413 in the house: An exploration of a black sense of place and black placemaking in Springfield, Ma

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Abstract

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Black matters are indeed spatial matters (McKittrick 2006 xii), and diverse spaces are not a stand in for racially inclusive spaces. Through a Black geographic and Black feminist exploration of my hometown of Springfield, Massachusetts, my Masters thesis provides a discursive map detailing how Black social realities are bound up in the (re)production of the city's landscape through the lens of Black embodied knowledge holders. In total, I executed 15 semi-structured interviews via Zoom, received 1 written response from Historian Joseph Carvalho III, and conducted an inter-textual analysis of documents relating to Springfield's Black history, to understand the nuances of Black socio-spatial experiences from those most impacted by the nexus of race, class, and place. In centering individual and collective Black identity formation, I illuminate the complexities surrounding the way people of color materially and discursively negotiate a white gaze in the mid-sized, old industrial New England city of Springfield — a white gaze that is underpinned by dominative, anti-black discourses, and systemically racist structures — while also asserting life-affirming facets of their personhood. Ultimately, tracing the temporal lineages of Black struggles in Springfield provides a comprehensive case study that supports the usefulness of "a black sense of place" (McKittrick 2011), "quiet" (Quashie 2012), and "black placemaking" (Hunter et al.

2016) as guiding analytical lenses for other scholars with humanist visions who are looking to make space for facets of knowledge production that are silenced by traditional political economy discourses. As a case in point: my Masters thesis focuses on exploring the relationship between Black interiority and public expressions of resistance for more nuanced understandings of Black culture.

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Acknowledgements

While wrestling with how to write a story focused on humanizing depictions of Black life, I stumbled into finding my voice, and learned that I am not alone in my fight for Black liberation. My thesis is a product of intellectual and community engagement, shared knowledge, and a collective storytelling of Black people as empowered, method-making, informed agents of their community. I hope that my passion for this subject matter (on a black sense of place), love for humanity, and absolute awe of black livingness, brilliance, resilience, and resistance come across in this thesis.

I have truly been blessed to have so much support along the way and there is not enough space here to acknowledge all those who have been instrumental to my journey. A huge thank you to everyone who took part in my research; I could not have told this story without your input, and it has been a privilege to share virtual space and think alongside you all. For this reason, I frequently reference interviewees as "contributors" or "collaborators," alongside the more traditional terms "participants" and "informants," to emphasize their intellectual involvement in knowledge production and my commitment to the collective study of black knowledge.

Thank you to my committee members Mark Ellis and Victoria Lawson, and the departmental support at large, for supporting my insistence to create a transformative work of Black geographic scholarship that dedicated to my community first and foremost, before the academy. Thank you to my pre-reader, my friend and colleague Aliyah Turner, and my copy editor fiancé Christoff Luehrs, for helping me to get to the finish line.

Thank you to my sisters and mother for holding me down from across the country. This piece is dedicated to my nieces Jordan and Gizelle, Auntie loves you two forever and always.

Introduction

In humanity, quiet is our dignity.

— Kevin Quashie "Publicness, Silence, and the Sovereignty of the Interior," *The Sovereignty of Quiet*

"A black sense of place is a methodology and an analytical frame that believes in and believes black humanity."

— Katherine McKittrick "Failure: My Head Was Full of Misty Fumes of Doubt," *Dear Science and Other Stories*

—

Seek what others my status quo (a poem by Danielle Brown)

Step into the bright darkness and say
Hello to your fears, for there is no need

to be scared once you become comfortable with
caveating all of your knowings with unknowings

and vice
versas, and vice versas.

Over the past two years I have learned that as a Black woman I have many voices, all of which cry out in the name of Black liberation and for the end to widespread suffering. Beginning graduate school in Autumn 2019, the majority of my studies have taken place during a time of racial and capitalist reckoning across the globe. At times I have found myself in a state of paralysis and mourning, deeply worrying about the disproportionate, long-term impacts of the duel pandemic, encompassing COVID-19 virus and state-sanctioned violence, on the Black community' collective well-being: mentally, physically, emotionally, economically, and psychologically. When is enough, enough?

In order to write a thesis focused on black livingness and not black trauma I had to first privilege my own healing. Interestingly, while my theoretical headspace was burdened, sullen, removed from this world for a moment, my soul was on fire, stirring up ways to get involved in

the movement for Black Lives through poetic protest. Poetry, painting, and photography were my vehicle for my soul to express not only my pain and worry from witnessing Black death on replay, but also the linchpin of my hope, joy, and resistance. In my Black poetics I found my voice, which allowed me to publicly embrace the complexity of my identity in a way that I could have never imagined. I got involved in efforts to decriminalize University of Washington's police force, as well as began to speak publicly about my own mental health as a Black graduate student navigating the predominantly white world of both higher education and Seattle, Washington.

However, as time went on and the widespread death resulting from racialized police violence and coronavirus continued alongside a slow return to a "pre-pandemic" society, I realized resistance wasn't all that I needed. What my body and soul needed was to take a step away from being a strong Black woman, and instead choose to rest, and wander, and stumble in order to dream and re-align with the whole of my humanity.[1] I would actually more sternly argue that my own "self-actualization" was necessary for me to "remain connected to a larger world of collective struggle" (hooks 2015, xii).

At times exploring the depths of my sense of self has been a whirlwind, such as battling the ocean's waves while surfing, getting engaged unexpectedly, and beginning therapy, all during a two-week timespan. Embarking on three vastly different life adventures around the same time allowed me to understand in real-time the essence of Kevin Quashie's concept of "quiet," arguing that to fully challenge dominant conceptualizations of blackness we must

[1] I find it interesting that my first dive into academic research targets questions of selfhood head on. Much of my poetry and prose written in middle and high school centered on similar questions of self, muddling through the tension between public representation and expression in relation to status quo logic systems and binaries.

expand notions of Black humanity "beyond the boundaries of public expressiveness" to include a greater focus on the interior (2012, 24). Strikingly, Quashie asserts in *The Sovereignty of Quiet*:

> Quiet is antithetical to how we think about black culture, and by extension, black people. So much of the discourse of racial blackness imagines black people as subjects with identities formed and articulated and resisted in public. Such blackness is dramatic, symbolic, never for its own vagary, always representative and engaged with how it is imagined publicly. These characterizations are the legacy of racism and they become the common way we understand and represent blackness; literally they become a lingua franca.

Quashie argues that the public sphere's role in "making, marking and policing racial difference," results in black culture being unconsciously "overidentified with an idea of expressiveness that is geared toward a social audience" and engages external forms of resistance primarily towards political ends (2012, 11). However, insisting in the Black feminist "principle that the personal is political," (Combahee River Collective 1977, 20) Quashie's shift towards black interiority with the metaphor "quiet" pushes us to deepen our collective understanding of "the interior" "as the source of human action — that anything we do is shaped by the range of desires and capacities of our inner life" (Quashie 2012, 8). As my research on Black residents' belonging in Springfield, Massachusetts, demonstrates, studying contemporary racialized landscapes and social justice movements from a lens that honors black interior and exterior forms of expressions as intrinsically linked provides for a more complex understanding surrounding the role of liberal governance in the modern day struggle for Black personhood. For instance, from this perspective, public assertions that Black Lives Matter can encompass political strategies targeting systemically racist structures, while also being underpinned by a collective cry for Black humanity motivated by individual negations with anti-black racism.

I employ an analytical framework that accentuates Kevin Quashie's concepts of quiet and interiority as a way of studying black cultural identity (2012, 8) alongside Black geographic and Black feminist thought to take up McKittrick's query: "what happens to our questions if we

insist our methodologies are, in themselves, forms of black well-being?" (McKittrick 2021, 117). Focusing on black well-being means seriously embracing black ways of knowing to fully understand the role of racialization in the production of black psychological and material worlds. Foregrounding life in Springfield in my investigation into a black sense of place and black placemaking, and adhering to my "commit[ment] to possibility analytically" (McKittrick 2021), I question:

1. *How does a desire based analysis of Black urban communities unveil nuanced renderings of Black humanity?*
2. *How does a Black Geographies framework center the standpoints of Black embodied knowledge holders to deepen disciplinary understandings of a black sense of place and black placemaking?*

The duality and fluidity embedded in these questions demonstrates the briefness afforded to Black subjects to just be human beings in an anti-black world, and epitomizes the usefulness of the concept "quiet" as an analytical framework to empirically examine the interior facets of black knowledge production taking place in my project emerging from a black sense of place. As McKittrick asserts, an engagement with a black sense of place "opens up a methodological opportunity" to explore worldviews outside of hegemonic knowledge systems and unmeasurable on "colonial terms" (McKittrick 2021, 117). Thus, two additional, analytically targeted guiding questions, focused on how to study nuanced renditions of Black livingness are:

3. *How do the concepts "quiet" and "a black sense of place" help us understand black subjectivity beyond a state of resistance to simply being in a white supremacist society that is structured for Black peoples collective demise?*

4. *How does a Black feminist project focused on collective Black spatial politics pay tribute to the facets of black humanity that lie within and beyond the traditional black cultural focus of resistance?*

What I found throughout my time speaking with fifteen individuals living in Springfield, Massachusetts, thirteen self-identifying as Black, were radical stories boldly and proudly embodying black resistance, resilience, self-reliance, and self-determination, layered with sneak peeks into the depths of interior feelings, hopes, intentions, dreams, hesitancies, and tangents down memories lane. I understand that much of my thesis' focus remains on documenting public acts of black resistance undertaken by my participants, or otherwise detail other facets of their black subjectivity in relation to the white world. However, my intentional focus on "the interior aliveness" of both the participants and myself whenever possible is to represent a fuller picture of "the reservoir of human complexity that is deep inside" Black people as human beings (Quashie 2012, 26).

Regarding my participants, this is primarily accomplished through my extensive and exhaustive use of quoting in Chapters 2 and 3, which "let[s] their experiences of racism and resistance be told in their own voices;" stories layered with emotional depth, psychological perception, and active intention (Brekke, Joseph & Aaftaab 2021, 47). My own interior exploration largely appears through my creative boundary crossing, using poetry as an "undisciplined" intellectual, political, and culturally expressive medium to translate the very real, human side of my research journey (McKittrick 2016). Focusing on my and the participant's nostalgic wanderings and guttural reactions in my storytelling analytically center the idea that "anything we do is shaped by the range of desires and capacities of our inner life" (Quashie 2012, 8).

Chapter breakdown

While my inquiry is not a definitive account of Black social realities operating in Springfield, Massachusetts, I employ a two scale approach that draws on storytelling to hear the "community speaking in its own voice" when exploring Black meaning-making's role in the (re)production of the racialized landscape in the city (Lipsitz 2014, 233). Doing so amplifies the voices of the 15 residents I interviewed, as well as addresses key areas of concern to the Black and working class communities' collective socio-economic betterment that emerged from these discussions: 1) to connect racially and socially positioned realities, grievances, and community based-solutions, to the inequitable access to resources and public spaces (i.e. lack of job opportunities, and 2) to illuminate the individual and collective senses of place, refusals to status quo paradigms, and rootedness to Springfield as their home.

While the introduction and Chapter 1 are primarily focused on connecting my analytical lens of black livingness to my theoretical and methodological frameworks, Chapters 2 and 3 delve deeper into my thesis' empirical interrogations of black spatial experiences in Springfield based upon semi-structured interviews and textual analysis. The conclusion wraps up speaking to what can be gained from my research on Black Springfield.

The introduction details the specifics of my thesis' grounding framework. First, I touch upon my ontological and epistemological stance as a scholar, which aligns with feminists' belief in socially constructed realities and knowledge. In this discussion, I speak to the insertion of positionality and reflexivity as a technique of critical inquiry into Black Springfield. I then engage "Footnotes," Chapter 2 of McKittrick's recent book *Dear Science* (2021) to break down my thesis' citational engagement with others evoking a black emancipatory praxis. I end by pointing to the key theoretical contributions emerging from my case study.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of my thesis' theoretical framework and describes my methodology. I begin by providing a brief literature review of three grounding frameworks for my research on Black Springfield: Black Geographies, a black sense of place and black placemaking. Then, I break down my research methods by detailing the two primary modes of observation used to conduct my research: inter-textual content analysis of documents on Black Springfield and semi-structured interviews with 14 individuals (including 1 written inquiry). I end speaking to my decision to center Black embodied knowledge when deciding on who to interview.

Chapter 2 traces the significance of place. The goal of my historical chapter is to understand if the current residents' black sense of place, where they know from, is informed at all by the local Black history. Additionally, are the associated landmarks perceived as active, Black placemaking projects? In other words, Chapter 2 investigates how contributors understand the racial remnants of local and familial histories impact on their own modern day experiences in Springfield. The interviews, coupled with the inter-textual analysis of a written statement from Historian Joseph Carvallo III and archival databases created by local organizations (e.g. non-profit, college and universities, museums), illuminate the hidden depths of black history-making in this place and subsequent effects of circulating anti-black discourses on black self-worth and agency. In turn, my research argues that longstanding diverse spaces in the northeast — as sites of memory and resistance — demonstrate how being separated from one's history is an integral part of contemporary denial of Black personhood.

Chapter 3 engages in a contemporary analysis of a black sense of place and black placemaking focused chiefly on two questions asked to interviewees: first, what is your experience of living in Springfield?, and second, what does Black Springfield mean to you?

Concentrating on Black socio-spatial negotiations in seldom studied racialized landscapes sheds light on the daily political work wielded by people of color to navigate the criminal, token, and strong Black woman scripts, across regions for those holding black subjectivities. Importantly, I quickly move on from participant interactions with, and navigations of, controlling images and transparent space, to detail how they enact their individual agency and collective organizing as ways of pushing back against societal definitions and inequitable bureaucratic policies attempting to limit them.

Throughout the entirety of my empirical analysis of Black Springfield, I consider the underlying racial dynamics and power dimensions behind individual resistance practices, senses of place, and collective community oriented solutions. I argue that these assertions are political, aesthetically black, self-reliant forms of refusal to existing white paradigms. Thus, a central claim of my thesis as a whole is that multifaceted configurations of Black livingness emerge when studying Black life and placemaking projects through conceptual lenses that vantage Black situated knowledges and modes of thought.

I conclude with empirical lessons beyond the Springfield case study, namely for other black communities located in smaller cities in New England, as well as summarize further avenues of exploration to come out of MA thesis. Additionally, the primary analytical and methodological takeaway from my thesis centers on the importance of a researcher's analytic and methodology. Importantly, my place-based intervention in my hometown and in-depth engagement with black epistemology demonstrates how humane, nuanced analyses start with the types of questions you ask and are bolstered when there is a level of trust between the participant's and the researcher.

Why Springfield, Ma?: My journey to embracing "mesearch"

Destined Destruction (a poem by Danielle Brown)

Refusing to be just another opportune Black Unicorn
My position and commitments stand firm
Choosing to enact a desire-centered approach
Welcoming and centering those from the margin whose entire existence has been continually, institutionally shunned
Partially, Situated, Knowledges and Perspectives
I see you, I hear you, and please know that you are valued and loved

I don't want to be in an Ivory Tower.
And I don't want to be in an Ebony Tower.
I want to burn the tower down entirely,
hoping the smoke signals the dawn of a new day.

Giving physical and metaphysical space for the production of knowledge to exist everywhere...,

and nowhere....

In a single act of destruction destiny will finally run its course
and while I may be signing away a piece of my soul,
making a deal with the devil,
giving away my token Black Pass to exist in this White dominated academic world;

I also know dismantling scholarly gatekeeping fundamentally sets free many passed away souls, that have long been misrepresented and ostracized as aberrant by this institution;

Creating the necessary space for what is, or who is, a knowledge producer,

To be intrinsically tied to what it means to be…

To hold space and exist in the world
... It is as simple as that

—

Calling Springfield, Massachusetts my home, my own experiences growing up in this space are intrinsically embedded in my process of writing this story. My positionality as an emerging critical race, social science scholar, Black Springfieldian, and believer in possibility are forever linked. Rather than attempting to deny this fact, I have chosen to embrace it as my greatest advantage. My work takes up McKittrick's call to "get in touch with the materiality of

our analytical worlds" through an empirical investigation that "pos[es] new and different academic questions that emerge from a black sense of place (where we know from)" (2021, 11,117). I question how my vantage point (and institutional privilege) provide an opportunity for inquiry into Springfield as an understudied space of Black abundance, self-determination, and sites of memory. In other words, what can be learned about Black life, space, politics, and vulnerabilities from an analytical and methodological engagement that centers Black embodied knowledge holders from the space of inquiry, from researcher to participant?

By disrupting white supremacist understandings of how power operates and revealing otherwise hidden ways of knowing, feminist theory promotes a praxis of knowledge production that "address[es] political questions about who is represented within its walls, both as scholars and as subjects of scholarship" (McDowell, 1999: 92). For this reason, a central part of my work on Black Springfield is to continually reflect on the partiality of my knowledge when speaking to my positionality and reflexivity as a researcher, knowing that we all "view the world from different embodied locations" and that my own journey is not only the inspiration of the piece (England, 2015: 364), but also the very reason I even knew the significance of this space in the first place (Collins 1986, 122).

Following a Black Feminist praxis

> We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meaning and bodies that have a chance for life.
>
> - Haraway 1988, 580

Softness is available to us
Care is available to us
Rest is available to us
Intimacy is available to us
Community is available to us
Sleep is available to us

> Justice is available to us
> Pleasure is available to us
>
> — The Nap Ministry, @thenapministry on Instagram

As a Black feminist geographer my work aligns with feminist scholars' rejection of "positivism as an aspect of patriarchal thinking that separates the scientist from the phenomenon under study" (Reinharz & Davidman 1992, 46). Stemming from cis, white, masculinist thought, positivist epistemology centers on objective rationality, a single reality or truth, and promotes the notion that researchers must remain unbiased throughout the research process (England 2015, 362–63). However, as a Black woman from a middle-class background who grew up in a neighborhood likened to the "hood," who has now found herself in the predominantly white world of academia, I know for a fact that this is not the case. If anything, I would argue that my blackness has never been more ever-present since coming to this space, largely due to the academic practice of treating knowledge gained from, or centering on, perspectives such as my own as niche and on the margins (hooks 1990). Quite frankly, theory intimidated me. Luckily, many of these doubts began to slip away as I soon found an intellectual home reading the many Black feminist, critical race, and decolonial theorists who continue to refuse assimilation into dominant modes of thought. While critical theorists interrogating hegemonic systems of oppression, such as manifestations of White Supremacy (e.g. anti-Black racism, racial capitalism, settler colonialism) and the heteronormative patriarchy, remain niche in many ways, my immersion into their works helps me to see that their marginalization does not refute their necessity in both academic and public discourse. Rather, it demonstrates their profound importance.

I ontologically believe in the social construction of individual realities, as well as socially constructed realities and knowledge that are constantly under the influence of societal power

relations. For me it is only natural to orient my epistemological and methodological approach to research, which favors learning through dialogue, with feminist theorists who challenge Western Enlightenment knowledge systems (England 2015) by "call[ing] into question scientific neutrality and other masculinist and colonial knowledge systems" (McKittrick 2021, 130) through the inclusion of gendered voices. For instance, Donna Haraway emphasizes vision and the white, male gaze, contending that traditional objectivity upholds an absolute, impartial, disembodied point of view that is held by the majority group in society (1988). This "god trick" acts as a neutralizing process and renders their bodies unmarked, which further maintains their perspectives as the normative basis for collective knowledge in society (Haraway 1988). In turn, Haraway puts forth an embodied feminist objectivity that is labeled situated knowledges and partial perspectives, which denounces the idea that there is one truth, and instead declares "that knowledges are situational, marked by the contexts in which they are produced, by their specificity, limited location and partiality" (England 2015, 363). For Haraway, the aim of "unmask[ing] the doctrines of objectivity" and focusing on "those ruled by partial sight and limited voice" is to illuminate the possibilities of "unexpected openings," which leaves space for broader community visions outside of the hegemony (Haraway 1988, 578, 590).

Distinct from Harraway's partial perspectives top-down analysis, Sandra Harding's standpoint theory conducts a bottom-up analysis with a different political project in sight aimed at connecting material socio-spatial experiences to broader dominative forces in society. Importantly, feminist standpoint theory's individual inquiry into situated knowledges is a jumping off point to understanding obscured social relations and discovering group consciousness (Harding 1993). For instance, feminist standpoint theory questions how social conditions produce different kinds of knowledge by placing similarly socially positioned subjects

(and their socio-spatial experiences), in relation, to map existing practices of power (Harding 1993).

Many Black feminist geographers like myself coming from the long tradition of Black feminist thinkers located in both academic and public realms, and who are conducting rigorous analysis of the "white-masculinist cartographic gaze" (Hawthorne & Meche 2016) look to Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought*. Collins' renditions of standpoint theory also privilege partial perspectives and situated, subjugated knowledges in her centering of African American women's experiences (Collins 1990, 234–5). Collins' critical, intersectional examination of the "matrix of oppression" details how Black women — as uniquely socially positioned subjects, along race, gender, and class lines — are inaccurately marked as deviant in dominant discourses, leading to real material consequences (e.g., Collins 1990, 1996, 1998). However, she argues that taking African American women's perspectives seriously illuminates a multitude of standpoints and lived realities that complicate mainstream narratives of oppression, privilege, power, and race in their pursuit of liberation. A vast number of Black studies scholars across disciplines have taken up the call to complicate what we understand about blackness, many of whose studies analytically center the perceptions of Black women to explore the power of who controls the narrative in debunking anti-Black discourses and stereotypes about both people and place (Cahill 2007; Thorpe 1996; Stallings 2015).

Ultimately, feminist challenges to hegemony were instrumental in carving a space for other epistemological and ontological projects vantaging "othered subjectivities" outside of white, masculinist thought; collectively destabilizing biological determinist notions operating in the academy that certain types of bodies, be it gendered, raced, or the multitude of other analytic categories ascribed to humans, "can elicit transparent data" (McKittrick 2021, 130). In

subsequent chapters, I continue my discussion on the ways in which my research has bumped up against white conscripting knowledge systems, "refus[ing] the positivist contours of human geography" to instead reveal "alternative spaces for political struggle" (McKittrick 2021, 182). Namely, my thesis seeks to provide empirical evidence for the usefulness "a black sense of place, where we know from" (McKittrick 2021, 117) and "quiet" (Quashie 2012) as conceptual disruptions to dominant, degradative, narratives surrounding Black/non-white people and spaces. In my work I intrinsically treat the situated knowledge rendered as "significant political acts and expressions," (McKittrick & Woods 2007, 4), also including an expanded notion of what is political to include an interior dimension by using Quashie's conceptual framework "quiet". In doing so, I illuminate a spectrum of Black socio-spatial experiences operating in Springfield that both informs current Black geographic conversations on resistance, as well as expands notions of black humanity to encapsulate an interior, wandering existence.

Methodological framework: the politics around my Black citational practice

How to do Academia Ethically? (a poem by Danielle Brown)

Thinking with/as **blackness** as a cite/site of **liberation**
with my radical peeps through
transformative interdisciplinary conversations
sets my mind free to imagine what can be
outside of hegemonic knowledge systems
and makes my heart sore to the tippity top
of the bare leaved trees in mid-February

As flurries of snow incircle me and set me aflame
because coolness is heat
and heat is passion flowing through constricted veins
like my pen against the paper or my cursor against the screen

...At times I feel unsure of how to breathe Black livingness into my thesis
…...My soul undergoing a temporary paralysis as I struggle with how not to reify erasures or binaries
……...Questioning if refusal is the key to meeting the liberatory ends of my political citational practice

And then reflexively I remember as a Black woman who is also matter-of-factly
a
living
being
That my first step must be to walk _my_talk
And that means to take care of my flesh, which
right NOW requires me to step away and simply focus on *breathing*

—

I quickly realized upon entering graduate school that my goal to interrogate blackness in Springfield from a humanizing vantage point with a focus towards Black liberation, as opposed to endlessly documenting experiences of Black trauma, is not without its hurdles. It is common practice to analyze manifestations of blackness, be it Black people or perceived Black spaces, as evidence of deprivation, sites of dispossession, the epitome of violence (Hunter et al. 2016). Admittedly my first encounter in graduate school with questionable citation practices, which I viewed as erasing Black intellectual thought and embodied ways of knowing, left me stumped and stumbling for any semblance of assurance that my time in higher education would not be consumed by oppositional analyses laced in Black trauma. I struggled to understand how to uplift under acknowledged modes of thought by centering marginalized voices, while also not reifying the very same erasures I myself am critiquing.

My encounter with George Galster

In my first quarter of graduate school I came across the scholar Shelby Hayden's (2017) concept of "the geography of crime and comfort," which argues that residents can still feel positive place attachments in neighborhoods where they also face contentious life circumstances. At this point in time I thought my thesis would examine the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) policies operating in Springfield and the Buy Springfield Now Initiative out of Mayor Sarno's office (BuySpringfieldNow.com) from the lens of neighborhood

effects literature's discussion on a given community's effect on long term opportunity. Hayden notes that HUD initiatives geared towards racial segregation and high-poverty neighborhoods tend to be substantiated by quantitative methods (e.g., social indicator mapping, regression at the census-tract level, and social network analysis), which lead to an inaccurate portrayal of these spaces as undesirable and a predominate focus on people-based dispersal and mobility policies over place-based policies. (Hayden, 2017:550). Through an ethnographic analysis of a low-income neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio she calls for more stability, place-based policies, arguing that place mattered heavily despite living in an impoverished community and the residents' general perceptions were contrary to general public portrayals (Hayden, 2017:563). Hayden's work is important because she illustrates how the over-saturation of quantitative research fails to fully account for those living in less well-off economic areas who still have strong place ties and do not see these spaces as valueless.

I was uncertain of how I would insert myself into this very dense area of literature (at the time) until I read a jarring statement by George Galster, renowned scholar in the neighborhood effects literature. Namely, Galster released a 2019 comprehensive book on the field, putting forth what he calls a middle-ground policy solution to U.S. neighborhood outcome inequity that both people-based and place-based advocates can equally support. The policy he proposes is a "'circumscribed, neighborhood-supportive' suite of policies in three neighborhood domains: physical quality, economic diversity, and racial diversity" (Galster, 2019: 299). Through a strategic implementation of mobility policy initiatives in specific "low-quality" areas based on these three neighborhood domains, Galster argues that there will be a shift in the negative behavior of private market actors. The result will be a decrease in destructive gaming behaviors from residents, increasing the likelihood of investment from investors, and ultimately "defusing

self-fulfilling prophecies" (Galster, 2019: 300). As a result, these policies will reduce involuntary residential mobility, improve conditions in low-quality neighborhoods, while also maintaining decent quality neighborhoods (Galster, 2019: 299).

Evidently, when responding to empirical ethnographic findings by researchers, like Shelby (2017), George Galster entirely dismisses them all. Encompassed in a single sentence near the end the book, Galster responds to researchers who found that people did feel positive feelings towards their "deprived", "deplorable" neighborhoods, such as: place attachment, strong family/friend ties, comfort, a sense of community, racial homophily, or generally any degree of residential satisfaction. He asserts the following:

> I do not doubt that some, perhaps even many, low-income residents of concentrated poverty neighborhoods evince many of the aforementioned attributes. To admit this does not, however, challenge the desirability and likely efficacy of reforms along the lines suggested above, for two reasons.
>
> First, according to the behavioral economics and psychology I reviewed in chapter 5 virtually everyone *manifests a status quo bias: a tendency to overvalue present circumstances in comparison to alternatives* [emphasis added].
>
> Second, residents' preexisting preferences are not immutable, but instead are contingent on experience. Since so few low-income residents in high-poverty neighborhoods (or their parents) *have ever experienced high-quality, safe neighborhoods with functional school systems*, their expectations become leveled [emphasis added] (Galster, 2019: 283–284).

I agree with Galster that exposure is important for the expansion of one's worldview and sometimes can lead to new or different opportunities. Also, due to the "racialized and racist structuring of (urban) space" it may in fact be true that "some black people exhibit bad behaviors as a result" (Hunter et al. 2016, 32). In any case, it is extremely limiting to subsume culture of poverty rhetoric, such as "negative-gaming behaviors" and "self-fulfilling prophecies" into his analysis, which presumes the inexistence of Black livingness; "this reality does not wholly consume the energies of the black community" in urban spaces (Hunter et al. 2016, 32).

In my opinion, Galster's almost exclusive use of traditional, positivist social science canons linking Black bodies to dispossession, and erasure of critical Black scholarship (besides

briefly citing William Julius Wilson, 1987), epistemically rendered Black people without agency and as placeless, denying their communities of any meaningful value. As I expound in Chapter 1's detailing on Black placemaking, sociologists have always found the "long, deep, and illustrious scholarship on these topics (Hirsch, 1983; Sampson, 2012; Sharkey, 2013; Venkatesh, 2006; Wilson, 1996)" to be incredibly restrictive to Black communities in urban spaces (Hunter et al. 2016, 32). That is to say the reductionist analysis that values negative depictions of Black life over life affirming ones are underpinned by Eurocentric paradigms, which result in their valuing of place through measurable socio-economic utilities as opposed to an unmeasurable individual and collective sense of meaning and memory.

Generally, there are many assumptions made here by Galster, who has a clear confirmation bias and is using a rational actor model that favors economic stability over emotional stability, even while he purports to be putting forth a "middle-ground" solution. His generalized assumption that empirical findings of low-income Black sentiments asserting positive place-attachments towards their "deprived" neighborhoods as a manifested "status quo bias" predicated on "overvalu[ing] present circumstances in comparison to alternatives" (Galster 2019, 283) is a positivist analysis laced in white, liberal economic value systems. This presumption of faulty thinking due to place status relates Black bodies with dispossession (both ontologically and agentively) epitomizes McKittrick's critiques of masculinist social science thinking on matters of space and race. In particular, her conceptualization of transparent space comes to mind, which "assumes that geography — specifically, physical and material geographies — is readily knowable, bound up with ideologies and activities that work to maintain a safe socioeconomic clarity," which oftentimes results in Black communities living in

resource deprived spaces being stigmatized in many academic and public spheres (McKittrick 2006, 5–8).

I felt it was important to take the time breaking down my coming across Galster's work for several reasons. First, it fundamentally changed my thesis' course from focusing on housing trends as a form of place attachment, to multi-faceted depictions of Black abundance and belonging. Second, it provides a clear example of the kind of opposition standpoint my work is pushing up against by demonstrating how the continued normalization of anti-Black rhetoric in academic discourses has real-world impacts on policies. Finally, it helped me to realize the importance of my own citational politics, which stems from a desire to cite as a mode of critical, transformative inquiry into Black bodies as more than vectors of dispossession and violence. I want to avoid citing the literature that reifies these negative assessments of people of color based upon conventional urban social analysis of place presupposition towards statistical significance, population density, and socio-economic indicators, when deciding which spaces are designated as places of opportunity, over lived experience and word of mouth. Instead, "this is a story of the black body and black bodies unabandoned (agentive-intellectual)" that belies the ruling Eurocentric and racist logic systems of our Western world (McKittrick 2021, 128). Accordingly, I will cite literature and scholars that I believe affirm, elevate and celebrate marginalized spaces and partial perspectives.

Finding McKittrick

> This story seeks to honor black ways of knowing by observing and critiquing the injustices of racism without revering and repeating and describing racial violence (description is not liberation)
>
> — Katherine McKittrick Demonic Grounds

My thesis research explores the nuances of Black humanity and culture through the analytical lenses of "quiet" and "a Black sense of place, *where* we know from" in Springfield, Massachusetts. This end goal supports the embedding of a liberatory practice into the very framework of my research methodology that leaves space for possibilities of Black livingness. Thankfully, McKittrick's lengthy discussion on Black citational practices in *Dear Science and Other Stories* helps me to speak assertively and yet not defensively, to critique systems and theorizations without insult, to put forth a referencing practice that values the production of an interdisciplinary, shared dialogue over "citations as quotable value" (2021, 26).

Thus, my analytical decision to primarily engage in conversation with other Black studies and critical race theorists who are also working to expand dominant conceptualizations of Black humanity to capture "black life, black well-being, black livingness" (McKittrick 2021, 117) is wholly as a way to meet the ends of my intellectual and political project to take Black embodied belonging seriously. In doing so, my refusal is not based in inclusionary or exclusionary citational practices (McKittrick 2021, 30); I will place my research in conversation with various epistemological stances, such as that by Galster, based in different ways of knowing and documenting reality, to highlight the oppositional standpoint as a means of showing what my work is fighting against (28). However, my political project, which "critiques racism and other practices of discrimination" without "remain[ing] beholden to the systems of knowledge that profits from oppression" requires that I keep degradative discourses to a minimum to ensure I do not reinscript inequitable power relations (McKittrick 2021, 71; Hunter et al. 2016). In other words, while these short exchanges with negative traditional depictions of Black people and places are scattered throughout my work as a reference point to demonstrate my thinking outside the hegemony (with Galster's previous section the most prominent by far due to its impact on the

trajectory of my thesis), I quickly move on so that I do not give White Supremacist, anti-Black discourses the space it needs to breathe discursive violences into my work.

Ultimately, a close engagement with McKittrick's "Footnotes" provided me with a central takeaway that I intentionally look to as a way of checking my work for its commitment to its stated purpose; to imagine "the black body, as an analytic" "outside violation" (McKittrick 2021, 127). Pointedly, I acknowledge the anti-black representations that emerge in my analysis of Black Springfield, but I do not dwell on them; my work may be referential to white liberalism, but it is in dialogue with life-affirming black epistemology. In doing so, my work aligns with McKittrick's call for a black studies citational project that is not predicated on naming the who's who of traditional geographic canons (2021) but instead on sharing ideas with those whose deep passion for Black life is also based in "an alternative humanist vision of societal organization" (Collins 1986, 111).

In this way, my refusal is based on a promise to myself not to acculturate to the trappings of the "academic-industrial complex" (Tuck & Yang 2018) and the notion that there is one reality or truth by continuously asking myself "with whose blood were my eyes crafted?" (Haraway, 1988, 585). It means no matter what frameworks, scholars, and/or visionary thinkers I am theorizing alongside, I will "take[e] stock of its recruiting of conscript knowledges" because we all have hegemonic thought to unlearn, minds to decolonize, and "refusal, taken seriously, is about humanizing the researcher" (Tuck & Yang 2018). In my case, humanizing the researcher means staying true to my interviewees, my city, and the Black community at large by fully "walk[ing] my talk" (Pulido citing Gilmore, 342) and deciding NOT to embody the inherent oppositional nature of my work, but to instead "radically reimagine liberation collectively"

(McKittrick 2021, 31) with my interlocutors through an alternative look as Black senses of place operating in my hometown of Springfield, Massachusetts.

Contributions emerging from my case study

Springfield represents a non-traditional area of focus to study minority, inner city dynamics due to it being located in New England. However, I move beyond a reductive focus of simply examining a place African American life has seldom been a place of study to demonstrate how studying Black livingness in diverse spaces (both in terms of size and racial/ethnic make-up) is instrumental to understanding the struggles for Black personhood and meaningful collective political action. Namely, by illuminating how the continued perversity of anti-Black discourses have led to nuanced links between "the racist trope and absolute space" by way of respectability politics and restrictive, racist bureaucratic policies in urban communities (McKittrick 2021, 11).

Through an engagement with narratives from 15 individuals who live and work in Springfield, as well as both historic and contemporary documents detailing various aspects of Springfield's Black history, I show what an inquiry into Black socio-spatial experiences through the analytical lens of a Black sense of place (McKittrick 2021) and quiet (Quashie 2012) inform about:

1) Black livingness, from struggles to hopes to intentions to control over self-definition and knowledge of one's history, to
2) Black entanglement in, and resistance to, dehumanizing scripts, and lastly,
3) Black attachment and access to public space.

Additionally, expanding how we understand Black placemaking to encompass both formal and mundane sites of legacy pushes back against attempted erasure of community history and African American rootedness to place.

All in all, I find a home within Black Geographies, and am deeply embedded in other derivations of Black Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist Thought. I also hold an undergraduate degree from American University in political science and have spent much time with sociological literature. I am also a poet and an artist, a daughter, sister, and partner. Above all, I am a Black woman. My multidisciplinary aids my research goal to expand black cultural simplifications that privilege a Du Boisian double consciousness (1903) approach to "black subjectivity as conflict with whiteness and imagines black agency only as/in resistance" (Quashie 2012, 12). Instead, by "paying careful attention to the structures of feeling which underpin black expressive cultures" (Gilroy 1993, 77) I not only uplift participants' public resistance practices, but also their nostalgic wanderings during our interviews to demonstrate their brief escape from public expressiveness to internal solitude.

Ch. 1 Theoretical framework and methodology

Dominant interventions in the social sciences on race, space, and knowing

> A black sense of place draws attention to the longstanding links between blackness and geography. It brings into focus the ways in which racial violences (concrete and epistemic actions and structural patterns intended to harm, kill, or coerce a particular grouping of people) shape, but do not wholly define, black worlds.
>
> — McKittrick, 2011: 947

Grocery Store Talk (a poem by Danielle Brown)

I know you must have heard about the infamous Barbershop talk...
or hairdresser talk
But have you ever come across the idea of grocery store talk?
Corner store talk?
Car service talk or Mailbox talk?

There are times when we find ourselves in these deeply personal conversations
suddenly during an otherwise mundane moment
And personally,
I did not realize how much these small conversations could mean to me
As more than a passing dialogue
But instead as a moment of solidarity and care
Amongst another understanding individual
Until today when I received the best relationship advice of my life
in the middle of the meat aisle…
of my neighborhood QFC

I kid you not,... it was a surreal experience
To have someone take the time
To ask me how I was
and inquire when my stumbled reply was full of hesitation

It is as if there is an embodied sense in that moment
of an acceptable vulnerability and openness
uncommon in most public spaces for the average person of color
because I know this individual is making an opening
in this specific moment and place
for pure authenticity and true engagement
in an instant
there is a manifested, affirmative
black sense of place

—

Scholars, policymakers, and average citizens continue to wrongly dehumanize, and make concerted efforts to eradicate, Black modes of being, sites of living, spatial imaginaries, and senses of place. As I live through what has become colloquially labeled a national racial reckoning with the country's history it is more important than ever to amplify the voices of those outside of the high walled academy when it comes to what is going on in their own communities. It is learning from those living and working in our Black communities that we can truly begin "to shar[e] ideas about where liberation is and might be," operating both within and beyond commonsensical renderings of our socio-political world (McKittrick 2021, 182). Importantly, doing so not only thinks outside of white traditional disciplinary analyses that study Black abject bodies as "descriptor[s] of social ills" (Wright 2017, 2), but also imagines what "a future not defined by racial domination" (Bledsoe 2017, 46) might look like alongside other Black embodied knowledge holders.

This tension between struggle and possibility allows for multiple realities to be true at the same time, demonstrating the way in which theorizing through the lens of a black sense of place illuminates Black people as nuanced, agentive, knowledgeable individuals engaged in formally and informally recognized modes of social justice work. Chapter 1 begins with an overview of three Black spatializing conceptualizations within the social sciences operating in my thesis: Black Geographies, a black sense of place, and black placemaking. Together, these crucial bodies of theory center Black geographic thought, privileging black subjectivities that embrace alternative interpretations of how the world is structured. I then detail my research methodology, with a particular focus towards what I did (semi-structured interviews and inter-textual analysis), and who I studied (primarily Black embodied knowledge holders). I end with a discussion of

methodological limitations and a brief description of how the methodology breaks down across Chapters 2 and 3.

Black Geographies

> The black diaspora — the process of displacement and unbelonging — is a human phenomenon that has highlighted, called into question, and refused the positivist contours of human geography and thus worked toward creating alternative spaces for political struggle.
>
> - McKittrick, 182

Geography has a long, problematic history regarding race and racism, conquest, and exploitation (Cope 2010; McKittrick 2006), with the undercurrents of anti-blackness leading to Black scholarship historically being considered un-geographic within the academy (Hawthorne & Heitz 2018, 148; Wright 2016). As a recently codified sub-field within the discipline of Geography, Black geographies methodologically centers "black experiences and ways of being in the world" to critique Western spatial formations and expand overarching intellectual and societal understandings of Black geographic expressions (Bledsoe 2021, 15; Hawthorne, 2019; McKittrick 2021). Three central, interdisciplinary, intervention points of Black geographies identified by Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* are:

> 1 ... the ways in which essentialism situates black subjects and their geopolitical concerns as being elsewhere (on the margin, the underside, outside the normal), a spatial practice that conveniently props up the mythical norm and erases or obscures the daily struggles of particular communities.
>
> 2 ... how the lives of these subjects demonstrate that 'common-sense' workings of modernity and citizenship are worked out, and normalized, though geographies of exclusion ...
>
> 3 ... the situated knowledge of these communities and their contributions to both real and imagined human geographies [as] significant political acts and expressions
>
> — 2007, 4; Hawthorne 2019

What stands out amongst these tenets are the ways in which Eurocentric paradigms, which often mark Black subjects as non-geographic, extend onto our socially geographic orders through "crude racial-sexual hierarchies," normalizing the uneven development of space (McKittrick 2006, xiv). And yet, black communities also assert their own agency to evoke life-affirming facets of their humanity as more than their societal racial suffering, ensuring they are not defined or confined by these dominative forces at work (McKittrick 2011, 948).

Black Geographies asserts that hierarchical Western logic systems equate dispossession to the Black subject's natural place in society, which in turn informs traditional conceptualizations of Black people as placeless (McKittrick 2011, 949). This is because starting from a vantage point that there is one reality, and then that dominant reality being based in Eurocentric, racist logic systems, begins from a premise of damage and predestines an inability to recover Black livingness (due to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and "victims" of modern dominative practices). In turn, Black knowledge is commonly rendered unknowable and Black bodies as ungeographic. Instead, Black Geographies "untethers Black knowledge from a violated body and de-centers the body as the primary unit of analysis," which exposes "new spatial knowledge" and associated "Black resistance practices" (Hawthorne 2019, 4). Stated differently, it is not about *recovering* a black sense of place, which assumes that something has been lost, but about *uncovering* and *discovering* knowledges, senses of place, and connections to space that are always in existence, but have been rendered unknowable in white geographic orders and modes of thought.

Generally, key thematic areas for inquiry in Black Geographies are space-making practices and Black spatial imaginaries, racial capitalism, carceral geographies (including cities, policing, surveillance and containment), racist histories' contemporary manifestations, and

plantation futures (Hawthorne 2019)[2]. There have also been several scholars who have argued for the contribution of Black geographic literature into their discipline for more rigorous analysis of the importance of racial difference in the production of space (e.g., urban planning, urban studies, domestic geopolitics, borderlands) (Brand and Miller 2020; Roy 2020; Vasudevan and Smith 2020; Ramirez 2020). Of the scholars heralded as foundational to legitimizing Black geographic exploration in the academy (Bunge 1972; Wilson 1977; Woods 1998; McKittrick 2006; Gilmore 2005; Pulido 2006), Katherine McKittrick's epistemological approach to studying black spatial realities bound up in racialized constructions of space in particular resonates strongly with me. My familiarity with McKittrick's Black geographic conceptualizations, namely a black sense of place, black vs. traditional geographies, and transparent space, are the anchor point for the rest of the literature review in Chapter 1 and empirical analyses of Springfield in Chapters 2 and 3.

A black sense of place

Black Geographies' epistemological shift from dominant geographic thought, centering how "othered" subject positions construct knowledge and concurrently produce space, is epitomized in McKittrick's (2011) conceptualization of a black sense of place, which she has defined as;

1. "a methodology and an analytical frame that believes in and believes black humanity." (McKittrick 2021, 107)
2. "where we know from" (McKittrick 2021, 117)

[2] To see an exhaustive list of Black Geographic inquiry by thematic category please see "Black matters are spatial matters" by Camilla Hawthorne (2019).

3. "the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the *difficult entanglements of racial encounter*" (McKittrick 2011, 949).
4. "alternative mapping practices" (McKittrick 2011, 949)

Generally, listing some of the primary ways a black sense of place has been defined up front is to emphasize its dimension, complexity, fluidity, flexibility, scale, and temporality[3]. Most importantly, I insist on the fact that a Black sense of place is "not a standpoint or a situated knowledge" but a "location of difficult encounter and relationality" predicated upon moving through the world on "strikingly racial terms'" (McKittrick 2021, 106; 2006, 25 speaking to Frantz Fanon).

In her landmark essay, "On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place" Katherine McKittrick describes a Black sense of place "as the process of materially and imaginatively situating historical and contemporary struggles against practices of domination and the difficult entanglements of racial encounter" (2011, 949). In other words, a black sense of place encompasses the relational nature of the Black experience, choosing to wrestle with the nuances (and paradoxes) inherent in Black people's relationship to self, society, and space. On the one hand, the black experience is predicated on the intrinsic struggle against past and present dominative acts and discourses for those holding Black subject positions, such as negotiating longstanding state sanctioned acts of dispossession (of personhood, culture, language, land) and racial violence (e.g., slavery, the mass-incarceration system, surveillance, residential segregation,

[3] My etymological style breakdown of a Black sense of place, as defined by McKittrick, is inspired by (and accredited to) Alice Walker's etymological breakdown of "Womanism" in "Coming Apart" (1979) and E. Patrick Johnson's etymological breakdown of "Quare" in "'Quare' Studies, or …" (2001). In both cases, Walker and Johnson strategically deploy this structuring technique as a way of emphasizing their social theorizations' Black epistemological deviation from hegemony based upon their centering of Black perspectives and everyday experiences.

health inequities, etc.) And yet, despite these inequitable materialities and uneven geographic landscapes, Black communities at their core epitomize Black resistance, hope, joy, and decipher possibilities of livingness.

Here, McKittrick also highlights the theoretical connections between a black sense of place and Doreen Massey's "sense of place" (1994: 149). McKittrick asserts that Massey's conceptualization of a "sense of place" through the "power geometry of time-space compression" gives us one avenue to think through the different power social groups hold (2011, 950 citing Massey 1994, 149) in relation to "the flows of money, spaces, infrastructure, and people" when the "built environment privileges, and therefore mirrors, white, heterosexual, capitalist, and patriarchal geopolitical needs" (2006, 6). A Black geographies lens to studying people's flows and movement within society (McKittrick 2011, 950) recognizes the racial irrationality of "prevailing spatial organizations" to envision ways out of our inequitably structured, modern day world.

In *Demonic Grounds*, McKittrick embarks on a multi-scalar investigation into Black women's cartographies across space, place, and time (i.e. slave ship, auction block, plantation, garret, Atlantic Ocean, Black Canada). Vantaging her analysis from a black sense of place, McKittrick details simultaneously occurring racialized geographic processes and arrangements by employing the conceptual terms "black geographies," "traditional geographies," and "transparent space." Traditional geography refers to the hegemonic (read "cartographic, positivist, imperialist") conceptualization of space, which "assume we can view, assess, and ethically organize the world from a stable (white, patriarchal, Eurocentric, heterosexual, classed) vantage point" (McKittrick 2006, xiii). Black geographic inquiries recognize the material power of traditional geographies by acknowledging that "discourse produces the world as it understands

it," (Rose 2001, 137; Hall 2001) which uncovers the role anti-black racism has in the production of physical space as transparent space, a broad perception that "what we see is knowable, readily decipherable" (2011, 6). Further breaking down how inquiries into traditional geographies and transparent space "clarify the ways in which black geographies can be conceptualized," McKittrick states:

> While the power of transparent space works to hierarchically position individuals, communities, regions, and nations, it is also contestable - the subject interprets, and ruptures, the knowability of our surroundings. What this contestation makes possible are 'black geographies,' which I want to identify as 'the terrain of political struggle itself,' *where* the imperative of a perspective of struggle takes place. Here, the locations of black history, selfhood, imagination, and resistance are not only attached to the production of space through their marginality, but also through the ways in which they bring into focus responses to geographic domination (2006, 6).

Black geographies then, embodies the struggle over spaces and places by diasporic communities across time, as well as the many ways Black peoples and cultures work both within and outside commonsense understandings of geography through the enactment of resistance practices to make alternative Black worlds (McKittrick 2011, 6). Generally, my thesis focuses on understanding where Black subjects in Springfield locate positive notions of their senses of place by inquiring into "internalized affirmative narratives" and resistance to negative notions of their sense of place that "challenges hegemonic social narratives" (Allen 2020, 1563). I do so because I strongly believe that it is high time that Black people, places, and history stop being equated exclusively and exhaustively with narrations of Black dispossession, loss, and violences, whilst ignoring a "spectrum of resistance" by Black communities; I stress, nestled within everyday "responses to geographic domination" are unforeseen Black possibilities (McKittrick 2006, 116/6).

Chapters 2 and 3 both begin with brief detailings of participant interactions with traditional geographies by examining their negotiation of hegemonic discourses (i.e. local histories in Ch. 2 and controlling images in Ch.3). I then illuminate black geographies by

exploring ways in which the Black community operates within and beyond traditional geographies to combat existing inequitable landscapes and tropes. Namely, my inquiry into Black Springfield from the lens of Black embodied knowledge holders illuminates individual and collective preservation techniques based in refusal through self-definition, such as an ability to acknowledge multiple realities at once and the creation of community-based solutions. For instance, in Chapter 2, I explore how theorizing from a black sense of place, where one knows from, illuminates the collective consensus of white local histories and situated understandings of local Black history. In Chapter 3, I theorize from the lens of a black sense of place (i.e. difficult entanglements of racial encounter) to understand Black spatial knowledges and resistance practices across subjectivity lines, as well as inquire into how differently positioned individuals materially and symbolically negotiate transparent space and Black placemaking projects. In both chapters I explore a Black sense of place in the context of Black identity in the northeast to complicate dominant conceptualizations of New England's racialized landscapes, histories, and control over space to unearth alternative mapping practices.

Black placemaking

Traditional conceptualizations of placemaking are theorized in the discipline of geography as "the cultural, discursive, and material practices through which" individuals and social groups physically and symbolically shape their space of inhabitancy and foster collective belonging (Elwood et al. 2015, 123; Massey 1995). However, embodying Black methodologies, interdisciplinary theoretical engagement with epistemologies centering Black geographic thought, I have chosen to draw from the recent sociological conceptualization of Black placemaking.

The concept of Black placemaking emerged as a theoretical deviation by sociologists to rectify unequal conceptualizations of Black communities in social science scholarship by focusing on the ways "that urban black Americans create sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance" (Hunter et al. 2016, 32). As Hunter et al. point out, the norm of positivist, sociological thought is to represent "urban black residents and their neighborhoods as bounded, plagued by violence, victims and perpetrators, unproductive, and isolated from one another and the city writ large, if not also pathological, dangerous, and depressing" (2016, 51). Dominant social science discourses then begin from a deficit framework that largely renders Black bodies as non-geographic and incapable of producing the things that reflect and generate positive senses of place, as shown in my interrogation of Galster's argument in the *Introduction*.

Black placemaking is concerned with the way Black people, as agents of place making, reconstruct uneven geographies containing unjust socio-spatial processes into "sites of play, pleasure, celebration, and politics" (Hunter et al. 2016, 34). Although contrary to overarching white thought, from this vantage point Black communities are producers of the things that reflect and generate positive senses of place. Some of the ways scholars have theorized Black placemaking are through interrogations into the role of African heritages and African American commemorative practices in Black identity formation, as well as to examine Black making of place in American pop culture (Radney 2019, Giancarlo 2020; Drayton 2019).

My project's analytical engagement with a black sense of place and quiet allows me to interrogate the complexities of how black placemaking plays out on the ground. Importantly, many of my contributors held positive notions of a sense of place directly tied to familial sites of memory, as well as made concerted efforts to create stable homes for their family and build a stronger, healthier, BIPOC community. However, one's ability to publicly assert themselves

looked differently across axes of difference, demonstrating the "dialectical relationship between structure and agency, between domination and resistance" and the difficulty of claiming space in places where Black communities lack substantial capital (Hunter et al. 2016, 33). Lastly, bringing these affirmative Black spatial concepts together helps to illuminate the difficulty of preserving community connection, Black cultural presence, and sites of memory, while living in oppressive geographies, and yet also shows how Black communities persevere and "make places amidst and in spite of those realities" to call home (Hunter et al. 2016, 32).

Chapter 2 examines Black landmarks located in Springfield, illuminating the relationship between whitewashed local histories and equitable access to sites of memory in the city. Chapter 3 investigates personal memories and current experiences of interviewees for notions of Black placemaking (i.e. individual perceptions of acceptance and access to public and private spaces), as well as reviews contemporary resistance movements working to cultivate Black and brown identity formation through social sites of belonging. In both cases, I link the concept of Black placemaking to material, cultural, and discursive forces at play to demonstrate how group identity and sense of belonging are produced in relation to place and exemplify Black geographies. Pointedly, my interviews illuminate how transparent space, as absolute spaces ruled by racist, capitalist logic systems, in fact hinders Black access to private and public spaces (e.g. MassMutual Insurance Company, Downtown Business District) due to traditional geographies designating who belongs and who does not in particular kinds of places, necessitating alternative Black spatial arrangements for survival.

Methodology

Initially, I intended to conduct an ethnographic study of Black Springfield in Summer 2020 that centered a landscape analysis of historic Black landmarks encompassing participant

observation and short oral histories. Ethnographic research is a common way Black feminist and Black geographic scholars conduct place-based investigations into racial hierarchies by examining the socio-political "webs of significance" operating in a space from the resident perspective (McTighe 2018; Moore 2014). I was also interested in performing a landscape analysis of local Black landmarks to understand both the material and symbolic importance of these commemorative sites to the community (Duncan & Duncan 2018). However, due to a halt in most in-person research during the COVID-19 pandemic these styles of physical interaction and observation were cut off from me.

Luckily, the shift from being physically on the ground to remote semi-structured interviews with key informants and inter-textual analysis of Black Springfield documents provided me with a greater engagement with others' thoughts, knowledge, and experiences, epitomizing how "a black sense of place is not individualized knowledge — it is collaborative praxis" (McKittrick 2021, 106). In particular, "us[ing] conversations with the project's participants as primary texts of analysis" honors collective standpoints that emerge while "discursively mapping sites of power" operating in Springfield, Massachusetts (Brekke, Joseph, Aaftaab 2021, 46). Typical of a Black Geographies approach to methodology, these experiential primary modes of observation are supplemented by existing statistics, such as demographic mapping of the city and average poverty data (See Appendix 1) to place interviewee statements in context with current political economy data (Bledsoe 2021, 1). Ultimately, my multi-method approach to studying historic and contemporary Black Springfield while analytically, methodologically, and epistemologically centering black knowledge systems, demonstrates how "interdisciplinary investigations make possible the category of 'black geographies': subaltern or

alternative geographic patterns that work alongside and beyond traditional geographies and site a terrain of struggle" (McKittrick 2006, 7).

Nuances of Black embodied knowledge and modes of thought

Who I talked to and why

> You have worlds inside you. You have permission to share them.
>
> - Adrienne Maree Brown, *Emergent Strategy*

To learn about the distinctiveness of the black experience from a diverse, local population holding vastly different positionings and knowledge bases, my methodological inquiry sought to understand experiential and embodied ways of knowing from those holding black subjectivities in Springfield, or individuals who worked in close proximity to the Black community. My approach to who I sought out for interviewing was limited largely to race, class, and gender because of my general focus on participants' racialized experiences and my limited access to the community due to not working on the ground. When I first began my process of convenience and judgement sampling for interviews, I found that all my participants worked in various artistic, economic, and cultural efforts dedicated towards the vitality of the Black community. Twelve of my collaborators are not only residents of Springfield, but also work in public facing careers — from a historian and a council member, to activists, entrepreneurs, artists, and non-profit leaders. Excitingly, each of them granted permission for their real names to be used in the piece. However, knowing that the black experience is not a monolith and there is something intrinsically unique about differently positioned social identities, I felt it was important to speak with a few community members who could remain anonymous in my piece by studying those who "know one knows" outside of the public view (McKittrick & Woods 2007, 4–5). These

three individuals have been given pseudonyms by the names Devin, Demarcus, and Malcolm, all of which are Black men in their mid-20s.

While my sample size of 15 individuals, spanning 24 years of age to late 70s, is not a representative sample of Black socio-spatial experiences operating in Springfield, their musings do showcase the messy entanglements with white supremacy operating in diverse, urban centers located in New England. The stories I have teased out are weighty and full of complexity, containing insights into racialized experience in Springfield also "intermingled with place-based critiques" and "respatializations," demonstrating the way in which "practices of subjugation are also spatial acts" (2006, xix). The non-linear nature of our conversations demonstrates how more than two things can exist at the same time. To truly capture the multi-faceted expressions of Black experiences necessitates an interior inquiry (Quashie) into self-perception, requiring a space where *both* rational *and* irrational (at times seemingly paradoxical), thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams, wants, wishes, intentions, resistance practices, and nostalgic wanderings are all given the opportunity to simply be, messily *but* authentically. Thus, to not box participants in and honor their words, except for when contributors explicitly reference their positionality as a part of their lived experiences, I have chosen not to indulge the allure of categorical analyses along identity standpoint lines. Doing so honors my intersectional lens to "see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects" authentically in participants lives, beyond noticing "simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there" (Crenshaw 2017).

In doing so, I deconstruct binaries and resist flattening Black spatial experiences and knowledge operating in the space to one monolithic narrative. Instead, my empirics demonstrate the way in which positionalities such as race, class, gender, and home status, jointly work to

shape the kinds of racist tropes people encounter, as well as the types of resistance strategies people have access to, in diverse New England landscapes where respectability politics are a part of the cultural sphere. As Latoya Eaves asserts on the relationship between Black identity and geographic formations and knowledges, understanding the nuances of an individual's Black sense of place helps illuminate the ways "participants [are] significantly impacted by the conjecture of race and place in their lives but not necessarily impacted in the same ways;" providing for a fuller regionally specific geographic story that is textured with black geographies (Latoya Eaves, 2017, 90).

Interestingly, class was sutured heavily around perceived social status and neighborhood segregation, supporting bell hooks' insistence that we "become more conscious" to issues of class beyond the "obvious that some folks have more money than other folks" (2000, 5). I most directly take up this query for more complex engagements with class in Chapter 3's discussion of contemporary racial dynamics operating in Springfield when examining how perceived socio-economic status leads to tokenizing and criminalizing classifications within the Black community based upon the way you look, talk, act, etc. Additionally, employing "a black placemaking perspective" allows me to center "the agency, intent, and even spontaneity of urban black residents — across genders, sexualities, ages, classes, and politics — in creating" life-affirming, laughter filled, culturally imbued, sustainable gathering places (Hunter et al. 2016, 51)

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews (13 via the platform Zoom and 2 via phone call) for which all of my respondents signed consent forms and agreed to participate in my research. My interviewee population consisted of anyone living and/or working in Springfield who were Black themselves or worked in close proximity to the Black community. Because of

my very specific research focus on the Black experience in Springfield, I chose a non-probability sampling strategy with units of analysis and measurement being individual interviewees.

My first 11 interviews (and 1 written inquiry) took place from July 2020 to November 2020. I decided to conduct these initial interviews over the course of several months because of the cultural and political strife going on in the country. Knowing the toll on the Black and brown community from personal experience, I thought it was an extreme act of care to center healing during this time and not heavily push my own research. For the interviews, I used 3 different sampling methods: 1) I reached out to those I know working in non-profits and some people I went to high school with (convenience), 2) I purposely contacted some individuals in public facing positions working in close proximity to the Black community (judgement), and 3) based upon these first 2 inquiries I received some additional names of people to reach out to who fit my initial population description (snowball). Most of my communications were done via email or direct message on the social media platform Instagram, with one inquiry via Facebook. After providing my interviewees with their transcripts in January 2021, so that they would be able to edit, redact, or highlight specific parts of their transcripts (which to me means to give them control over their words), I received the request for a follow-up interview. Out of this follow-up interview in January 2021 (over the phone), I conducted three additional, targeted, snowball interviews in February 2021. Again, the three interviews began with an email exchange and then were completed via the platform Zoom and phone call.

The main purpose of using a semi-structured interview approach in my inquiry on a black sense of place in Springfield is to understand the material realities of living as a Black person in this space, from either personal experience or due to working for the betterment of the Black community. All of my interviews took between 45 and 90 minutes and were recorded after

confirming consent. My first interview cycle in summer 2020 primarily focused on understanding the participants' personal experiences in Springfield, many of which mapped onto larger collective actions operating in the space. Some of my main points of curiosity were: 1) what is your experience of living in Springfield?, 2) What does Black Springfield mean to you? (See Appendix B). On the other hand, the second cycle of interviewing in Winter 2020, containing one follow-up interview and three snowball interviews, aimed at understanding contributors' personal intentions behind being catalyst points for murals honoring local Black life (See Appendix B). While primarily a space for radical listening and collective knowledge making, I also found these interviews to be sites of validation, reflection, and healing. I can honestly say that I felt so welcomed and supported by every single one of my collaborators; our shared laughs, trips down memory lanes, asks of who my folks are, "I know you know where that is if you grew up here's," "you will always be one us girl," and congratulations and thanks for my work, is what I most cherish from my time doing this research.

I also received 1 written response to a set of targeted questions from historian and archivist Joseph Carvalho III after reaching out to him via Academia.edu messenger, which contains many of his articles written about Springfield and Western Massachusetts. I feel very lucky to have his expert opinion on Black Springfield history given his extensive archival research done over the span of 30 years, much of which has been documented in his book, *Black Families in Hampden County, Massachusetts: 1650–1865 (2011)*. My primary focus of written inquiry was to probe his opinions on how Springfield Black history has been memorialized in the city and nationally, as well as gain insight into how Springfield historically became a safe haven for Black people. However, here I focus on breaking down what led to his comprehensive review of Western Massachusetts through the lens of past Black resident's to better understand the role

of historians and archivists in widespread remembrance of Black history (Schwartz and Cook, 2002).

Inter-textual analysis

The main purpose of conducting an inter-textual analysis of historic Black Springfield texts is to interrogate counterarguments to traditional conceptualizations of racialized Northeastern landscapes as white spaces by illuminating existing and lost Black legacies. Much of my initial research into existing archival databases created by non-profits, universities, and museums, was done in Winter 2020 as coursework for my Black Digital Studies final project. Again, this was a non-probability, judgement sampling of key sources containing information on racial and ethnic Springfield histories. From this inquiry I found the following sources to conduct my inter-textual analysis of Black Springfield documents:

- Joseph Carvalho III book and articles (historian)
    - *Black Families of Hampden County, Massachusetts 1650-1865,* 2nd Edition, New England Historic Genealogical Society (2011)
- Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History at the Springfield Library
- Our Plural History Site Creators (Springfield Technical Community College)
- Springfield Preservation Trust
- "Report on Massachusetts: Housing Discrimination in the Springfield-Holyoke-Chicopee Metropolitan Area by The Massachusetts State Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights". Thurgood Marshall Law Library, The University of Maryland School of Law.
- Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz and Kathy Peiss (Eds). *Love across the color line: The letters of Alice Hanley to Channing Lewis*, University of Massachusetts Press (1996)
- The Pan African Historical Museum USA
- Imani Kazini, "Black Springfield: A Historical Study," *Contributions in Black Studies*, parts 1 and 2 (1977, 1978)
- Walking Trails
    - Detailed_Key_to_Springfield_Sanctuary_by_Ryan_Murray.docx.pdf - Google Drive
    - AA TRAIL BROCHURE (mysite.com)

I also checked the official websites and Instagram accounts of the different collectives operating in Springfield profiled in the thesis to supplement my semi-structured interviews. Primarily as a way of identifying and confirming basic information, such as dates, locations or names of different events, places, and/or people brought up in the discussions, as well as for updated information on events and community messaging.

Coding

I created transcriptions from participant interviews using rev.com and then analyzed those in three stages. First, I read through all the transcripts to gain a general context of the data. I then coded the transcripts for the following overarching themes:

- Binary/non-binary thinking
- History
- Black placemaking
- A black sense of place/the Black experience/Black Springfield
- Traditional geographies/transparent space
- Scripts/controlling images/master narratives
- Manifestations of racial capitalism/White Supremacy/Anti-blackness
- Resistance
- Refusal
- Community based solution
- Vulnerability/the interior
- Do not use

Last, I listened to snippets of audio recordings as a reinsertion into a more intimate space with contributors' choice of words, voice inflections, hesitations, and nostalgic wanderings. This three step, iterative process steadily moves between inductive and deductive analysis, resulting in a rigorous methodological engagement that honors both academic theory and lived experience as sites of knowledge production.

Methodological limitations

My scholarly purpose is to bolster material evidence of Black knowledge production by engaging in deep empirical investigations in understudied spaces, alongside commonly silenced

perspectives. In other words, my place-based praxis and Black oriented epistemology takes seriously Black people and spaces, allowing for a piece that is embedded in Black geographic thought (Bledsoe 2021). However, extremely limiting for place-based research was my inability to do any in-person research due to the COVID-19 pandemic, taking away the options for ethnographic research containing landscape analysis and participant observation. While restricted in regards to my choice of methods, I demonstrate how "paying close attention to the materiality of the black story matters" by grounding my analysis in discoveries found through in-depth interviewing (McKittrick 2021, 11). Centering my analysis at the micro-scale, emphasizing experiential knowledge about the neighborhood and city via word of mouth) upholds feminist arguments "that the global and the intimate constitute one another," and aids in representations outside "of narrowly economist globalization discourses" about Black urban communities (Mountz and Hyndman, 2006: 451).

My interest in "affirmative Black Geographies," (Allen 2020) through an exploratory (Babbie 2016, 95) investigation into Black Springfield, means that my research is largely silent when it comes to other marginal ethnic and racial perspectives operating in this very diverse city. Few references are also made to other intersectional subject positions, such as gender (beyond the man/woman binary), disability and sexuality, which is limiting and disallows more nuanced intra-racial arguments about Black socio-spatial experiences.

Another methodological limitation it is important to note regards my positionality. Being literally from the streets I choose to study, and always maintaining a feeling of that space as "home," I already feel "a *part* of a community of struggle, rather than as the academic who occasionally drops in" (Pulido 2008, 351). Springfield's success means the success of my very own family and friends who continue to live there, as well as the community I continue to return

to when I need to feel a sense of nostalgia like no other that is found only at home. However, that does not negate various privileges I have gained since leaving Springfield and "the partial situatedness of knowledge means" that the academy is now a part of my embodied "social, intellectual and spatial" positioning in life (England 2015, 364).

Appropriately, some reflexive questions that I have continually returned to along my research journey have been "Can I do this and still come home; what am I revealing here and why? Where will this get us? Who benefits from this and why?" (Simpson 2007, 78). Out of my interviews, one thing that my contributors made clear was that they did not want my thesis, which places different publicly known individuals in connection on racially sensitive subject matters, to be a fracturing point to the Black community in Springfield. Once again, I thank all my interviewees for trusting me with their words and stories and have made it a central point to not focus on differences in experiences through an oppositional analysis, instead choosing to honor individual standpoints and related socio-political negotiations as evidence of the truth spectrum of blackness.

The final aspect of my accountability that I will address relates to my decision not to focus on damage centered narratives or to reference any of the information my interviewees chose to redact from their transcripts. These exclusions mean that I willingly have chosen not to directly use a substantial amount of the data I collected. Simply stated, it is my scholarly responsibility to contribute to life affirming projects with the working class, Black community in mind first (bell hooks 2000, 37), maintaining my research's short and long term commitment to the struggle for Black liberation. I am very much guided by the same principles as Clyde Woods in his research on Black working class communities, which are to "respect the subject of

research, seek the truth, and be mindful of the implications and ramifications of your conclusions" (Lipsitz 2014, 236).

This thesis proceeds with both chapters pulling from the contemporary empirics gathered through semi-structured interviews, but while Chapter 2 engages the impact of Springfield's history on contributors' lives, Chapter 3 largely focuses on how they articulated their socio-spatial experiences as intersectional Black positioned subjects in the city today. The inter-textual analysis of Black Springfield documents and the answers fielded from Joseph Carvalho III are largely referenced in Chapter 2's probe of local history.

Ch. 2 The significance of place: unearthing a local Black history

Black landmarks: A poem by Danielle Brown

hidden gems scattered throughout the landscape
nuanced histories concealed in plain sight
under acknowledged and almost forgotten
...and yet they persist
…the embodiment of ancestral resistance

Whenever I tell anyone, I am from Massachusetts, their first question is, “You’re from Boston?”. Instead, I may go straight to saying, “I am from Springfield” to thwart having the whole “Boston” conversation, but then they say “Oh, from Illinois...the Simpsons!”. I laugh and say, “Everyone says that...no Springfield, Massachusetts”. It is this choreographed dance that I can look forward to every single time anyone asks where I am from, be it in Washington DC for undergraduate studies, or Seattle, Washington for graduate school. Upon interviewing, I learned that this is a common perception of how these conversations typically go for us Springfieldians (Collins 1986, 105), just take a look at how eerily similar two participants’ stories were to my own:

> Dr. Kamal Ali: There's a place in Queens called Springfield Gardens. I would say to people, "I'm from Springfield," they would assume I meant Springfield Gardens. I said, "I'm not from the Gardens. Springfield, Massachusetts." "Massachusetts?" "Yeah, Massachusetts." Dummy.
>
> Malcolm: When you think of Springfield, they're like, "Oh, is that near Boston?" It's like, dude, we're like the third largest city in the state and you come up with Boston like it's OD.

Once we are past this point I can then move on to my typical hometown call outs, that the city is the home of Basketball, the Armory, and Dr. Seuss. I may squeeze in that Smith & Wesson, the horse & buggy, and Merriam Webster Dictionary were founded there, as well as countless other

Industrial Revolution inventions. However, I distinctly remember learning as a child that my grandparents' bright yellow house hid a treasure in the basement, an old passage that was a part of the Underground Railroad, and that St. John's church right up the road from my home, which I had frequented often throughout my childhood, was named after the famous abolitionist John Brown.

It was during a Black Digital Studies and a Public Scholarship course during my first year of graduate school that I realized the importance of what I emphasized to others about my hometown when recounting stories of Springfield. Tracing the historical lineages of "slavery, segregation, and discrimination" from a racialized lens illuminates a longstanding archival practice of "denouncing African Americans as unequal, while claiming objectivity," resulting in the erasures of authentic African diasporic experiences (Evans 2007, 205). I questioned what I did not know about my own city's Black history, and upon researching, discovered that the pockets of information I previously knew were just slivers of Springfield's Black history. From my puddle of knowledge I had waded into an ocean, while in search for what I thought would at most be a lake, and I knew instantly that one goal of my MA thesis would be to unearth nuggets of Springfield's rich Black history. For me, this project is not only a work of love for my hometown, or a piece of academic scholarship interrogating blackness, class, and access to space in contemporary Springfield, but an endeavor to both *right* and *write* history.

Importantly, my place-based dive into unknown historical territory unearthed much more than names, but an abundance of stories detailing bountiful lives of Black residents full of self-determinative acts, from journeys out of slavery (bought or by way of escape), to entrepreneurship and philanthropy, and the pursuit of love. To me, "this [is] the raw material of the Black radical tradition, the values, ideas, conceptions, and constructions of reality from

which resistance was manufactured" (309) that Cedric Robinson speaks about in Black Marxism. Intentional, transgressive actions by people of color in the name of Black liberation that defies White Supremacist logic systems, and yet goes underknown due to a lack of up-take in local and national discourses. For me, the most distressing aspect of these radical Black histories not being common knowledge is that it seemingly erases Black humanity and resistance from the historical narrative, which perpetuates discourses of Black deprivation and not stories of Black abundance; my emancipatory drive leads me to worry deeply about how these white-washed histories impact Black communities today.

Thus, through the lens of "a black sense of place, where we know from," (McKittrick 2021) my research examines what histories are known amongst the participants to understand the role of local Black heritage in everyday living. At the crux of my investigation of Black Springfield history lie these questions: How does what history is known impact how individuals feel about themselves and their space of living? Are there relationships between local histories (known and unknown) and contemporary geographic patterns by Black individuals and Black communities today? What is the relationship between collective racial consciousness, selfhood, and physical and metaphysical access and ownership to the city histories, narratives, and geography? In other words, Chapter 2 is not focused on reproducing a traditional timeline of Black Springfield history, although I do use the opportunity to share where to access such resources, instead exploring how past racialized discourses are wielded, taken up, and re(produced) by the city government and amongst Black Springfield residents today.

First, I discuss the racial erasures of Springfield's abolitionist history through the context of who gets to write, and who is represented in the archive, by engaging Historian Joseph Carvalho III, author of *Black Families in Hampden County, Massachusetts: 1650–1865 (2011)*,

and muralist Ryan Murray, creator of the Springfield Sanctuary mural located in Union Station. I also touch upon past Black figures whose mark on the city still resonates throughout the landscape today. Here is one area in which my analytical focus of "quiet" shines through, choosing to focus on past "black geographies" operating in Springfield, such as the passionate pursuits of past Black Springfieldians (i.e., entrepreneurship and love) alongside Black abolitionist and organizational activity, in my brief summarization of why illuminating past Black self-determination actions are important to expanding notions of Black humanity.

I then argue for the importance of racial and ethnic histories (such as those detailed here) by examining nuanced connections between Black socio-spatial experiences across time, demonstrating the way in which "archives validate our experiences, our perceptions, our narratives, our stories." (Schwartz-Cook 2002, 18). I begin deciphering which of Springfield's historical narratives are most well-known among the interviewees, and how these histories are learned. Upon illuminating a racial imbalance on which histories are organically learned by Springfield residents, I explore various interviewee sentiments related to learning disproportionately more about Springfields white history than Black history, sharing their thoughts along the way about avenues for the city to adequately honor local Black legacies.

Ultimately, I argue that knowledge of one's full history is a basic and essential, whilst a sorely neglected, human right that is fundamental to full personhood, collective belonging, and ownership of material and discursive realities today.

Why study Black Springfield history?

Black history matters gravely to all of our history. As Historian Joseph Carvalho III states, "the 'tapestry' of American local and family history could never be complete without the inclusion of everyone's story;" thus highlighting the geographical importance of racial and ethnic

records to accurate portrayals of broader city, state, and regional historic accounts. Pointing to the current widespread movement for Black Lives, muralist Ryan Murray further complicates and politicizes the importance of racialized interpretations of local and national narratives, asserting: “history is being highly debated because of who gets to write it, who's been writing it, and who gets shut out of it as a result of who writes it.” Here, Ryan probes various power dynamics embedded in the regular exclusion of non-white histories from circulating discourses, emphasizing matter-of-factly: “historically, people of color, their full stories aren't told.”

Pointing towards the archive as a key site of marginalization and erasure of racial and ethnic histories, both Ryan and Joseph used their own personal and professional experiences to substantiate their claims. For instance, as a Black man whose mom studied libraries and archives in college, Ryan expounded disheartedly, “She could be looking for the rest of her life and that's how it goes.” Ryan continued with his interrogation of structural gatekeeping in the archive declaring: “Things like archives, they're very hard to find a job in because they're not given resources, the history is not that cared about and that translates to certain histories getting erased as a result of their studies being underfunded.” In other words, it appears that the archive as a site of knowledge documentation is a mutually reinforcing cycle where the longstanding lack of resources dedicated towards the incorporation of non-white histories (due to anti-Black value systems) has led to a general disposition of racial and ethnic chronicles as niche heritages; further propagating the notion of them being undeserving of large pools of funding and making it even harder for people of color who are looking for archival positions.

Joseph’s professional background as a historian, from his time in graduate school at the College of William and Mary, to his “first job in history as a Reference and research librarian at the Springfield (MA) City Library’s Local History & Genealogy Department,” provides insight

into the overt valuing of white lensed accountings of history. As Joseph explained, as a white man his family "always had close relations and friendships with African-Americans". As he explains, upon joining graduate school and not being "all that pleased with the glorification of Confederate history from a few of the professors" he decided to write his MA thesis on exposing "the segregationist and racist aspects" of the "New Deal Depression Era program" called the "Civilian Conservation Corps as it applied to Virginia." Moving to a focus on Springfield, he proceeded to share how he "quickly realized" the city's "local history and genealogical resources were overwhelmingly if not exclusively connected to the white population related to the early English settlers and their descendants" upon starting his job as a reference and research librarian. This was despite the population of the city growing increasingly diverse since its colonial founding in 1636 by William Pynchon, "with people from all parts of Western, Northern, Eastern, and Southern Europe; Russia, Middle East, all parts of Africa — from slavery and from modern-era immigration, Latin American and the Caribbean, and all parts of Asia" eventually settling in the area over time.

Determined to correct the local historic erasures, Joseph and Ryan each committed to centering people of color in their work as a way of bringing awareness to Springfield's Black community about their ancestral roots. In doing so, they each critique the propagation of archival practices documenting local and national histories from predominantly white vantage points and demonstrate how a counter story not only provides access to one's full history, but also access to humanity. For example, Joseph recalled his embarrassment "by the dearth of materials easily available to" a "Springfield resident of African ancestry" seeking to "research his family history," vowing "then and there that [he] would rectify that problem." He provided additional context on the extensive archival process of piecing together the local Black history:

> Joseph Carvalho III: From 1977 to 1983, I used my lunch-breaks, most days off, and as many weekends as my wife Gayle would agree to (and she was VERY supportive of my effort) to scour through histories, census microfilm, archives, local records, Probate and Registry of Deeds records, and oral histories of local African Americans who also shared access to their own family records. The result was a compilation of every African American individual from Hampden County that I could find so that anyone researching their African-American heritage would finally have a resource to assist in their research.
>
> I retired from my Executive Director position at the Springfield Museums in 2010 to return to research and writing local history and my first objective was to incorporate and update my book on Black Families of Hampden County into a second edition...to include individuals up to 1865 (and their descendants beyond that date).

Similar to Joseph's professional goal to provide access to full ancestral histories for those seeking to know their local familial lineages, muralist Ryan Murray also upholds the teaching of counter histories as essential to "the full, fleshed out, Black history being told." Originally from the neighboring city of Northampton, Massachusetts, interviewee Ryan Murray received his Bachelors of Fine Arts from Carnegie Mellon University in 2014. Moving to Springfield to be a part of the burgeoning arts scene, he took part in Fresh Paint Springfield in 2019 (FPS2019), a week-long community mural festival produced by the non-profit organization Common Wealth Murals, both of which are directed and founded by Britt Ruhe. Paying homage to the local Black community, Ryan created Springfield Sanctuary in the Union Station concourse to "educate people who are coming through to Springfield" about the history of Black abolitionist activity in the city. Ryan hopes that strategically siting Springfield Sanctuary in "a literal railroad " "is a major stepping stone in" more people knowing about "the Underground Railroad and the work

that people did to protect and house freed slaves" in Springfield, Massachusetts. As Britt explains, the mural features "faces and buildings associated with people who were a part of Springfield's involvement in the Underground Railroad. And then on the train there are the faces of people who are continuing the legacy of that fight for racial justice, but are more contemporary, so some that are alive and some that have recently passed."

When asked if he perceives Springfield Sanctuary as a Black landmark, Ryan quickly asserted that he does, sharing how it is a "totally radical new way of seeing how the space could be treated," demonstrating how transparent spaces (McKittrick 2006) meant for practical use-values, such as transportation, can be reconfigured into racially conscious places of community education and ancestral groundedness. Importantly, the mural not only provides visceral fulfillment from physical interaction, such as one interviewees statement that it gave them "shivers" when seeing it for the first time while on a FPS mural tour[4], but there is also an easily accessible online key that succinctly details background information on all of the figures represented in the mural.[5]

Ultimately, Joseph Carvalho III and Ryan Murray decision to embrace a geographic conceptualization that centers racial and ethnic socio-spatial experiences illuminate Black geographies as alternative mapping patterns, and pushes back against the widespread archival documentation of Springfield's history through a traditional geographies lens that presumes "we can view, assess, and ethically organize the world from a stable (white, patriarchal, Eurocentric, heterosexual, classed) vantage point" (McKittrick 2006, xiii). More importantly, by historicizing how local Black diasporic populations exist "'partly inside and not always against the grand

[4] Downloadable+Guide.pdf (squarespace.com), Accessed 12/17/2021

[5] Detailed_Key_to_Springfield_Sanctuary_by_Ryan_Murray.docx.pdf — Google Drive Accessed 12/17/2021

narrative of Enlightenment and its organizing principles,'" they begin to clarify the "genealogical connections between dispossession, transparent space, and black subjectivities" operating in contemporary Black Springfield; "principles that include the naturalization of identity and place, the spatialization of racial hierarchies, the displacement of difference, ghettos, prisons, crossed borders, and sites of resistance and community" (McKittrick 2006, xxi). As we see in the next section, inquiries into black geographies, through the humanizing conceptual lenses "quiet" and "a black sense of place," broaden dominant narratives' primary historical focus on detailing conditions of, or resistances against, Black enslavement, to include multi-faceted configurations of Black livingness that include love and entrepreneurship.

"They said, 'Not today: '"A Black counter story emerges in Springfield, Ma

I chuckle every time I read Devin's comment, "They, said, 'Not today,'" — his reaction to first learning about the League of Gileadites, a group of past Black enslaved people who, working alongside abolitionist John Brown, banded together in response to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and successfully protected Black residents in Springfield from potential slave catchers. For me, the snappy phrase clearly encapsulates in few words the seriousness of the collective's ultimate mission, which was the safety, protection, and survival of Black life. It embodies the urgency of the moment and is a discursive description of the weight one still feels today in their gut when first learning of such monumental acts of Black self-reliant resistance. However, upon further inquiry into who these members were, I found that their lives contained layers of particularities beyond these collective public acts of resistance. For instance, William Green went on to write his own book detailing his life since his escape from freedom, and Thomas Thomas was not only known as "John Brown's Lieutenant," but also was a Restaurateur who used the back of his business as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Thus, by conceptually centering "quiet," my intent here is not to exhaustively detail Black histories in all of their glory, and instead take the opportunity to highlight a few of the accessible resources outlined in my list of Black Springfield documents (See Methodology for complete list of Black Springfield History sources) that document historic "responses to geographic domination" to illuminate "black geographies" operating in Springfield, "which [McKittrick]" "identif[ies] as 'the terrain of political struggle itself,' *where* the imperative of a perspective of struggle takes place" (2006, 6). Importantly, the pieces I have selected also connect to the city's racialized landscape today, either materially, by detailing physical Black landmarks still in existence today, or conceptually, to local socio-economic phenomena continuing to impact the Black community today, like class.

In doing so, my thesis humanizes past Black life in Springfield by giving space for Black humanity to just be, without the need to be overexplained, overworked, overanalyzed, overdetermined. It is crazy to think that just stating, "this Black woman loved in 1808" or "this Black man had a business here in the 1800s" or "these ex-slaves came together and protected their fellow brothers and sisters" is in itself promoting Black livingness discourses evoking the Black radical tradition, and yet, it is, so here you go. Read, discover, dream, and be inspired by some of the glimpses into the Black fight for liberation and personhood in a small urban community over 200 years ago.

Pan African Historical Museum USA & The Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History

> The African American community in Springfield dates back to its colonial beginnings to the turbulent Civil War. It is a community of men and women who contributed their talents to this great city as they fought for liberty and justice and their own freedom. It is a city of such prominent African Americans as Thomas Thomas. Annie McTier. Eli Baptist, and Primus Mason. It is a city of the Underground Railroad with its secret hiding places

> in plain view on Main Street. It is a city of champions! Come and hear their stories![6](The Road to Freedom, PAHMUSA)

Both Ryan Murray and Joseph Carvalho pointed to The Pan African Historical Museum USA (PAHMUSA) located in Tower Square and the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History at the Springfield Library, as two physical repositories of the local Black history sited in downtown Springfield. Each of them stated how they wished more Springfield residents knew about these resources. For instance, the Wood Museum of Springfield History houses a lot of information about John Brown's influence on local abolitionist activities, as well as other early anti-racist movements by white institutions to make the city a safe haven for Black life (Lipsitz 1995, 384). One piece I find particularly interesting is a ledger from 1806, which documents Reverend Samuel Osgood of Springfield First Church (now St. John's Congregational Church) gathering the community to raise $100 for Jenny William's freedom, a fugitive slave at the time. Jenny Williams went on to get married in Court Square in downtown Springfield in 1808. I also was immensely inspired while reading the words of three past enslaved people, Edward Lewis, Henry Clinton, and Mrs. Martha Tucker, whose documented remarks from speaking at a memorial service of John Brown upon his passing. Again, all of these living remnants can be found in the Springfield History Library & Archives and the John Brown, Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War sections of the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum which are free to Springfield residents, as well as readily accessible to explore online[7].

The PAHMUSA contains a breadth of information on Black history, which stretches all the way back to the African Empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay, to that of Western Massachusetts, even providing a walking tour for key sites related to the Underground Railroad

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[6] *The Road To Freedom: The African American Experience featuring The African American Heritage Trail*, Accessed 12/17/2021

[7] Museum of Springfield History | Springfield Museums Accessed 12/17/2021

in Springfield. In my opinion, the walking tours provided by PAHMUSA (cited in the epigraph above) and the Springfield Sanctuary Key[8] by Ryan Murray are two key sources that succinctly describe past local Black figures and organizations, providing references to physical landmarks still in existence today.

Additionally, as discussed in the previous section, Joseph Carvalho III has a number of works available online, from his book Black Families of Hampden County 2nd Edition, New England Historic Genealogical Society (2011), to a number of articles, which provide detailed information on local Black familial lineages between 1650 and 1865. His work also details the involvement by "the local African Americans who filled the ranks of the Patriot regiments during the American Revolution and Union regiments during the Civil War mak[ing] it clear that these Americans earned their place in blood as full citizens of this nation."

"Love Across the Color Line: The letters of Alice Hanley to Channing Lewis'" edited by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz and Kathy Peiss (1996) uses letters found in an attic to unravel the "psychological and social worlds" underpinning an inter-racial love story between a white woman from nearby Northampton and a Black man from Springfield in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (8). The book puts their social positions (race, class, gender) in historical context with social, economic, and political realities to understand dimensions of race relations and working-class lives at the time.

Finally, I was elated to find an undergraduate senior thesis by Imani Kazini, an Afro-American studies major at UMass Amherst, on Historical Black Springfield while combing the internet for sources (Kazini, 1977, 2008). Covering the periods' part 1 (1636–1900) and part 2 (1900–1970s), Kazini asserts that Black Springfield was a "haven not heaven" for Black life

[8] Detailed_Key_to_Springfield_Sanctuary_by_Ryan_Murray.docx.pdf - Google Drive Accessed 12/17/2021

because there were very real racialized experiences still taking place. This work of nuanced, Black geographic scholarship makes many connections between the socio-economic realities of Black life historically and today, such as low job opportunities, residential segregation, over policing of Black communities, and refusals to social, economic, and political positioning in the city by creating self-reliant African American institutions.

Ultimately, inquiries into Springfield history from the lens of Black socio-spatial experiences demonstrates "the ways in which local-contextual black geographies hold in them the ability to destabilize places — and times — outside the historically dispossessed body" by illuminating "ideal example[s] of black (or black feminist) political, racial, and spatial opposition" that both expand ruling histories of the space and provide insight into locally specific strategies for targeting systemically racist policies and structures today (McKittrick 2006, 69/116).

"I can't relate to that:" an emerging dominant history

Place holds the potential to shape people's lives in healthy and politically empowering ways (Allen, Lawhon, Pierce 2019; 1004). Unfortunately, it is also often the site of socio-economic and ethnic marginalization, perpetuated by systemic racism, which dislocates minority communities from political systems and stunts their human right to live a decent life in a place with rich historical meaning (Woods 2002). Upon my expedition into learning about Springfield's Black history, I learned of the contributions of many Black Springfieldians who risked their lives defending the community in which I grew up and wondered why these local figures had not been included alongside their high-profile counterparts in the city's narrative on Springfield's abolitionist history. Pertinently, I also wondered if others held similar experiences to my own of routinely learning about local white histories from city-wide discourses, such as

from the public-school curriculum, while being denied the chance to learn in tandem about the Black hues to some of those same narratives. For instance, who else knows about John Brown's abolitionist activity without having learned about the League of Gileadites, Thomas Thomas, Eli Baptist, or William Green? Who, right this very moment, is living in Mason Square, with no knowledge of it being named after one of the greatest US philanthropists of the 19th century?

My investigation into the role of local history in residents' current lives began with a simple question to interrogate civic responsibility for collective knowledge: What do you know about Springfield's history and where did you learn it from? Generally, the overwhelming majority of the interviewees were able to quickly tick off various white cultural historic markers Springfield is most prominently known for. In particular, what emerged was a collective knowing about the following Springfield histories: Springfield's 1) role in the American Revolution due to its siting of the United States Armory and Arsenal at Springfield aka Springfield Armory (1777–1968), 2) it being the birthplace of Basketball (1891) and current site of the Basketball Hall of Fame, and 3) it being a key site of industrialization for countless inventions, particularly in relation to its production of the Indian Motorcycle (1901–1953) and Smith & Wesson firearms (1852–present).[9] When asked how they had learned about these major points in Springfield's past, participants attributed widespread knowing to several city sponsored honorary avenues, such as teaching in the Springfield Public School curriculum, annual city events, and big sculptures coupled with descriptive plaques.

However, there were vast differences in the amount of knowledge known by participants about Springfield's Black abolitionist history, failing to rise to the status of common knowledge

[9] Smith & Wesson will be relocating their headquarters to Tennessee as of Sept. 30 2021 due to increased firearm legislation protections in Massachusetts. Smith & Wesson to relocate headquarters from Mass. to Tenn. (wcvb.com), Accessed 12/17/2021

as other city histories do. Contributors who did have knowledge of various particularities of local Black abolitionist activity largely noted awareness of their local neighborhood history, such as Mason Square being named after Primus Mason, a nineteenth century entrepreneur and real estate investor, and philanthropist what was one of the richest men in the country at the time, as well as the role of St. John's Congregational Church as a key gathering site for Black collective action historically. Interestingly, local Black history was learned from very different avenues than the dominant city narratives noted above, instead being primarily gained through participation in local Black institutions (e.g. NAACP and St. John's Congregation), individual research due to interest in local Black history, by word of mouth from community elders and visiting the PAHMUSA.

Everyone who knew about Springfield's Black abolitionist activity praised the Pan African Museum located in downtown Springfield for its breadth of information on Black history. Remarkably, PAHMUSA was not only brought up by interviewees for being a physical and virtual site to house nuanced Black histories across time, space, and place, but also in regard to the complexities embedded in the longstanding importance of the oral tradition in Black knowledge dissemination. For instance, Leonard W. Underwood, a Black businessman born and raised in Springfield shared:

> Leonard W Underwood: Unfortunately, their founder, LuJuana Hood, passed away a couple years ago. And she was brilliant. And they say, when she passed, unfortunately all the history passed with her. Because some of it was documented but a lot of it wasn't. So they're trying to keep it alive. It's still existing. And it's a great space with information on Sojourner Truth, which they have information on her and the Florence area, Mass.

Anne Richmond, a white woman who moved to Springfield over 20 years ago with her husband and who has since raised two sons in Springfield, as well as past director of the non-profit Gardening the Community which is discussed in Chapter 3, also acknowledges the late LuJuana Hood, stating how "she would tell us all of these stories before she passed…" questioning " how are all those stories getting passed down? I don't know." Anne continued expressing her thoughts on the role of storytelling in passing down local Black knowledge, exemplifying: "I'm not even Black but somebody living in the neighborhood, it's come from my neighbors who have talked about their experiences and the history." Similar thoughts are echoed by Dr. Kamal Ali, an older Black professor in the Ethnic Studies department at Westfield State University, who shares: " I worked a lot with [LuJuana Hood] and she was really a bear on the history of the community." Dr. Ali went on to further share how the majority of the information he knew about local Black histories were learned from "people [his] father knew who came to [their] house," and "just wish[es] that more had been written about it."[10]

In total, three participants, all Black men in their mid-20s, had absolutely no idea their city held any substantive Black history to speak of, questioning why they had not learned about it in school. For instance, living in Springfield his entire life, Demarcus shared how he "never really learned about the Black history of Springfield" and found it "interesting that [he] never learned any of that history in school." Malcolm, who moved to Springfield at eight years old, also indicated that he "never really thought that Springfield really had deep Black history" further inquiring "….Hopefully you can educate me on that." I took the opportunity to share a few key stories of local Black abolitionist activity with the collaborators who had no prior knowledge of their existence, namely the League of Gileadites, Primus Mason, and the buying of

[10] See LuJuana Hood, director of Springfield's Pan African Historical Museum, leaves legacy of dedication to cultural heritage - masslive.com for more coverage on this topic. Accessed 12/17/2021.

Jenny William's freedom; and upon learning, all felt a personal sense of injustice for not having learned the content in school. Malcolm's reaction to learning about Primus Mason emphasizes this point forcefully, stating "that's crazy because Mason Square really got rich history. I know the first game of basketball was played right there, right across the street from McDonalds. That's insane. Little things like that, I didn't know," "that's like withholding information, bullshit...cheating me out of an education." And upon further reflecting on learning about the role of the Springfield Armory in school, simply exclaiming, "I can't relate to that."

Ultimately, knowledge of prominent local Black history (and associated landmarks) varied largely based upon one's personal experiences, failing to rise to status of common knowledge as other city histories do, showing how dominant narratives that push white-washed histories extend to today's racial hierarchies and community consciousness on matters of race. It brings up the question, is the city responsible for teaching racialized histories? Importantly, when asked how the city can rebalance the overarching erasure of the depth and importance of local Black history, participants pointed to similar commemorative practices to those done for the Basketball Hall of Fame, William Pynchon, and the United States Armory and Arsenal at Springfield — like creating highly visible landmarks, encompassing both a large sculpture and descriptive plaque, city-sponsored events, and teaching the curriculum in the Springfield Public School system. Here, we begin to see how the ease of accessing white local histories is not simply an issue of equitability, but also how white histories are reinforcing white supremacist identities and governance power in the city. As seen upon further interrogations into the urgency to the reclamation of emancipatory histories, the overall silencing, erasure, and lack of acknowledgement around the local Black history begin to demonstrate the ways in which the

project of making white history universal is at the roots of making racialized difference a lived reality, both materially and immaterially, in contemporary Springfield.

"That's something we should know:" The urgency to the reclamation of emancipatory histories

Demarcus' remark, "that's something we should know," to learning about local Black abolitionist activities, epitomizes how all fifteen contributors felt in relation to the importance of a more widespread understanding of racial and ethnic histories in Springfield. When asked why the reclamation of emancipatory Black histories was essential, interviewees made many links to contemporary spatial narratives and racial consciousness, collectively asserting various foreseen positive impacts on the Black community. An exchange with Demarcus highlights these ideas:

> Demarcus: I don't think anybody should go around and not know their own heritage, just because something like that is very empowering, and at the same time it's important for us to know exactly what happened and exactly where we came from.
>
> Danielle: So you think that those short snippets I just told you are empowering?
>
> Demarcus: Yes, very much so.
>
> Danielle: And what do you mean by that?
>
> Demarcus (reflecting on just learning about the League of Gileadites): I mean to know that a bunch of... To know that not one slave was ever brought back to slavery and was all freed in Springfield is very... It makes Springfield seem more... I'm trying to think of the word and I can't seem to think of it. Homeland, I guess? It makes Springfield seem more like a community. That's what I was thinking of. For that to happen, for the community to come together like that and for not one to be given back,

> that's very... It sheds a new light on Springfield. Even though Springfield might not be like that now, but at that time, it makes Springfield seem like a better place than it is, or it was a better place than it is currently.
>
> Danielle: Yeah. So what comes to mind, typically, when you hear Springfield?
>
> Demarcus: When we were one of the top five of the most dangerous places to live.
>
> That's the first thing that comes to mind, I would say. Not my family that lives here, not anything of the history. That is what comes to my mind first.

This stark assessment linking the overarching silence of empowering Black histories and figures to contemporary degradative discourses about Springfield continued. Niyah Boyd, a Black woman in her mid-20s who has lived in Springfield her entire life, and co-founder of Peaceful Roots 413, also expressed never learning about her city's history until starting the non-profit in the Summer of 2020 and researching the background on her own. When I asked what it did to her sense of self to now know the racial histories of the place she has lived her entire life, she shared how it gave her "strength because this has been years that Black people have been fighting" and yet:

> Niyah: There's so many great people, so many great things that have come out of Springfield, and yet they make it seem like we're the black sheep of Massachusetts or something.
>
> Danielle: What makes you feel that way?
>
> Niyah: It's so much. It's all of those. It's the politicians, the media, the people surrounding, the surrounding cities, the people even in Springfield.

> It has so much to do with a lot of people because this has been my whole life that I've heard people belittling Springfield.

Both Ryan and Malcolm similarly explained:

> Ryan: Yeah. Springfield was the butt of a lot of jokes growing up. I remember in high school when we would have track meets down there, the joke was try not to get shot going down there and things like that. Like it was the hood, stay away from it.
>
> Malcolm: To be honest with you, I travel a lot so I get different point of views of Springfield. When I go to Vermont, people are like, "Dang, Springfield is ghetto, nasty." It's like you don't even exist...It's like, ew Springfield. Then that's when I'm just Vermont. If I go to New Hampshire or Maine, or Connecticut, it's like, "Oh, Springfield is lit." It's just different.

And finally, Ibrahim asserts:

> Ibrahim: I think that it would change ... maybe people would litter less. Maybe people would want to learn more about how this person was able to ... what did he do to buy the land? How did he save the money at that time and space when Black people really didn't have access to a lot of different things. How did this guy get that money? And if he was able to get enough money to buy a lot of land, what can I do? If he can do that in 1910 or 1920, what can I do in 2020, 2021 to better my family, my situation?
>
> We learn or we know about things in the past, like I was saying before, because that can help us chart our present and our future. So we can't move forward in a way that is going to be productive if we don't understand and change what we know about the past. *We have to take control of the past in order to provide the framework to get us to where we need to go moving forward* (emphasis added).

Collectively, these statements speak to Patricia Hill Collins' assertion that "one key reason that standpoints of oppressed groups are discredited and suppressed by the more powerful is that self-defined standpoints can stimulate oppressed groups to resist their domination" (1989, 749). Coming from this perspective reminds me of one of the primary concerns of my inquiry into black geographies, which is to deepen my understanding of a black sense of place, "where we know from" (McKittrick 2021, 117) to unveil "difficult entanglements of racial encounter" (McKittrick 2011, 949) and "alternative mapping practices" operating in Black Springfield (McKittrick 2011, 949).

In taking another look back at what participants recounted when asked about Black Springfield histories, beyond public abolitionist activities based in resistance, unveils intimate, familial based understandings of historic Black Springfield from the twentieth century. For example, pretty much all of the African American participants whose families have lived in Springfield for several generations recounted Great Migration stories from the South, as well as spoke highly about Mason Square as the longstanding heart of the Black community in Springfield. Kamal Ali recounted so many wonderful, humanizing contours to his knowledge Black Springfield based upon being born and raised in Springfield, such as it being a stop on the Chitlin Circuit for Black musicians and housing a Black Tennis League that played at Forest Park, during a time of racial segregation in many social organizations.

However, there were also descriptions of many socio-economic struggles by past family members, such as their being inequality in the job sector and being disallowed from the professional sector and unionized positions, delegating Black people to manual jobs. This lens of Black Springfield resident socio-economic struggles throughout the twentieth century is explored at length in parts 1 and 2 of "Black Springfield: A Historical Study" by Imani Kazini (1977,

2008). Interviewees also knew a lot about how "the process of urban renewal and highway construction set in motion a vicious cycle" for existing "minority neighborhoods" (Lipsitz 1995, 374–75), such as the Black community being moved out of downtown Springfield to 'up on the hill' in Mason Square, as well as how White flight led to the residential racial segregation and disinvestment of Mason Square still seen today. Thus, examining participant understandings of local black history from a lens of black interior expressions and not solely for knowledge of overt Black abolitionist activity working to make the city a safe haven, showcase how "historical and contemporary black geographies surface and centralize the notion that black diaspora populations have told and are telling how their surroundings have shaped their lives" (2006, xxi).

Final remarks

This place has hidden depth. From understanding what history is known, and how, amongst collaborators, I derived the following pertaining to Springfield history:

1. Collective knowledge of dominant white histories gained from city-wide commemorative practices
2. Feelings of loss for not having been taught about Black abolitionist city histories
3. Socio-economic and nostalgic connections between residents and local Black heritage
4. Archival and creative refusals to claim space in city discourses and built environments

Ultimately, my inquiry into historical Black Springfield demonstrates McKittrick's assertion that societal understandings of blackness can be deepened by studying "the geographic relationship between past and the present racial geographies" because they illuminate how current discourses and mapping practices naturalize racial difference by "rendering body-space integral to the production of space" (McKittrick 2006, xxvii). This is essential for understanding how the "new set of concerns for black subjects" relate to the "material and conceptual possibilities geography offers" both "beyond and through what is considered the given, knowable, and profitable

perimeters of space and place" (McKittrick, 2006, xxvii). McKittrick's theoretical assertion advocating for temporal and spatial place-based analyses focused on unveiling black geographies is empirically substantiated by Ibrahim's definitive claim about the necessity of "understanding the source of white supremacy" historically and the kind of political struggles operating in contemporary Springfield:

> Ibrahim: But definitely from a grassroots perspective, we need to have an understanding of the history of how we got here as a country to understand what are the remedies for dealing with racism in terms of our personal spaces, as well as the organizational stuff that can come up.

In the end, an exploration of Black Springfield demonstrates how a counter story not only provides access to one's full history, but also insight on place-based struggles for humanity. There are a number of salient connections between socio-spatial struggles by past and present local Black communities, namely residential segregation and severe economic inequality underpinned by job scarcity, that showcase embedded racialized practices of domination working to maintain hierarchies of difference in Springfield.

Ch. 3 Blackness, class, and space in contemporary Springfield

ODE TO SPRINGFIELD: A poem by Danielle Brown

Oh Springfield
The way you protest
Brings me joy
And such delight

The political energy
A sign of human care
We have such a rich abolitionist history
And you remind us now that this hard time is here

Mobilizations by the community
To organize a Black Lives Matter protest
Students of the high schools
Your dedication to this cause makes my heart fly

To fight for the causes pertaining to Black Americans
The sense of racial consciousness remains in the air
I am so honored to be from such a driven city
In the struggle for racial equity, I strongly believe our collective actions will lead us there

(Written in response to the BLM Protest in Springfield, Ma on June 3, 2020. The initial version is published in Springfield's local African American community news magazine, the Af-Am Point of View, Sept. 1, 2020)

The Summer and Autumn of 2020 were a time like no other I have experienced in my twenty-four years of living as a Black woman in the United States of America. I spoke with my contributors while there were mass protests across the globe collectively asserting that Black Lives Matter, and while a global pandemic was occurring that further aggravated existing resource deprivation within Black and brown communities. Many of their stories touched upon the lived realities of racial capitalism as a key organizing principle in their daily negations of social structures in Springfield long before the pandemic ever began, substantiating the importance of studying "new forms" of "Black opposition to domination" from the perspective of those most materially impacted by the nexus of racism and social ideology (Robinson 1983,

5). Thus, keeping with my analytical goal to rewrite "the material landscape itself, as it is produced by the black subject" "into black, and arguably human, existence" my analysis of contemporary Black Springfield focuses on understanding individual and collective negations of, and resistance to, the racialized landscape of the city, with a focus on politicizing and humanizing the interior and exterior facets of Black life (McKittrick 2006, 5).

This insertion into the racialized realities of so many different folks within the Black community, from participants to my own newfound hypervisibility when navigating the world, and finally the onslaught of images depicting the loss of Black life from media outlets, forced me to understand the depth of Black existence in a way that I had not fully grasped before. In many ways, taking part in contemporary social justice movements from a number of different social positionings (i.e., Black woman, researcher, community member) brought "to the surface" the "political and analytical importance" of "freedom and love" as "revolutionary ideas available to us" when seeking to "understand the collective desires of people in motion" (Kelley 2002; 11–12). While I have learned about past Black liberation movements throughout the twentieth century, such as Garveyism, Civil Rights, and Black Panthers (Bledsoe and Wright 2019), this experience of learning from participants about their daily work for full Black personhood substantiates the grand importance of rigorously studying the nexus of interior and exterior Black worlds for fuller pictures of their social realities.

If there is one thing that I garnered from my inquiry into Black Springfield, it is that Black matters are indeed spatial matters (McKittrick 2006, xii), and diverse spaces are not a stand in for racially inclusive spaces. In general, contributors' experiences unraveled racially salient encounters with their surrounding geographies along three dimensions: first, "the physical landscape and infrastructures," second, "geographic imaginations," which McKittrick defines as

"the practice of mapping, exploring, and seeing" and third, "social relations in and across space" (2006, xiii). Yet, there were times in speaking with each of them when I was transported into joyous, nostalgic, imaginative spaces that were simply beautiful reflections of their time living in Springfield.

I begin by investigating what discourses are circulating in Springfield today by understanding what scripts contributors bump up against (i.e. token, criminal) and their subsequent resistance practices (i.e. exceptional ability to articulate beyond binary logic systems, Black mentorship, collective organizing). Here, rather than engaging in a damage centered analysis that primarily focuses on retelling various trauma entangled stories, I spend the majority of my time describing how contributors individually and collectively define and assert their personhood as more than these restrictive tropes in Springfield. I end the section focused on interviewee perceptions of their personal lives in Springfield with a metaphoric synthesis (i.e. "crabs in a barrel" & "not wanting a seat at the table") and discussion of collective assertions that Springfield is their home.

The second part of Chapter 3 highlights recent projects by locals working to re-envision relationships of race and class through Black and brown self-determination movements: Peaceful Roots 413, Gardening the Community, Preacher Man Mural. Notably, the intentions behind all of the Black placemaking projects here are told by the leaders of the projects themselves, with each of them accentuating the importance of self-definition through self-reliance when navigating neoliberal bureaucracy.

Ultimately, the information gained from 14 semi-structured interviews (and 1 written inquiry) show an inextricable link between race, gender, and class positions for Springfield's Black residents when navigating "contemporary struggles against practices of domination and

the *difficult entanglements of racial encounter*" (McKittrick 2011, 949). A look at these accounts of individual and collective resistance to prevailing racial discourses in Springfield demonstrates how "inequality [is] blazoned into the geographical landscape...for certain socially determined ends" predominantly "through economic, ideological, social, and political processes that see and position the racial-sexual body within what seem like predetermined, or appropriate, places and assume that this arrangement is commonsensical" (McKittrick 2006, 6,xv). Ultimately, I argue that an intersectional analysis of Black Springfield, analytically centering "a black sense of place" (McKittrick 2011) and "quiet" (Quashie 2012), unveils the importance of anti-black capitalist discourses in hierarchically structuring how people are positioned in Springfield, as well as how individual and collective assertions of refusal are discursively and materially wielded to push back against status quo logic systems for the betterment of the Black community. This tension and nexus between the black experience and systemic oppression, abundance and lack, struggle, resistance and refusal, is what my thesis examines in contemporary Springfield, Massachusetts.

Navigating and resisting racial tropes

> The dead spaces are inextricably linked to the dehumanizing scripts — they require one another: one cannot have (and dispose of) the welfare queen without (loathing and pushing her out of) the objectionable infrastructures that surround her" (McKittrick 2021, 11)

Oftentimes, dominant narratives circulating amongst the media, education sector, public policy, and pop culture, proliferate damaging discourses in relation to Black people and the respective spaces they call home (Cacho 2012). What emerges are master narratives containing monolithic tropes about Black life (e.g., mammy, jezebel, strong Black woman, thug, welfare queen, whore, token) and places of living (e.g. ghetto, crime ridden, valueless) that flatten blackness into controlled images lacking the nuance and depth that truly encapsulates the

spectrum of Black representations possible in the world (Cohen 1997; Collins 1986). Worse, these all-encompassing anti-black narratives have real societal implications, oftentimes depriving Black people and their respective homes of the dignity of self-definition and equitable living conditions. In an anti-black economy focused world (i.e. capitalist and neoliberal), the lived realities of communities of color faced by racism have shown to be a precursor for premature death (Gilmore 2007). Here, when I refer to the relationship between "racism" and "premature death," I am speaking to Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism as "the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore 2007, 247). Further, decolonial theory shows us how these damage focused narrations "play by the rules of the settler-colonial gaze" in order to "satisfy the morbid curiosity derived from settler colonialism's preoccupation with pain" (Tuck & Yang 2018, 19). There are many place-based investigations into the inequitable impacts of White supremacist, Eurocentric paradigms on marginalized communities that use frameworks of racial capitalism (Gilmore 2007; Melamed 2015; Robinson 2005) and de- and post-coloniality (Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2017) to illuminate the material consequences of, and everyday resistance strategies to, systemically racist structures (Lipsitz 1995).

Negotiating Springfield

Now in his thirties, Leonard Underwood's detailing of his paradoxical experience as a page worker in his late teens at the Sixteen Acres library encompasses the complex reality of living in Springfield perfectly. When asked about racialized experiences growing up in the city, Leonard described excitement about his work and feelings of acceptance by the boss that hired him and many of the clerks (some of which were African-American), and yet could not help but notice that some of the librarians "weren't nice and friendly" to the "black boy;" evoking their

white privilege with statements like "'Oh, you go to almost in college,'" with "almost in college" referring to nearby American International College. Leonard continues:

> Leonard Underwood: And honestly, though, I think part of it was that I was really good at my job and they really couldn't say anything bad about me. And so, I think because they're racist and because I was doing a good job and they couldn't say, "Oh, you're late." I was really efficient. I would leave work early because I was done with my work. There was really nothing else I could do. So there was a lot of things going on.
>
> And then also, now that I'm older, *I realized that it wasn't me, it was them, that they weren't comfortable with themselves.* And they probably were faced with issues that were bigger than me and had nothing to do with me.
>
> *And that's probably veering off from your question. But I guess that goes with growing up Black in Springfield where there's all types of nuances that we're faced with* (emphasis added).

Succinctly capturing the reality of living with a racialized positioning in Springfield, Massachusetts, Leonard's experience demonstrates how being Black comes with having to negotiate not always having to be explicitly told you are not allowed in certain public and private spaces; sometimes it is just a feeling, an epiphany, an understanding, a long over-extended sentiment of being othered, misunderstood, not good enough, unwelcome. However, his ability to contextualize the duality of his experience into one in which his humanity is kept intact, by asserting his enjoyment for the overall library experience and distancing himself from his white colleagues internalized racism, speaks to bell hooks' conceptualization of decolonization as a key factor in the Black community's ability to self-define and prosper in a Eurocentric society. Specifically, bell hooks (2015) asserts:

> We have resisted continued devaluation by countering the dominant stereotypes about us that prevail in white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy by decolonizing our minds. Here decolonization refers to breaking with the ways our reality is defined and shaped by the dominant culture and asserting our understanding of that reality, of our own experience. (Sisters of the Yam, ix)

Pointedly, two contributors' explanations of the workings of Springfield demonstrate the necessity of a decolonization framework when seeking to understand the operation of contemporary black geographies which, McKittrick "identif[ies] as 'the terrain of political struggle itself,' *where* the imperative of a perspective of struggle takes place," as an on the ground phenomenon (McKittrick 2006, 6). First, Dr. Kamal explains:

> Dr. Kamal Ali: To bring it down home, to me it's just commonsensical. It's like fish that are swimming in a current. You know, you're in a current and the current is taking you wherever you have to go. If you don't do anything at all, the current will take you ... You can lie on your belly at the beach in Martha's Vineyard, you'll go out to sea. The current will take you out to sea.
>
> Well that current is at work. And if that *current is racism, just the natural racism*, and you don't even know it because it's taking you wherever you have to ... *But white people are fluent with the current. We have to swim against that current. It's a natural part of our lives every day.* We're confronted with this reality of race in a racialized country (emphasis added).

And secondly, Ibrahim Ali shares how:

> Ibrahim Ali: We've learned how to navigate these invisible structures or things that *prevent positive motion taking place hindrance free*. There's always something that's going to hinder a positive idea, whether it be money, whether it be laws, et cetera, et cetera. And so, it becomes

> completely like part of your planning process in terms of making something happen.
>
> You have to navigate the way that the city, for lack of a better word, works. And when I say that, I don't mean that it works officially, I'm saying that in the sense that things are, I don't want to say corrupt, *but there are invisible walls that are very much walls that you have to know how to navigate in order to get either around them, over them, under them, or through them* (emphasis added).

Here, father and son, interviewed separately, each evoke McKittrick's concepts of "traditional geographies" and "transparent space" (2006) when detailing how whiteness is mapped onto city governments, infrastructures and landscapes, creating very real invisible barriers for Black people to exercise upward mobility like their white counterparts. As we see upon further engagement with participants' contemporary socio-spatial navigation of Springfield in Chapter 3, while "the experiences of members of minority groups are not interchangeable," "the possessive investment in whiteness always affects individual and group life chances and opportunities" (Lipsitz 1995, 383).

Class

As bell hooks asserts, "collective unmasking is an important act of resistance" against prevailing, dehumanizing scripts about Black life (hooks 2015, 16). Importantly, the Black socio-spatial experiences of collaborators that emerged while interviewing point to both class and race as essential to their negotiation of Springfield.

Malcolm's experience living in the city as a young, Black man exemplifies the way in which race and class are hierarchically fluid categories depending on where one is located in the city. When asked about the role race plays in his daily life, Malcolm explains:

> Malcolm: It's more on class, more than race per se. It doesn't really start to get about race until you start getting on the outskirts, like Forest Park and all that stuff. When you're in the inner city it's more class, more like wealth, how much you make, where you land in the social status. That's inner city Springfield.

Upon further questioning on how class and social status impact his feelings of belonging, he shares:

> Malcolm: The mayor, police commissioner. Yo, a whole lot of them. It's really just people like employment companies. Those are the people ... Oh my gosh. Those are the people that make you feel excluded. But everybody else, like the common people, the ones that you see everyday are the ones that you feel the acceptance from.

Here, Malcolm makes it clear that he feels very ostracized by city officials. Interestingly, the nuance of the Black experience is shown when Malcom's opinion on the role of social status in Black well-being is placed in conversation with Black entrepreneur Leonard Underwood, who speaks to how "knowing the key players is critical" to garnering "human resources" and "leveling up." The juxtaposition found between Malcolm and Leonard's experiences as Black men are important to highlight because they signify the range of comfortability with bureaucratic interactions for differently positioned Black people across class lines.

The token script

At some point in the conversation, several of the participants described their everyday racialized experience of navigating their social status as feeling like a token (or a part of a quota) or a criminal — two dominant controlling images attached to Black life. Yet, there were also clear resistance practices wielded in an effort to overcome and self-define beyond said tropes, speaking to "the necessity for developing an understanding of class position of Black [people]

who are generally marginal in the labor force, while at this particular time some of us are temporarily viewed as doubly desirable tokens at white-collar and professional levels" (Combahee River Collective 1977, 20).

For instance, Rosemary Tracy Woods, owner of Art of the Soul Gallery and a Black transplant from Philly to the area over 40 years ago, describes a women's event she attended where diversity and inclusion were on the agenda:

> Rosemary Tracy Woods: So I looked at that and I'm looking around the room, this nice big room, and I start lifting up the tablecloths, looking under the tables, and looking around, and they say, "Oh, Tracy. What happened? You drop your keys? You looking for something?" I said, "You damn right I'm looking for something. You talking about Women at Work, diversity inclusion. Where are the black women?"

While Rosemary cannot control when other groups choose not to include a diverse group of participants, she did decide to walk away from the event detailed above, telling them to let her know when there are actually women of color in the room. Additionally, she leverages her own gallery business as a steppingstone for artists of color in Springfield, always providing their names for city sponsored events and giving them a creative home. As Ryan explains,

> Ryan: It was definitely different because I had never had any sort of gallery representation before. I had been showing in coffee shops and the lobbies of office buildings but never ... It was definitely a step up professionally. I had a lot to learn for the first time but it's been ... It's not been as difficult as it could have been because Rosemary has been there for me every step of the way.

Like Rosemary, Leonard is a fellow Black business person who has also felt tokenized before in the white professional world, stating "oftentimes, I'm like, I feel like I'm just a quota." While he

is “thankful for the corporate world,” he expressed overwhelming gratitude to the local Black community who “have been [his] backbone for all of [his] business” since he started his photography business at 20 years old:

> Leonard: So I'm thankful for the Black community because they're the ones that hired me, had hired me religiously for everything across the board. But there are White, I do have some White clients as well that are consistent and not just the corporate stuff but for the personal things too. And I'm not complaining, just sharing the truth.

In sharing his truth, Leonard also went on to explain how he “enjoy[s] mentoring businesses as well” to help others who have a passion “to start their own merch line or get started in photography.” Both Rosemary and Leonard’s ability to give back to their community illustrates how “tokenism in education and employment” at times can be wielded to “effectively fight out oppression” (Combahee River Collective 1977, 18).

Upon inquiring further on his motivation for “pro bono providing [his] expertise,” he explains, “I guess you could say I'm a dreamer. I like shooting high or just aiming for things that are larger than I am. I've done skydiving. I'm not sure if you knew, but I was on Wheel of Fortune a couple of years ago. I kind of like doing things that are out of the box or unique.” Leonard continued to share how the inspiration for his sock line, Upscale Socks, also stemmed from “ having a dream six years ago that [he] owned a sock line.” To me, these nostalgic wanderings, taking me on a journey to various dreams Leonard has been able to reach, is a wonderful depiction of multifaceted, Black humanity in action because it is simply predicated on his own thirst for adventure, and is not entrenched in a public resistance to whiteness.

The criminal script

Sadly, the idea of Black people being criminalized is a story we have all heard too many times. There were many general comments that provided insight into the stark reality of police violence in Springfield. City Counselor, Tracye Whitfield, shares her heartfelt thoughts on the subject matter:

> Tracye Whitfield: People think, "Oh, we don't have that level of hate in the city of Springfield." We do. I experienced police kill my godson. I experienced police kill my classmates that I was close to in the City of Springfield. These things happen everywhere and Springfield is not the exception.

Niyah was also sure to point out how the "FBI is investigating the police commissioner[11]" and "the police department in Springfield is really going through it" since "they pushed so much under the radar, and now it's coming out;" exclaiming, "and it's just like, "Yes, finally!"

As Ibrahim asserts:

> Ibrahim: I don't know any Black person that doesn't have any stories of being even followed by the police, either harassed by the police, sometimes beaten by the police. That was a common thing in my understanding of being a Black man since a baby. There was never no time where I didn't know about how the police treated Black men or Black people generally speaking, that there was never no moment where I could be like, "Yeah, there was this period of time where everything was all good. I really felt secure if the police were around." I've never felt that in my life.

[11] Justice Department Announces Findings of Investigation into Narcotics Bureau of Springfield, Massachusetts Police Department: Investigative Report, Accessed December 17, 2021.

One generation older, Ibrahim's father, Dr. Kamal Ali states similarly on his upbringing in Springfield that, "cops would routinely brutalize us when we were kids."

While interviewing, I found that many of the young Black men held very similar perceptions as Ibrahim and Dr. Ali's described above, of feeling surveilled and criminalized by local law enforcement. In many ways, their sentiments echo Rashad Shabazz's (2015) inquiry into how blackness is spatialized in Chicago via surveillance, policing and architectures of confinement. Malcolm, for example, expressed frustration from "the police bullying people around here" even when at your own house, sharing how you may have "run ins with the police" even while standing in your own driveway. Devin also expressed frustration, almost awe struck, when accounting an experience walking home from school in elementary school and the cops "picked [him] up and they brought [him] home."

In discussing how they negotiate racialized social structures and maintain their safety, the male participants all spoke to similar external resistance practices, namely being mindful of where you are and who you are around. As Malcolm explains, you have to be careful of your "choice of friends and your choice of activities every day" to ensure you don't "get pulled into" things like "drugs, violence, and gangs." Demarcus states directly, "You don't want to be caught up at the wrong time, wrong place at the wrong time." And similarly, by Devin, that while "it can be safe" it is also true that "sometimes stuff just happens. It all depends on your perspective of the city….But, sometimes trouble finds you...Like I said before, I been seeing people dying."

Upon inquiries into their personal perceptions of Springfield as a violent city, an interior resistance pattern emerged of a keen ability to understand the duality of human existence. Malcolm's thoughts were simply that Springfield "has its pros and cons, like every other city has its pros and cons." Devin remarked on the way, "somebody will make a little small joke like you

don't get robbed, or I don't want to get robbed, or something like that," and while he feels "it's an appropriate fear though, because it does happen" he also know for sure "that's not the only stuff that happens. A lot of good things happen here, too."

My next question on the topic of crime in Springfield sought to understand participants' opinions on why some people may choose to participate in various criminal activities in the first place. In response to my question Devin further states:

> Devin: Because sometimes they feel like that's what they have to do, or that's like the only ... That's the only way they're going to eat, because the system don't care about us and the jobs don't hire, and if you have like a family, you've got to make decision. Do you let your family starve or you've got to find some way to provide. And sometimes, people turn to robbing people or selling drugs or whatever they feel they have to do to get by at that time, or whatever they have to do.

Upon my asking his thoughts on the accessibility of the job market, Devin provided more nuance, stating, "But, I feel like they don't give them enough opportunity, maybe because people don't have enough experience on their resumes. But how are they going to get experience if they don't get chances?" A conversation detailed below with Malcom illuminates further nuance to the realities of survival in urban cities with few job opportunities. I depict this dialogue at length because it provides essential insight to a gravely important subject matter:

> Malcolm: Why do people turn to that life? Wait, when you say that life, what do you mean? Just the gang life, because you know that life includes many things, like dealing drugs or just-
>
> Danielle: It does. You explain it to me.
>
> Malcolm: All right, so let's say dealing drugs.

Danielle: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Malcolm: People are into dealing drugs because right now there's not the opportunity for them to go make the money that they need. Right now the pandemic is hitting and people aren't working as much as they used to. The hours are cut. The rent's got to be paid. The bills still got to be paid, so they go out of their way to get into unnecessary things to make some money.

Danielle: Yeah.

Malcolm: Really. Then the whole gang, to me, I feel as though me myself, I would never join a gang because I would never die for somebody that I never came out that same womb from. It's more like a brotherhood. It's people around you that genuinely have love for you, that genuinely care. It's like a support system that you don't get outside your house. You have a support system inside your house, but you also need a support system outside your house, and that's what the gangs provide really.

Danielle: So in your opinion, a lot of the people who join gangs, it's not that they don't have support in their house. They're lacking support outside of their house?

Malcolm: Yeah.

Danielle: What support are they lacking outside of their house?

Malcolm: Again, employment opportunities.

Danielle: Yeah. You were talking a lot about right now with the pandemic. Was there this same lack of job opportunity before the pandemic hit?

Malcolm: Yeah. I'm going to be honest, yeah.

Danielle: In what way?

> Malcolm: In Springfield, there's not really many job opportunities in Springfield really. The three main employers in Springfield are Smith & Wesson, Mass Mutual and ... what was the other company, Big Y and CRC, the new train company that came over. Those are high paying jobs. In those jobs, it's harder to keep those jobs because they're constantly trying to save money, especially with this pandemic and in the market that they're in. So they're constantly having to hire temp employees to make up for their full-time employees that they're not trying to pay, so people lose their jobs. Full-time employees lose their jobs.
>
> Malcolm: Then it's harder to get a job in Springfield because all the other jobs are minimum wage paying jobs. With the casino in Springfield, the price of living is going up, so people have to go outside of Springfield to go get a job. I worked all the way in Farmington, Connecticut once.
>
> Danielle: So a lot of people now have to find employment outside of Springfield.
>
> Malcolm: Yeah.

Here, Malcolm points to a number of processes at play that make it difficult for Black people to find adequate employment and may potentially lead someone into illegal means of survival, including an overall lack of full time jobs willing to hire young Black folks, resulting in them having to go for local, low-wage, temporary work positions or find a full time position outside of the city (i.e. spatial mismatch, Fernandez 2004).

Mass Mutual

One example of a profession a number of participants used as an ideal example of a job seen as out of reach by many youth of color in the city, and thus offering an expression of race and class dynamics at play, is MassMutual, a Fortune 500 Insurance company, located in

Springfield. Pointedly, participants discussed the perceived lack of access in more of a metaphysical sense, explaining how many youth would never think of ever stepping foot in the building, let alone actually take seriously ever working there. Ibrahim really takes on this perspective, exclaiming:

> Ibrahim: Those are just opportunities that people are just not seeing. And if they're not seeing it, if it's not something that you can perceive in your mind, if you can't even dream about it, you're not going to try to make that dream a reality. If you can't even perceive something as being viable, you're not going to even, in most cases, most people wouldn't even try.

Leonard similarly connected the lack of perceived job opportunities in white collar or local government by the Black community to societal discourses surrounding who is worthy and valuable across racial and ethnic groups, stating:

> Leonard: So there's a lot of history that is systemic. And it's part of the reason why we probably don't see it as an opportunity. "Well, oh, I can't work at City Hall, or I can't work at this big marble building at Mass Mutual. They're not going to hire me." Or, "Oh, it's too complicated. There's too many interviews." And so they talk themselves out of these opportunities, not knowing that they're just as qualified as a white person or the Jewish one, as I mentioned earlier, who's told at a young age, "You can do it. You're capable of this."

Tiffany Porter, a Black entrepreneur, teacher, community organizer, and holder of a couple of bachelor's and master's degrees, was born in nearby Hartford and moved to Springfield when she was seven. Poignantly, she shares her experience of attending nearby Science Tech, a high school located in Springfield, saying how "there are thousands of students who went to school across the street [from Mass Mutual] and don't even know what the inside of the front security room looks like." Here, she speaks of a common practice within the Springfield Public School

system, one that I have experienced myself, which is to allow high merit students on professional development school trips, resulting in some — but not all — students getting access to professional buildings like Mass Mutual at an early age. The social and economic ideological weight of the space on potential job opportunities, aiding in an inequitable structured landscape across racial lines, is why Mass Mutual epitomizes McKittrick's conceptualization of "transparent space" in *Demonic Grounds* (2006).

Section wrap-up

Generally, all the participant experiences detailed above speak to Dr. Kamal Ali's commentary that microaggressions are a common racial experience for people of color in Springfield. Specifically, Dr. Kamal Ali asserts:

> Dr Kamal Ali: So there are degrees of segregation and racism and violence perpetrated on people of color but there are what we call macro-aggressions, which would sort of be lynching, I suspect, or being arrested for loitering and spending three years in jail. And there are microaggressions, which are the fact when I go into a store right now, I feel a sense that people are watching me. You know? That's still an aggressive behavior. Going for job interviews, getting the feeling that certain places when I was a kid up here, a feeling that I'm not going to get this job, I can tell by their attitude. Or going to the doctor.
>
> Those subtleties are a part of what I would call the socialization process that Black people go through in order to get along in a society, to meet people, to maybe better their chances at employment or opportunities for school. I mean, we do all that stuff.

Dr. Kamal Ali continues on sharing how he has a "distinct advantage" by knowing both white and Black people's "dialects." Collectively, their experiences speak to how liberal individualism

is one of the mechanisms White Supremacy uses to categorize and mark certain groups on a valuation hierarchy, creating a spectrum to the way people across race and class make sense of the world through embedding the "possessive investment in whiteness" into all aspects of their reality, so that no one can negotiate their surroundings without bumping up against racial capitalist practices and controlling images (Lipsitz 1995).

Metaphoric synthesis: crabs in a barrel, a seat at the table

It is what it is: A poem by Danielle Brown

Learning friend vs. foe,
where to come and where to go

is not a choice, it's essential business,
for the holders of a Black existence

Ultimately, a number of contributors used the same metaphors in their efforts to succinctly epitomize their perceptions of the race and class dynamics operating in Springfield, namely "crabs in a barrel" and "not a seat at the table."

Crabs in a barrel

For instance, Ibrahim clearly gets across the sense of relative deprivation felt by the community stating, "It's just to be another crab in a barrel, just kind of jumping on each other, trying to get at these crumbs doesn't really make any sense." Leonard also described a similar sentiment when describing his experience of helping a friend in their job pursuit when he says, "it just took me being willing to do that. And so many times, I think we see crabs in the barrel and people not wanting to support one another." This sense of desperation due to a lack of economic resources echoed throughout my interviews.

Niyah paints a stark picture of what reality is like "living in Springfield as a Black person or a person of color," describing it as "always hav[ing] a side hustle." She continues:

> Niyah: You have to be creative and strategic about surviving. Unfortunately, a lot of us out here, we're not worried about living, we're trying to survive. We don't have the money to... It's not easy for us to pay rent, pay for childcare, different things, food.

Here, the process of relative deprivation taking place in the city is shown by residents stating clearly that it is hard to make ends meet when it comes to their basic needs. Even more important to examine is what manifests in a community when people feel like "crabs in a barrel." As bell hooks asserts, it is important to study intra-racial dynamics to truly deepen understanding of the Black experience and disrupt "the notion that racism affects us all in equal ways" (2000, 8). Generally, there were collective sentiments of standoffishness within their own communities because of the community being on edge due to socio-economic conditions and general discourse of the Black male being a threat. Many shared stories of growing up and feeling like there was a greater sense of community before, now believing that people will barely "even look your way" or "greet each other."

Not a seat at the table

However, there were sentiments of refusal to existing paradigms scattered all over my discussions with participants, which is epitomized in the other metaphor that popped up more than once, "not a seat at the table." As Rosemary Tracy Woods asserts:

> Rosemary: But one house, one people. Listen, honey, they ain't talking about us. They talking about, "You're at the table." "Sitting at the table" means just that. "Come, eat, watch your manners, and after dinner, get your black ass up and go home." That's what they mean, "being at the table." They don't mean it for us. Those terms are not for us. That's idealistic.

And Niyah goes on similarly:

> Niyah: The only reason why we are minorities is because we don't have the "seat at the table". But it's at the point now, I don't even want a seat at the table. I'd rather just have a seat in my own house but not necessarily at that table, if you know what I mean.

When placed in dialogue, the metaphors of "a crab in a barrel" and "not a seat at the table" provide a glimpse into a collective black interior expression of vulnerability, fear, and neglect, that is predicated on the Black community's overarching lack of access to equitable resources and opportunities in the city, which is substantiated by the city's high poverty rate at 26.9% in 2019, versus the United States estimate in 2019 of 11.4%, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau.[12] However, simultaneously, there are assertions of refusal to assimilate into the very structures that have denied Black access to their collective means of survival; refusals that lead to folks embarking on public acts of resistance in an effort to ensure their communities collective social, economic, and political well-being, as shown in the analysis of community based solutions below.

Refusal as resistance: We assert, Springfield is our home!

When asked, "what does Springfield mean to you?," all of the collaborators asserted matter-of-factly that Springfield is, and will always be, their home, their foundation, their place of rootedness (Fullilove 2004), as well as expressed nostalgic wanderings for the people, spaces, and experiences that makes the city so special. In doing so, they are not only "challenging the political knowledge-validation process that has resulted in externally-defined, stereotypical images" of blackness, but they are also "stress[ing] the content of Black [people's] self-definitions" through self-validated, authentic expressions of blackness (Collins 1986, 106).

[12] U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Springfield city, Massachusetts; United States, Accessed 12/17/2021

Simply listing, without manipulation, some of the ways contributors expressed what Black Springfield means to them is to maintain their essence of Black humanity:

> Malcolm: But my overall experience with Springfield is I love Springfield. I ain't leaving this shit.
>
> Ibrahim: I think of the people and the places that I would go to coming up and some of the things that happened in those houses, in those places. hanging out with the cousins at Aunt's house.
>
> Leonard: A firm foundation. I'll say a firm foundation or a solid foundation. I'm deeply rooted here. And so if I have to be uprooted and somewhere like San Diego, then I'll have to find my footing and a lot of navigating around and looking around and figuring out.
>
> Dr. Kamal Ali: I would do it all over again. The greatest memories in my life occurred right here in Springfield. I'm telling you. So I have to say that my roots are here and I'm very proud of that.

And lastly, in dialogue:

> Devin: It means like home.
>
> Danielle: Home?
>
> Devin: I mean I was born here. A lot of my first stuff happened here. I got my first car here, I went to my first elementary school. I went here all the way through high school.
>
> Danielle: So what are some of your happiest moments in Springfield?
>
> Devin: Meeting my brothers, because a couple of my brothers I didn't meet until three years ago...then we met, and we've been cool ever since. And I met my sister too at the same time, one of my sisters.
>
> Driving my first car. Driving to school that first day. I woke up and I drove to school. I was like yeah, felt like the man. No more walking to the school, taking the bus.

I remember my first day driving to school too...what a memory….such a universal experience it is to drive your first car to school and feel like a champ, isn't it.

Community based solutions: a snapshot of three black placemaking projects

> Niyah: When I think of Black Springfield, there's so many words that come to mind. I think we're amazing, we're innovative, we're creative, we're motivated. What else are we? We're entrepreneurs, we're hustlers, we're some of everything.

Black placemaking encompasses the “dialectical relationship between structure and agency, between domination and resistance” when “urban black Americans create sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance” (Hunter et al. 2016, 33,32). My inquiry into black placemaking in Springfield, Massachusetts sought to understand participants' motivations and intentions for creating community based solutions targeted at reclaiming Black and brown ownership of space, narratives, and histories through play, celebration, and radical assertions of Black humanity. As I detail below, Black placemaking projects are self-reliant, reactive responses to inequitable social, economic, cultural, and political conditions that often bump up against traditional geographies and transparent space. In one way or another, all of the participants who spoke about creating life-affirming cultural spaces detailed the complexities and struggles of authentic Black placemaking in a country ruled by white, capitalist logic systems predicated on Black suffering, marginalization, inferiority, and violence. Oftentimes, a need to negotiate bureaucratic processes, gain funding, and/or dispel anti-black discourses, came up as a primary barrier to ownership. Still, through wielding a politics of refusal, they were able to make urgent, loving, places for people to laugh and collectively reminisce in culture, showing us what it really takes for Black control over narratives and space.

Interestingly, key to many of the Black placemaking projects in Springfield are the use of murals as a self-defined, material expression of Black humanity. As Britt explains, “murals bring communities together” and over time once there is “a series of murals that [go] up, that are depicting diverse people and perspective and experience, it shifts the sense of ownership in public space.” Britt continues to describe how art can be used as a collective pushback against reductionist narrative, stating “... it's like putting a stake in the ground. You know what I'm saying, like we're here. We're here too. We've always been here, we're still here.” To me, this

perspective provides an alternative look at the politics behind Black spatial aesthetics and neoliberal structuring of space from the lens of a Black community still struggling to gain economic power and forms of material ownership in their places of living (Summers 2019).

Preacher Man mural

Preacher Man was a well-known Black resident in Springfield whose death left a mark on the city. He was an elderly panhandler by the time of his passing, who often was seen giving out bible verses near State Street. Upon the community's frequent inquiring about ways to commemorate his legacy, Andrew Johnson, Senior Vice President of the Urban League of Springfield, as well as president of the Springfield Cultural Council, pushed to have a mural created of Preacher Man, which can be found at The American International College (AIC). Andrew shares how he moved to Springfield as a young man from the South upon receiving a full ride to AIC and falling in love with the plethora of opportunities available to him up North. Andrew went on to explain how there was some pushback against the Preacher Man mural from "people who were not of this community, but outside of the community, who were indicating that, 'Why are you going to have a criminal on the wall.'" As Andrew explains, rather than feeding the media frenzy they decided to "let it settle down," asserting that the Preacher Man is a part of the community forever. He continues:

> Andrew: It was an outstanding project. People came by, they blew their horns. They stopped. They got out of their cars to take pictures in front of the mural. It was just an awesome experience. I think Britt captured some of that on video. We haven't heard anything since. I think, initially, I don't care who we would have put up on the mural, they would have had some kind of pushback. *If we had put Martin Luther King, people would have been saying something. We indicated that this was our selection. That's how we got it up there.* (emphasis added)

Here, we see how Black communities are unable to escape restrictive, dehumanizing scripts about Black life, yet still advocating for life-affirming, self-defined Black images based upon their own experiences. I also love that they emphasized the community gathering to honor the mural with pictures and car horns because it speaks to the element of celebrating blackness within the definition of black placemaking. The story surrounding the Preacher Man mural touches me personally because I have many recollections of him myself having grown up in Springfield. My sentiments are echoed by Demarcus when asked about positive memories of Springfield, exclaiming:

> Demarcus: I remember one day [while attending a nearby college], I had a conversation and they brought up that Preacher Man had passed away. I think you know who Preacher Man is, I'm sure. Literally all the Springfield faces that you could see, we weren't crying sad, but you could see the emotion. We knew who he was and we knew about his legacy and everything, and it was like all right. So that was a big moment for us. We were like, "Oh, that's terrible." I don't know how to explain it better than that. We were like, we all knew exactly who he was talking about when he said that. *It was a beautiful thing to see that us, people from Springfield, actually came together somewhere not in Springfield and talked about the city, and just talked about the different things. I won't say the different things that we went through, but the different and similar experiences that we had growing up in the city.* (emphasis added)

This statement holds so much significance to the story of the Preacher Man Mural because it overtly displays interior emotions demonstrating the intrinsic value and love and appreciation of Black life, across time, space, and place.

Gardening the Community

Gardening the Community (GTC) is a youth-based, urban farm based in Six Corners/Mason Square that administers three sites, one of which are owned and two on a lease basis. Having worked at GTC all throughout high school, I was very excited to speak with the co-directors, Ibrahim and Anne, both of whom I know well and have worked there for 10+ years. My discussions with each of them centered on refusal as risk-taking to gain self-reliance and change current food paradigms regarding access to healthy foods (Reese 2019). Here, I would like to focus on their journey for land ownership, beginning with Anne reminiscing about how their decision to buy the land was made:

> Anne: Yeah, yeah. I remember when we had to make the decision whether or not to purchase that land, or whether to purchase land. It was a really scary decision for us as an organization on one hand, because to own land, you have to be able to imagine yourself 20 years into the future. And when you're just a grassroots org, especially a fundraiser, which was me, the White fundraiser where I was having a really hard time saying, "Okay, we're going to scrape by year after year. We're going to keep this going for 20 years."
>
> *I couldn't imagine that enough to say, "Yes, we can own this." And [a board member] and some of the other Black leadership on the board were like, "Oh, we're doing this. Don't worry about that, Anne. This is important.* We have seen so much disinvestment and loss of ownership of land happen in the African American community, especially around farmland." So, she and others were like*, "No, our ownership is important, and it's going to be by and for the community. We're accountable to this community."* (emphasis added)

What shines through here is Anne, as a white woman, admitting that she couldn't imagine enough to think beyond economic value systems and take a leap of faith when it came to owning land as a non-profit until fellow Black board members asserted the urgent necessity to do so. It encompasses the idea that Black placemaking projects belie traditional logic systems at times because Black survival is often on the line; and yet, as Ibrahim asserts, yes it is about the fresh food, and yet "it's also something much bigger than that. It's like, this is a space that's for us. This is our space that we control, that we own." Upon asking for more context on the importance of ownership for the Black community Ibrahim shares:

> Ibrahim: I think for an organization like ours, which is grassroots and relatively small, *owning the land completely changed the landscape of the neighborhood, it completely changed what people began to think of our neighborhood, some of the neighbors, some of the youth.* And I can say that because I can witness the people that walk by, that will stop and just stare. I can witness, and I'm a witness to, people that are driving by that beep their horns and the numerous conversations that I have with folks from the neighborhood that reflect the pride that they have that that story exists (emphasis added)

Here, we see how Black ownership for GTC is not only about gaining land for a self-sufficient, neighborhood food system, but it is also about Black meaning making for an entire community who have been made to feel less worthy due to longstanding disinvestment in their collective resources. And yet, as Anne illustrates, sometimes Black placemaking projects may still feel unattainable to the community based upon public perception of what white spaces look like, remarking "initially, a bunch of people in the community were like, 'Who is that for? This is not for us because it's too nice.'" Continuing, she shares, "it was really painful to listen to people think that's a private club. That's some private place, that's not for the community. And then we had to do ... all of last year was this huge outreach effort to say, 'No, this is your space. Come,

come here, we're open.'" Black residents feeling that the new building structure must be a "private club" purely based upon it "looking too nice" is a clear connection to McKittrick's conceptualization of "transparent space;" further signaling towards the racialized landscape within the city, especially when placed in context with the previous examination of Mass Mutual as a space that is similarly seen as inaccessible purely based upon how it shows up in the material landscape.

When I asked Anne about the importance of having taken the leap of ownership as an organization, she spoke back to the beauty of black placemaking as a site of play and celebration and laughter, stating:

> Anne: I think there's something about ownership that is really important. And when I see, sometimes it really bugs me that our youth are just running all over the place and not focusing on what they should be doing. *And then I think, "Oh my God, this is their space." They feel happy and they can be a little crazy and goofy and just you are when you're ... And it's their space. It's their space* (emphasis added).

This sentiment insists on the intrinsic importance for Black placemaking projects to be spaces that foster Black joy as an essential part of Black humanity.

Peaceful Roots 413

It was such a pleasure to discuss the intent of Peaceful Roots 413 with one of the co-founders Niyah Boyd. As she explains, the goal is to "unite the Black and brown community in Springfield so we can overcome systemic oppression" through Black business vendor events, with an ultimate campaign aim of creating a "Black and brown owned shopping center." The first Black business event to raise funds for the shopping center was a Peaceful Roots arts protest on Juneteenth 2020. She details:

> Niyah: That's when we brought out the artists. That's when we really wanted us to get together in the community so we could realize that we're okay by ourselves. We don't have to depend on the government. We don't have to depend on anybody because we already have the tools that we need to succeed. So, when we did these events, we basically just wanted everyone to understand that we can generate black business and black money. So then, we can start to make our own black Wall Street pretty much. We can fund our own communities.

Here, Niyah channels her politics of refusal based on a "not a seat at the table" logic system, asserting that it is time that the Black community take Black economic matters into their own hands. We also see art being again used as a way of bringing the Black community together to celebrate their collective humanity while living in a space known to be structured for your demise.

Niyah further spoke on the strategic labeling of Peaceful Roots 413 as a way of overtly reclaiming community identity that is predicated on Black humanity and place belonging, sharing how Peaceful Roots 413 was started during Summer 2020 when "everywhere there was looting, and people made it seem like [all Black people are] just violent." Detailing her thought process behind the insistence to self-define beyond dominant degradative narratives, she shares:

> Niyah: So, I told my friend, I was like, "Okay, we're going to name ourselves something that has peaceful in it. And watch, they're still going to find a reason to get mad at us. But let's just let them know that we're peaceful no matter what." And then that's how the name Peaceful Roots came about. *As Black people, we're rooted to be peaceful. We never started the riots, the looting, none of that. That wasn't us. They flipped the narrative and made it seem like it was us* (emphasis added).

To provide a counter story about Black people based on their intrinsic value as human beings, Niyah felt it was essential to have "peaceful" in the title, despite knowing anti-black sentiments

will likely still find a way to try and deem them as bad Black subjects. This basic knowledge by Niyah that a bad racial script will always attach to your community speaks to contemporary denials of Black personhood. Upon inquiring "why a black and brown shopping center?," Niyah explains:

> Niyah: *Because there's so many shopping centers around here that aren't easily accessible for us*. There's not many shopping centers in Springfield. And then, on top of that, a lot of us don't know how to go about actually owning a business to have it in a shopping center. And it's like if all of us invested this much time in building our community, we might as well just have something to call our own (emphasis added).

Once again, we see inequitable access to Springfield's businesses being brought up as a primary reasoning for seeking out Black ownership in the first place. Interestingly, Niyah was also quick to acknowledge needing the help of white allies to understand the unspoken rules of neoliberal bureaucracy like "what to be careful for, what to look out for, and how to move as an organization." Detailing in more depth, she continues:

> Niyah: Because there's some things that white people can see, or white allies can see, that we can't as colored people, as Black people, as brown people. They understand things a little better than we do because we never had to understand some of the things that they understand. *So, when they give us pointers on what to look for with the police and the legal things and understanding all the things that's going on in the city legally, it's like, "Okay, we needed this (*emphasis added*)."*
>
> We had a meeting with a campaign funder, and it was just things that we never thought to even know. We always thought if we do fundraising at a smaller degree, then it'll take us more time but we'll get the money. And their thing is, "No, when you do fundraising, you have to make sure you do it this way. You present it this way, and you make sure that you ask for

> smaller increments and you get a hold of people with big money." I'm like, "Okay, I didn't know that. Thank you. I didn't know that" (emphasis added).

I find this comment especially insightful in understanding how people across racial lines have very different relationships to, and knowledge bases of, bureaucratic structures in Springfield. Poignantly, in Niyah's case, access to understanding essential economic and "legal workings" of the city as a Black woman looking to co-found a new local organization necessitated a "white ally."

Section wrap-up

Upon exploring various community-based solutions I consider to be examples of Black placemaking projects (Hunter et al. 2016) due to their overt focus on fostering cultural spaces dedicated to celebration and joy within the Black community, alongside their larger economic and political goals, one theme that emerged was the idea of Black woman being motivated to create transformative changes within their communities due to their personal negotiations with anti-black violence. I feel it is important to end my thesis giving voice to some of the Black woman I spoke to because they epitomize Quashie's assertion that to fully grasp public expressions of Black resistance we must first acknowledge "the full range of one's inner life — one's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears" (Quashie 2012, 6).

To begin, Niyah, above, expressed at length when the subject matter of Black womanhood arose in connection to her reason for wanting to start Peaceful Roots 413 in the Summer of 2020:

> Niyah: It makes me feel like the definition of what a Black woman should be. They make it seem like Black women are these angry women. We always have so many stigmas put against us. And I feel like this gives me the platform to express why we're angry. Black women aren't just walking

> around here angry just because. We're angry because this has been a fight that we've fought for generations. When we're cooking Sunday dinner with our grandmas, we're still listening to the stories that our grandmothers had. *Now, I'm a mother of two boys, I have to raise my boys and understand that even though they're three and two, they're already being looked at as targets for the system*.
>
> I feel like doing what I'm doing is really showing me how to be a Black woman in America. And that's something that nobody really teaches us Black women how to survive in America. They teach us what they think we can do. They teach us what they think we need to know. *But the reality of the situation is for generations Black women have been birthing kings and sons who just turn out to die or they get incarcerated or they don't have the education they need, or they're struggling because we were never meant to have the financial resources that we needed to survive.* I know that's a pretty in-depth answer, but I just feel like doing this makes me feel like what I should be doing as a Black woman.

Here, Niyah provides such an important insight into her purpose for co-founding an organization dedicated to putting on Black business events with an ultimate goal of funding a Black and brown own shopping center. Her statements above overtly assert her worries regarding her own son's well-being due to economic struggles and living in a system that actively recruits Black men for it's prison system. Niyah is not afraid to state that yes, she is angry, and has taken it upon herself, as many Black women do, to use this anger, with her love for her sons, to at least try her hardest to do something to change the economic landscape they find themselves in.

Lastly, I wrap up with a quick examination of Black access to public space today in downtown Springfield by touching upon the intentions and tensions behind the creation of two asphalt Black Lives Matter Mural projects in Summer 2020, both of which were Black women shepherded with Springfield's Black and brown community in mind. I appreciate that when I

interviewed Britt Ruhe in the context of her position to the thriving mural scene in the city, as a white woman she felt it was essential that I speak to some Black members within the mural movement, and I am very thankful to be introduced to both local Black entrepreneur and community organizer Tiffany Porter and City Counselor Tracye Whitfield through Britt Ruhe. While the much larger story will be a part of subsequent publications, including community sentiments, I wanted to touch here on both of these Black women's deep passion for Springfield as their primary motivator for the work they do.

When I asked City Counselor Tracye Whitfield about her role in the Summer 2020 Black Lives matter mural activity, specifically inquiring on how her intentions as a city counselor may have intersected with her intentions as a Black Springfield resident, she proudly asserts, “I'm a Black woman, first. I'm a Black woman. I'm a Black mom, I'm a Black daughter, sister, aunt. I'm all these things before I'm a city councilor.” She went on to express heartfelt stories of losing Black men she loves dearly by police officers, and so when the heightened awareness of state-sanctioned violence occurred around the death of George Floyd occurred and made it all “really hit home for [her],” she knew that it would be a primary goal of hers to ensure the city sponsored a Black Lives Matter asphalt mural in downtown Springfield in honor of the Black community. Specifically, Tracye states:

> Tracye: When George Floyd happened and I started seeing these murals pop-up, like in Washington, DC and other areas of the country. I said, "Well, we can do that right here. We need to create awareness that black lives matter." …You can't say all lives matter, but continuously kill black individuals and profile them and do all these horrible things based on the color of someone's skin. You can't possibly think all lives matter.

Here, we see Tracye connecting the interior and exterior expressions of her blackness, showcasing how in her case, as a Black woman she was motivated to ensure the Black community felt seen and heard on a more public scale by the city sponsoring a Black Lives Matter asphalt mural largely because based upon her own experiences of racial injustice she knows how it feels to mourn a tragic loss.

However, as Tiffany explains, the working class Black and brown community deciding to carry forward with an unsanctioned Black Lives Matter asphalt mural before the city sponsored mural could go up, despite not having the proper city permits, was a culturally salient, "reactionary" form of "protest" and "emotional stance" to the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, as well as a way to reclaim Black access and ownership to public spaces in Springfield outside of their pocket of the Mason Square area. Tiffany continues to share how the point "was to gather organically and kind of just cry out our energies," but the placement of the mural in the Court Square area of downtown was also "strategically planned" as a way of physically and metaphysically "reclaiming our history because it's ours," pointing to how "The First Church was actually instrumental in Springfield becoming a big part of the underground railroad." Radically, she declares how despite the city deciding to power wash away a mural in which the Black community came together to collectively paint, "It's not about the mural. We felt that day. We put it up. We know what it meant to us as a part of our history. They can't take it away." This statement epitomizes the ancestral depth underpinning many transformative claims of space, as well as the bureaucratic hurdles to longstanding implementation of said Black placemaking projects, demonstrating how "spatial acts can take on many forms and can be identified through expressions, resistances, and naturalizations" (McKittrick 2006, xix).

Concluding remarks

> I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood
>
> — Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

> Tiffany: Our community has so many negative myths about it, while we do incredible things all the time. So it's just kind of trying to fight that narrative, and having people like you do academic things solidifies it, and validates it, and takes it to a whole new level. So I appreciate you.

Ultimately, there is a beauty to giving Black people the space to share openly, without judgement, earnestly listening as a researcher in an effort to uplift their individual and collective voices, insights, and concerns about their spaces of living. As two of my research participants explain, just the experience of being taken seriously is in itself a profound, dignifying moment for Black people, who often feel unworthy of being heard. As Ryan explains, one of the primary motivators for pursuing his art is to use it as an avenue to complicate circulating Black mental health discourses. Poignantly, Ryan continues on sharing how, "for most Black people it's like growing up, especially in a white-dominated town like Northampton, it really felt at times that I couldn't be heard and even if I was heard, my story wasn't worth telling." I had a similar exchange on the lived reality of feeling intrinsically silenced based upon your race with Devin when discussing his steps towards pursuing his dream of music:

> Devin: So, I did that and the response is good. And I also figured out that's the way for me to express myself, because I don't really be talking to people like that.
>
> Danielle: No?
>
> Devin: Nah, not really.
>
> Danielle: Why not?
>
> Devin: Because I know at the end of the day, people don't care about your problems or what you're going through or whatever. So, I'll just spare

> them and me the time. But, I know that you're generally interested. So that's why I was happy to give you my time.

In essence, these two statements substantiate my reasoning for exploring a black sense of place and black placemaking in Springfield, Massachusetts, because they substantiate the importance of studying both understudied subjects (i.e. intersectionality positioned Black embodied knowledge holders) and places (i.e. Western Massachusetts, New England) in the demystification of anti-black master narratives, exposure of racialized political realities across regions, and expanded notions of black culture. Specifically, as Tiffany sums up nicely, an insertion into the social, economic, and political realities of Black Springfield resident's with a focus on race and class demonstrate how sometimes "the idiosyncrasies of everyday systemic, bureaucratic racism, we just let it slide because no one's being physically hurt" at that particular time and place in the traditional sense of what constitutes a violent state act.

More pointedly, placing historic and contemporary anti-racist movements in relation through the lens of Black diasporic experiences and spatial politics illuminates a deep-rooted commitment to collective action steeped in refusal politics for Black self-determination, especially during pivotal times of immediate, widespread attacks on Black personhood, humanity, and life itself. What becomes visible through my analytically applied approach are various, fairly specific, normalized social reproduction processes operating in the city that are tangible in nature and — with effort, time, and resources — can be altered for the betterment of all Springfield residents. I strongly believe the following recommendations would not only help the Black community in Springfield, but all of the residents in the city, because as a Black feminist I know "that the liberation of all oppressed peoples" is "tied to the contemporary economic and political position of Black people" (Combahee River Collective 1977, 19).

Key takeaways I extrapolated from my research that are tangible action items are:

1. The city should take action to acknowledge its rich Black history by:

- Updating the springfield-ma.gov's History and Culture page to include information on Black Springfield history.
- Overtly showing residents that the city acknowledges these Black legacies as an essential part of Springfield's history by placing visible plaques at both erased and existing landmarks, which shows the Black community that their cultural history is worthy of the time, money, and effort to place them there.[13]

2. The Springfield Public School System should:

- Create a Springfield Public School system curriculum on local Black history. .[14]
- Ensure equitable access to personal development opportunities, especially ones that allow students to enter professional and bureaucratic employment buildings.

In addition, through my rigorous theoretical, empirical, and epistemological exploration of Black Springfield, I seek to "honor black life as methodology" (McKittrick 2021, 117) by ensuring my thesis is not solely an extraction of black spatial knowledge, placemaking strategies, and resistance practices for public use by scholars and community leaders, but also a contribution of a meaningful, life affirming representation of the intricacies of black culture and Black people as whole beings. All too often, we as researchers dictate what is valuable to be communicated and conceptualized as a part of the knowledge production process, resulting in an overemphasis on the ways "life is lived in a brutal society," while neglecting to notice or privilege the everyday acts of livingness that contributors also assert as essential to their Black

[13] It is amazing to have heard that the city is making strides in this area with plans to transform Pynchon Plaza, located at the Springfield Museum and named after colonial founder William Pynchon, into a more historically, culturally salient space through mural art.

[14] I had the pleasure of sharing some of the Black Springfield History I learned while researching to an elementary and middle school class in the Springfield Public School system during Black History month 2021 and it was amazing to take part in their excitement about learning new facets of their local history.

existence (McKittrick 2021, 57). Sometimes, these assertions of Black life come in whispers, oftentimes they appear off topic due to our own assumptions of what will carry the most political weight in dominant discourses on black culture at the time. However, if you listen intentionally, you will not only hear Black people detail their lives as in opposition or resistance to whiteness — albeit of course this is a large portion of the discussion in our current hierarchical ordering of Western society — but they will also simply state: this is who I am, see me for who I am, I am a human being with aspirations, and wants, and dreams, and vulnerabilities, and opinions.

By analytically and theoretically centering McKittrick's concept of "a black sense of place" and embracing a "black creative praxes" (2021, 51) that is "one of disobedient relationality that always questions" (2021, 45) alongside Quashie's concept "quiet," I found humanity and existence, beyond public forms of racial resistance, in the interior, *nostalgic wanderings* by interlocutors about past joys, triumphs, and pleasures simply based in having experienced a wondrous time. I think of when Leonard discusses being a dreamer, which led him to being on the Wheel of fortune and skydiving, or when Devin discusses past memories of his first times in Springfield like driving his new car to school and meeting his brothers and sisters. Here, we see how, if we listen closely to black narratives, a focus on the interior leaves space for "the inevitable human capacity to wander without ever taking a step," which allows for facets of black humanity to be found within oneself even when it is not afforded in the outside white world (Quashie 2012, 125–26). In many ways, my Black feminist exploration of Black personhood in the expression of interior, nostalgic wanderings by interviewees epitomizes McKittrick's call for "radical geographic" inquiries in black studies "to puzzle out new and unexpected — and undisciplined and unacceptable — modes of being human" that are predicated on "the fantastic nowhere of black life" (McKittrick 2017, 99).

Ultimately, my thesis' "focus on affirmative black identities and affirmative black geographies that celebrate black life even as black communities resist a racist society" (Allen, Lawhon, Pierce 2019; 1004) fosters nuanced depictions of Black life that "unveil the limits of casting black knowledge as only emerging from the violated body," (McKittrick 2021, 51) and emphasizes the necessity of studying black interiority to truly gain full personhood as humans holding black subjectivities in this world (Quashie 2012) .

Appendix A: Springfield statistics

U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Springfield city, Massachusetts; United States

The Opportunity Atlas

Appendix B: interview questions

Phase 1 interview questions

During my interviews with key stakeholders asked open-ended questions beginning with the following:

1. Tell me about yourself, such as how long you have lived in Springfield and what you do for a living?

    a. What led you to pursue a career related to community organizing/community activism?

2. What do you know about Springfield's history?

3. What does Black Springfield mean to you?

Phase 2 follow-up/snowball interview questions targeting specific black placemaking projects

1. Can you please tell me a little bit about yourself and your experience of living in Springfield, Massachusetts?

2. What were your intentions behind your involvement in the X mural/community event?

Written inquiry — historian Joseph Carvalho III

1. To your comfortability level, what made you choose a career studying historical accounts of Black life in the location of Springfield, Ma/Hampden County, Ma? What was it about this place that made it a rich source to document? What led/compelled you to publish a major work like "Black Families in Hampden County, Mass." (2nd edition)?

2. Who are a few African American figures from Black Springfield that have not been adequately memorialized in the local and/or national narrative on African American involvement in abolition work?

3. Can you please elaborate on the below quote? What I'm most interested in are some specific examples that epitomize the black fight/struggle for resistance in Springfield.

In a 2011 interview based on your book *Black Families in Hampden County* you are quoted as saying:

"[My] appreciation for the trials and tribulations, tragedies and triumphs of survival and of the spirit, and examples of heroism and perseverance in the face of tremendous adversity deepened with each individual story that was revealed by the records[15]"

4. It appears that from Springfield's founding by William Pynchon in 1636 Springfield has always been a step ahead in regard to Black independence and emancipation (e.g. Black marriages, manumission, *Newport vs. Billings*).

On page 17 you write, "Through individual efforts, community and church-led initiatives, and organizations such as the colonization and anti-slavery Societies, Springfield had become established by 1845 as a major haven for Blacks who had escaped from slavery.[16]"

In your opinion, what was it about Springfield's local context that gave space for such forward thinking on race for the time period? How and to what extent has Springfield's pioneering status surrounding Black independence impacted the city's collective racial consciousness and contributed to an enduring demographic diversity in contemporary Springfield?

5. Do you believe Springfield's rich abolitionist culture is adequately memorialized by visible landmarks throughout the city and why? Which memorials/landmarks would you consider to be the most successful at commemorating Black Springfield's abolitionist history and why?

6. Why is Springfield's historic role in the Abolitionist Movement not a larger part of the National record?

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[15] African Americans were an early and diverse community in Hampden County — masslive.com, Accessed 12/17/2021

[16] Carvalho, Joseph. "Black Families in Hampden County, Mass.: 1650–1855", page 17 (digital version of book)

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