics of the street that emerged from the Black spatial imaginary.

Not every Black community enjoyed the relationship with street parades that prevailed historically in New Orleans, but Blacks in every city, town, and hamlet created cultural forms that celebrated movement in defiance of segregationist constraints and confinement. As Herman Gray notes, a street and road aesthetic organized around travel and adapting to new experiences served vital purposes in establishing jazz music as both a local and national practice among Blacks in the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> Even Blacks who stayed at home nonetheless incorporated movement into their lives. Household decorations and yard art transforming refuse into treasure utilized discarded tires, hubcaps, and wheels as raw materials that evoked mobility and power symbolically. Sometimes these objects even produced the movement they seem to merely evoke. In East Detroit during the summer of 1998, Tyree Guyton was bothered by crack cocaine dealers using abandoned houses on his block as their place of business. The drug traffickers conducted transactions during all hours of the day and night. The stream of people coming to their doors disrupted the neighborhood and frightened its inhabitants. Guyton wished that the abandoned houses would just go away. He nailed tires and hubcaps to the walls of these houses to suggest movement. "Curved space spins," he proclaimed, adding "I put something round on a square, on a house, and make it go."<sup>39</sup> Of course, the laws of physics being what they are, Guyton's alchemy did not work in the way he intended, at least not directly. The houses did not move anywhere. Yet he succeeded anyway. As Guyton nailed more and more tires and hubcaps to the houses, they attracted attention. Neighborhood children and pedestrians came to view the decorations. Word spread across town. People in cars drove by to see Guyton's art. Panicked by so much public scrutiny, the drug dealers moved their business elsewhere.<sup>40</sup>

In the early 1970s, when the energy crisis made big gas-guzzling automobiles seem outdated, Black sculptor Jim Gary in Farmingdale, New Jersey, transformed the skeletons of abandoned cars into statuesque dinosaurs, some of which were 60 feet long and 20 feet high. Gary would use of hundreds of parts from as many as ten vehicles in a single work. He turned brake "shoes" into dinosaur feet and transformed oil pans into dinosaur jaws. Generator fans served as lash-ringed eyes, and leaf springs functioned as rib cages in his

creations. In Gary's opinion, old Chryslers made the best dinosaurs. When transporting his work to galleries and collectors, Gary placed them on a huge flatbed trailer which he created out of salvaged automobile parts. As he traveled he provoked impromptu parades on the highway as drivers followed him for miles to take in the spectacle he had created.<sup>41</sup>

In many Black communities, the ability to travel to far-off places gave merchant seamen and railroad workers (especially Pullman porters) special prestige. As a youth in Birmingham in the 1920s, Lionel Hampton remembers groups of Blacks sitting by the railroad tracks on summer afternoons to watch the trains go by. Hundreds of people went to the railroad station every evening at six o'clock to watch "The Special" depart for Atlanta. As the train pulled away slowly from the depot, workers put on a show for the crowd assembled outside. Dining car waiters unfurled big white table cloths and draped them over tables. They tossed vases with roses in them to one another for placement on ledges and tables, moving quickly and artfully to put plates and utensils in their proper places. Pullman porters waved sheets and blankets as they made up berths for the night. Firemen shoveled coal furiously, and their helpers tossed stray lumps of coal to the crowd to use for heating their homes. When the train pulled away from the station, spectators cheered and applauded as porters and waiters looked out the windows and waved. The Black fireman rang the bell, and the white engineer blew the train whistle long and loud.<sup>42</sup>

Movement also provided the guiding aesthetic for Dr. Billy Taylor in Harlem in 1964. A pianist, composer of the song "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free," and host of jazz radio and television programs in New York City, Taylor turned the streets of Harlem into a performance space by placing jazz ensembles on flatbed trucks. These "jazzmobiles" cruised through neighborhoods as Taylor invited pedestrians to dance.<sup>43</sup> Mobility also guided the work of preachers who fashioned ways of making their ministries mobile by marching through the streets with their parishioners to bodies of water where they could conduct outdoor baptism ceremonies, staging revivals in tents, and broadcasting services on the radio. Reverend C. L. Franklin moved his ministry from Buffalo to Detroit in 1946 precisely because "I wanted to be in a city where there were crossroads of transportation. Trains, buses, planes, where people are coming and going, conventions of all kinds, and migrations."<sup>44</sup> The New Bethel Baptist Church invited him to be their pastor in 1945, but when Franklin arrived he discovered that the congregation met in a converted bowling alley that needed extensive repairs. He set out to construct a new sanctuary on Detroit's main Black boulevard, Hastings Street, but conducted services outdoors on sunny days and in a housing project community center when it rained. Broadcasting services on the radio helped Franklin build

a following. A local record store owner taped the preacher's sermons and played them on loudspeakers outside his Hastings Street store near Franklin's church. The sermons almost always attracted crowds, which alerted record distributors and radio stations to Franklin's potential commercial viability. He became a national celebrity in Black communities through some seventy recorded sermons that sold well. Yet even fame and fortune were not sufficient in the face of the power of racialized space. A federally funded urban renewal program demolished Franklin's Hastings Street church and much of the neighborhood surrounding it.<sup>45</sup>

The strong desire to move freely across space formed an important part of the Black spatial imaginary, but it has rarely been easy to translate hopes of moving freely into the ability actually to do so for African Americans. All forms of transportation have entailed vexed confrontations with the dynamics of racialized space. Railroad trains, streetcars, and buses became special sites of contestation during the civil rights movement. It is not mere coincidence that *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the key Supreme Court case legitimizing segregation, concerned seating arrangements on passenger trains, or that it was the bus boycott in Montgomery that launched the career of Dr. King and the modern freedom movement, or that freedom riders in the 1960s tested the limits of Jim Crow by seeking service at segregated bus station lunch counters. Transit systems became more important to Blacks than they were to whites because of the dynamics of racialized space. In the mid-twentieth century, federally funded highway construction destroyed Black neighborhoods in city after city while subsidies for the automobile-oriented suburb further secured the spatial privileges of whiteness. Dr. King identified transit racism as an important element in skewing opportunities and life chances along racial lines in a 1968 essay. "Urban transit systems in most American cities . . ." King wrote, "have become a genuine civil rights issue—and a valid one—because the layout of rapid-transit systems determines the accessibility of jobs to the black community."<sup>46</sup>

These problems persist today. Contemporary antiracist activists in Atlanta, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York view "transit racism" as a major factor skewing opportunities and life chances along racial lines. Public transportation vehicles are not more segregated than neighborhoods, jobs, or schools, but in a society where race is coterminous with space, transit vehicles are sites where segregated worlds collide.<sup>47</sup> Transit racism channels subsidies to mostly white suburban commuters while making commuting difficult for people of color. Blacks and Latinos make up 62 percent of urban bus riders and 35 percent of subway riders. They are twice as likely as whites to get to work by riding public transit, walking, or biking. Overfunding of highways and underfunding of nonautomotive means of transportation result in public

transit commutes taking twice as long as travel by car.<sup>48</sup> Inadequate public transportation, residential segregation, and automobile-centered development also endanger Black lives. When the construction of the I-10 Freeway subsidized white migration to suburban St. Tammany Parish outside New Orleans, housing opportunities opened for Blacks in New Orleans East. But they found themselves living without cars and without public transit in an automobile-centered locale. Fatal accidents took the lives of several pedestrians trying to cross the I-10 service road to reach shopping centers.<sup>49</sup>

The American Broadcasting Corporation's program *Nightline* examined a similar situation in the 1999 episode "The Color Line and the Bus Line." It detailed the death of Cynthia Wiggins, a seventeen-year-old African American single mother in Buffalo, New York, run over by a ten-ton dump truck on her way to work as she attempted to cross a crowded seven-lane highway to get to her job at a fast-food counter in the Walden Galleria shopping mall. Her death was an accident, yet she would not have been on the spot where she died had it not been for transit racism. City officials, bus company managers, and shopping mall owners conspired to make sure that buses traveling from Black neighborhoods could not stop at the mall in the nearly all-white suburb of Cheektowaga in an effort to cater to the fears and prejudices of suburban whites by keeping down Black patronage of the mall's establishments. Wiggins had to take the bus because there were no jobs available in her neighborhood and she did not own a car. The spatial mismatch between jobs and employment confronting her reveals a local manifestation of a national problem. Close to 50 percent of low-skill jobs are unavailable to Blacks because the jobs are located in white suburbs inaccessible by public transportation.<sup>50</sup> Residential segregation leaves Blacks more physically isolated from available jobs than any other racial group.<sup>51</sup>

Engaged to be married and hoping one day to study to become a doctor, the ambitious Wiggins rode the Number 6 bus for fifty minutes each day to her job as a cashier at Arthur Treacher's Fish and Chips restaurant. "Welfare reform" policies passed by a Republican Congress and signed into law by a Democratic president required her to hold down a job in order to receive benefits necessary for the survival of her child. With no employment available in her decapitalized neighborhood, Wiggins travelled to the suburbs to work. Although charter buses routinely transported passengers to the mall, city buses were not allowed on the property. Wiggins had disembarked at a bus stop three hundred yards from the mall and had to cross seven lanes of traffic on Walden Avenue, a highway with no sidewalk. She had almost completed her journey across the street on December 14, 1995, on a snowy Buffalo winter day, when the traffic light changed and the truck driver (who probably did not see her) started his vehicle.<sup>52</sup> Had Wiggins been less deter-

mined to work to support herself and her child, she might not have been killed. Yet her death was not entirely an accident. Nationwide, Blacks have a higher likelihood than whites of dying in pedestrian-vehicle accidents, in part because they walk more and drive less, but also because transit racism places them in situations of jeopardy.<sup>53</sup>

Yet compared to other potential sites for fights about segregation, public transportation has offered Blacks some tactical advantages. Because a transit system takes people to work, white employers have a direct interest in its smooth and timely operation. Disruptions in service affect everyone, not just Blacks. The Montgomery bus boycott divided whites because resolute defenders of segregation of the buses had to confront the displeasure of wealthy whites who expected their maids and cooks to arrive to work on time. Fare-paying Black passengers might be able to make demands on a transit line as customers that they could not make to their own employers as workers. Yet for those very reasons, public transit sites often have enormous tactical and symbolic meanings for defenders of white space, as the trajectory from *Plessy v. Ferguson* to *Milliken v. Bradley* indicates. In his important research on infrapolitics and the Black working class, Robin Kelley demonstrates how Blacks in Birmingham during the 1940s waged constant struggles over racialized space on city buses. They battled with bus drivers who short-changed them or who attacked them for allegedly not following instructions, who sometimes made them pay fares in the front of the bus then directed them to enter by the side and drove off without letting them board. The main goal of these Blacks was not to sit next to whites, but rather to be treated with respect and dignity, to receive the services for which they paid, and to get to their destinations on time. In St. Louis, Black passengers even resisted desegregation of the buses in the 1960s when the newly constituted Bi-State Transit Agency reneged on promises to hire Black drivers and insisted on the termination of service by the private Service Car company that had previously provided inexpensive and efficient jitney service in Black neighborhoods.<sup>54</sup> Vehicles moving across spaces came to mean something different to Blacks than they did to whites. Living in segregated neighborhoods posed enormous problems, but traversing their boundaries also brought new challenges every day.

Making unexpected use of public spaces has been a persistent theme for Black visual artists including Juan Logan and Betye Saar (see Chapter 7). David Hammons creates installations out of perishable materials like human hair, grease, powder, and snowballs to make his work unavailable for permanent exhibition in galleries or museums. He forages on the streets for materials and exhibits much of his work outdoors. Hammons solicits feedback about his installations from homeless men and women rather than from patrons

of museums and galleries, whom he describes as the “worst audience in the world” because he views them as people “out to criticize not to understand” and as a group that “never has any fun.”<sup>55</sup> Hammons adorns trees on inner-city streets with empty bottles that were once filled with alcohol consumed by homeless people, asserting, “Black lips have touched each of these bottles.”<sup>56</sup> One time Hammons dragged a cotton bale through the streets of Harlem to evoke the history of migration from the plantation to the ghetto and to signify on the title of one of Chester Himes’s books, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*. The provocation caused Black people to tell Hammons stories about memories of picking cotton but also to urge him to drag the bale away. One person told him, “I don’t ever want to see that stuff again.”<sup>57</sup>

The Black spatial imaginary that emerges from complex couplings of race and space promotes solidarities within, between, and across spaces. Like the white spatial imaginary, it is not reducible to embodied identity. Some antiracist whites have played important roles in advancing the Black spatial imaginary. Some Blacks have opposed it bitterly. Every Black person, however, suffers in some way from the neighborhood race effects associated with Black residential and commercial districts. Yet while it has been created by terrible and inexcusable injustices, the Black spatial imaginary has vitally important creative and constructive things to offer to this society and to its potential for democracy. The Black spatial imaginary views place as valuable and finite, as a public responsibility for which all must take stewardship. Privileging the public good over private interests, this spatial imaginary understands the costs of environmental protection, efficient transportation, affordable housing, public education, and universal medical care as common responsibilities to be shared, rather than as onerous burdens to be palmed off onto the least able and most vulnerable among us.

For most of the past half century, suburban property owners have mobilized politically to cut property taxes, resist school desegregation, and fight equal spending on education across district lines. In response, Black residents of the differentiated spaces of cities and inner-ring suburbs have emerged as the most fervent advocates for fair and affordable housing, for measures to combat childhood lead poisoning and other public health menaces, for the creation and maintenance of efficient and safe transportation systems, and for equitable educational opportunities. Journalists, politicians, scholars, and land-use professionals have long been cognizant that these views represent the experiences and opinions of different *races*, but they have been less discerning about the degree to which these differences in views stem from the experiences and opinions generated by life in different *places*.

Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate links between social structure and culture in the white spatial imaginary. Chapter 3 examines the spatial and racial logic

behind city and state subsidies for a sports stadium in St. Louis, while Chapter 4 explores the limits of the liberalism enunciated in the HBO cable television production *The Wire*. Both projects reveal the workings of the white spatial imaginary and the need for a counter to it, which I will present in Chapters 5 through 10.