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University of Washington

Abstract

RECLAIMING ERASED HISTORIES:

Spatial Justice & Indigenous Presence in Seattle

Gunes Erel

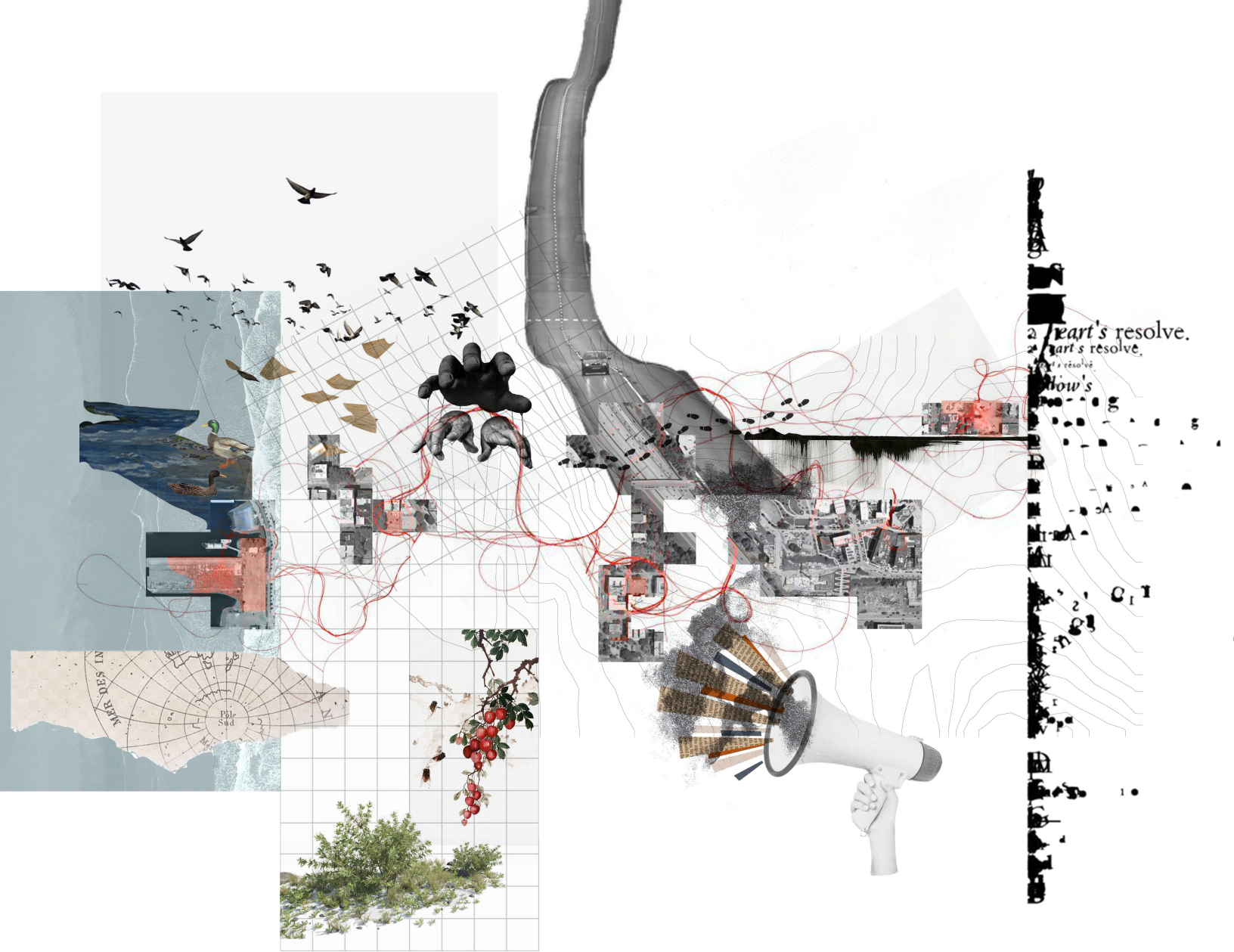
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This thesis examines how Seattle's urban fabric has been shaped by settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and overlapping processes of exclusion, erasure, and displacement. Indigenous, Asian American, and African American communities have historically been pushed to the margins of public space and collective memory through mechanisms such as land seizure, redlining, incarceration, internment, and speculative development. While many of these histories have been systematically erased from the city's built environment, they persist through oral traditions, cultural practices, and neighborhood memory. The central problem addressed in this thesis is the ongoing invisibility of marginalized communities in Seattle's public realm, where monuments and memorials often present partial or sanitized narratives. Although architecture and urban design have contributed to these forms of erasure, they also hold transformative potential as tools of repair capable of re-inscribing memory, reclaiming place, and restoring presence. Grounded in a decolonial framework, this project proposes a series of site-specific urban design interventions that seek to recover erased histories, strengthen Indigenous and marginalized community presence, and establish a spatial language of justice rooted in memory, resistance, and cultural continuity. Through mapping, archival research, and place-based storytelling, the project weaves memory into the city's everyday fabric, making hidden histories visible, supporting cultural resurgence, and offering a model for spatial justice. These strategies collectively imagine a Seattle that remembers more fully and equitably.



RECLAIMING ERASED HISTORIES: Spatial Justice & Indigenous Presence in Seattle

Gunes Erel
MArch Thesis Spring 2025

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Figure 1
Aerial view of Seattle from
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C H A P T E R O N E

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

1.1: Land Acknowledgment

I respectfully acknowledge that this thesis was developed on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded lands of the Coast Salish peoples, including the Duwamish, Suquamish, Muckleshoot, and other Lushootseed-speaking nations. These lands encompass the city now called Seattle and its surrounding waters and hills. In particular, the areas explored in this thesis lie within the territory of the Dx̣ʷḍəwʔabš (Duwamish People), whose name means “People of the Inside.”

For thousands of years, Coast Salish peoples have lived in reciprocal relationship with this land and water, stewarding ecosystems, holding ceremonies, building longhouses, and passing on knowledge across generations. Despite colonization, forced removals, and the ongoing denial of federal recognition for some nations, these practices endure today.

This acknowledgment reflects an ongoing commitment to support Indigenous sovereignty, cultural resurgence, and the LandBack movement, which calls for the return of land and power to Indigenous governance. I offer deep respect and gratitude to the elders, artists, and organizers whose stewardship and advocacy sustain Indigenous presence in Seattle. This project aims to contribute, even in a small way, to the broader work of memory, justice, and the restoration of land, story, and place to those who have always belonged here.

1.2: Acknowledgment

This thesis would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and generosity of many people. I am deeply grateful to my thesis committee Brian McLaren and Manish Chalana for your critical insight, ongoing encouragement, and mentorship. Your guidance has helped me carry this work forward with both clarity and complexity.

To the faculty and staff at the University of Washington’s College of Built Environments, thank you for expanding my understanding of architecture and urban design as disciplines deeply embedded in questions of justice, memory, and accountability.

I extend sincere thanks to the community organizations whose archival materials, public programs, and leadership shaped the heart of this research, particularly Chief Seattle Club, Densho, and the Wing Luke Museum. This work seeks to honor the histories and futures you continue to uphold. To the communities whose histories have been erased, dislocated, or ignored, this thesis hopes to help open space for visibility, healing, and reclamation, both now and into the future.

To my classmates and studio peers, thank you for the critical conversations, last-minute reviews, and shared commitment to meaningful design.

To my parents and my partner, Luis, thank you for your love, patience, and support. You have grounded me throughout this journey and reminded me why this work matters.

1.3: Personal Position

I approach this work as a guest on Indigenous land. My academic training in architecture has equipped me with tools for spatial analysis and visualization, but I recognize that design knowledge is incomplete without listening—to the land, to communities, and to those whose stories have been displaced. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to move at the pace of respect. That means sitting with complexity, allowing room for contradiction, and resisting the urge to simplify. My goal is not to offer universal solutions, but to highlight place-specific strategies that restore presence and invite reflection, joy, and resilience into Seattle’s urban spaces. This work is indebted to the people, places, and stories that have shaped it, and it reflects a commitment to ongoing learning.

At the same time, I acknowledge that I am an outsider to both the city of Seattle and the communities whose stories and struggles I engage with in this thesis. I did not grow up here, and I do not claim lived experience of these histories. However, during my time in Seattle and at the University of Washington, I have come to learn how the city I now experience has been shaped by deep-rooted injustices and exclusions. While I recognize my position as a guest and observer, I also believe these are critical conversations that extend beyond Seattle and resonate across many cities where marginalized communities have been erased or displaced. This work is grounded in respect and in a commitment to amplifying community narratives that challenge dominant spatial paradigms.

1.4: Goals and Problem Statement

Seattle’s urban fabric has been shaped by settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and processes that have produced a city marked by exclusion, erasure, and displacement. This thesis begins with a recognition: certain histories have been systematically erased from Seattle’s built environment. Yet these histories endure in oral narratives, cultural practices, neighborhood memories, and contested sites. While architecture and urban design have contributed to this erasure, they also hold potential as tools of repair.

The central problem this thesis addresses is the ongoing invisibility of marginalized communities in Seattle’s public realm. There is a need for spatial interventions that do not merely “represent” erased communities, but actively re-inscribe memory, reclaim place, and restore presence.

In this project, I chose to focus on four primary marginalized communities—Coast Salish Indigenous peoples, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, and African Americans. At the same time, I recognize that many other communities have contributed to the city’s development and have experienced exclusion, erasure, and resilience in ways that also deserve recognition. This thesis offers a framework for how design might begin to support memory, justice, and cultural continuity in ways that are site-specific and community-grounded. The goals of this thesis are to reclaim erased histories through site-specific urban design interventions, to strengthen Indigenous and marginalized community presence in Seattle’s public spaces, and to propose a spatial language of justice rooted in memory, resistance, and continuity.

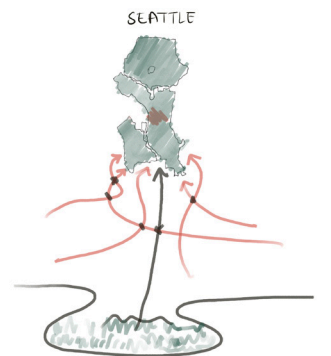
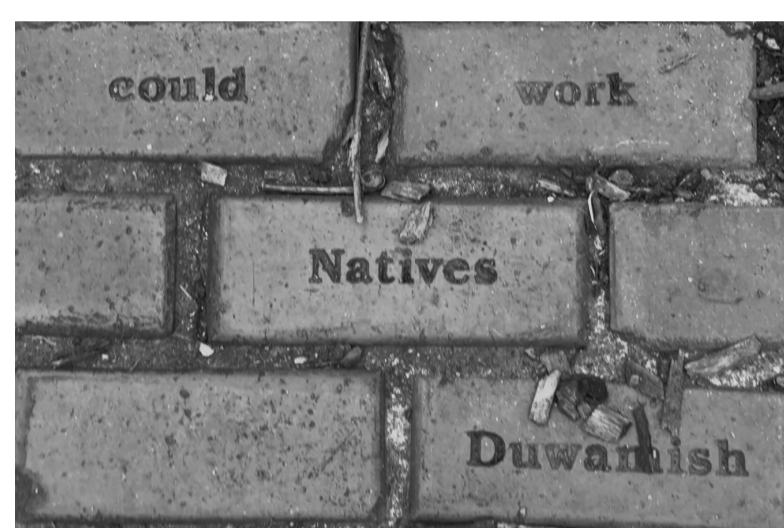


Figure 1.1
Concept of Seattle with multiple stories, intersecting and overlapping.



C H A P T E R T W O

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

[Figure 2]
Brick Paving near Pioneer
Square referencing the city's
founding narrative

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 : Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism, unlike traditional colonialism, which is exploitative and extractive, is a structure of replacement (Wolfe, 2006). It operates by eliminating Indigenous presence in physical, legal and cultural terms so that settler societies can establish permanence on appropriated land. Its logic is spatial: it transforms land into property, knowledge into capital, and presence into absence. In urban contexts, settler colonialism functions through a set of policies and designs that overwrite Indigenous geographies. In cities like Seattle, this has meant zoning laws that excluded Indigenous people from land ownership, planning decisions that erased tribal settlements (like Dzidzilalich), and a narrative framework that relegates Native people to pre-urban history. Aimee Craft (2018) further critiques how municipal governance often treats Indigenous issues as peripheral or symbolic, while maintaining settler control over urban infrastructure and resources. This becomes visible in city-led waterfront redevelopment projects that reference Indigenous presence in signage but do not include tribes in decision-making or land management. Furthermore, Jean O'Brien's (2010) concept of "firsting and lasting" describes how settlers create origin stories that position themselves as the beginning of legitimate history, relegating Indigenous peoples to a distant, vanished past. This mechanism is reinforced in architectural heritage registers, official city timelines, and historical plaques that often ignore or romanticize Indigenous contributions. Therefore, confronting settler colonialism in design requires more than acknowledgment—it requires material restructuring of ownership, narrative authority, and access to land. In this thesis, the Dzidzilalich Cultural Center at Pier 48 responds to this by making visible what settler urbanism has tried to erase and giving form to Coast Salish and other Indigenous presence in the heart of the city.

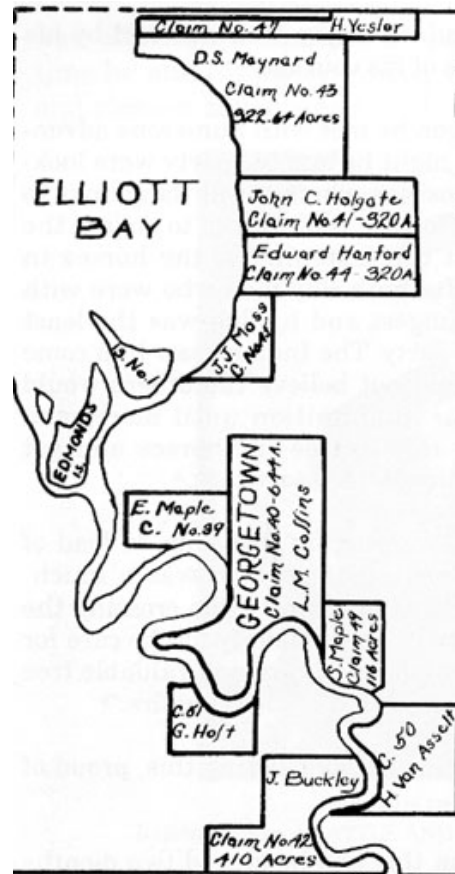
2.2 : Indigenous Urbanism

Indigenous urbanism challenges the false dichotomy between rural Indigeneity and urban modernity. It asserts that Native people are not passive residents of cities but active agents in shaping them through cultural continuity, political resistance, and spatial reclamation. Coll Thrush (2017) also challenges the idea of "vanishing Indian" which sees Native Americans appear in the first few chapters of a book and then disappear when the settlers show up. Renya Ramirez (2007) introduces the concept of "Native Hubs" to describe urban centers where Indigenous people maintain relational and ceremonial ties across dispersed geographies. Ramirez argues that cities are now central to Indigenous political life, providing platforms for visibility, organizing, and cultural renewal. Kyle Mays (2019) further elaborates on Indigenous urbanism as a theory of self-determination in how land, memory, and space are understood and used in cities. Mays draws attention to how urban Indigenous design should not merely reflect Native presence, but actively support resurgence through ceremonial spaces, governance models, and infrastructure that supports Indigenous life. Elder and scholar Leroy Little Bear (2009) also emphasizes the importance of relationality in Indigenous worldviews. While Western urbanism tends to segment land into private parcels, Indigenous spatial logics understand space as interconnected and reciprocal. In practice, this means rethinking what counts as infrastructure. A canoe landing, a smokehouse, a seasonal gathering space are not decorative additions but central components of Indigenous city-making. With the new waterfront project, there are artworks or different design elements that relate back to the Indigenous presence before Seattle's beginnings. However, there are more serious ways to give governance and presence to the Urban Indigenous Community.

[Figure 2.1] Duwamish Westcoast Canoe with traditional longhouse in background, Cedar River, 1893 Courtesy University of Oregon Special Collections



[Figure 2.2] Early Seattle claim map, including the then-winding Duwamish River, 1850s



[Figure 2.3] Nick Tilsen during a Land Back march in Rapid City. (Photo credit: Willi White)



[Figure 2.4] March 16, 1970: "Indians picket the Army – Indian and part-Indian youngsters picket the Army's Fort Lawton here Sunday as MP's in the background guard the fort after 78 Indians were arrested in a dawn demonstration in which they invaded Army land. Seventeen Indians go to court Monday on charges connected with the invasion. Other demonstrations were planned."



2.3 : Decolonization & LandBack

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's (2012) insistence that "decolonization is not a metaphor" fundamentally challenges design practices that seek reconciliation through aesthetics or surface-level gestures. True decolonization, they argue, involves the repatriation of land and life, not just representational inclusion. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2021) builds on this by emphasizing that LandBack is not simply a transfer of ownership but a restoration of Indigenous governance systems, cosmologies, and relationships. In her words, "LandBack is a reclamation of our ability to live in good relations." The LandBack movement also critiques the commodification of land under settler capitalism. In Seattle, Indigenous leaders such as Owen L. Oliver (2021) argue that urban land must be included in LandBack efforts. He stresses the importance of returning waterfront sites like Pier 48 to Indigenous stewardship, not only for ceremonial or cultural use but also for ecological restoration and youth education. The Dzidzilalich proposal presented in this thesis draws directly from these calls. It is not conceived as a center imposed by external designers but as a potential site of Indigenous governance, where Coast Salish and other Indigenous peoples can lead the design, use, and evolution of the land. It envisions a place for education, ceremony, environmental healing, and community resilience. It is a living response to settler colonial erasure and a step toward restorative justice.

2.4 : Racial Capitalism

Racial capitalism, a term popularized by Cedric Robinson (1983), refers to the ways capitalism relies on and produces racial hierarchies. Rather than treating racism as an unfortunate side effect, racial capitalism positions it as central to how value is extracted and power is maintained. In the urban context, this is visible in how housing markets, labor systems, and infrastructure are structured to benefit dominant groups while displacing or exploiting racialized communities. Jodi Melamed (2015) argues that racial capitalism works by commodifying culture while suppressing autonomy. In Seattle's development history, this dynamic is especially clear. Chinese laborers were instrumental in building infrastructure but were later expelled through violent riots. Japanese Americans cultivated farmland and contributed to regional food systems, only to be incarcerated during World War II. Black residents created vibrant cultural and economic hubs in the Central District but were pushed out by redlining, predatory lending, and urban renewal projects. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) introduces the concept of "organized abandonment," where state institutions withdraw support from certain communities, creating conditions of scarcity and vulnerability by design. These patterns are not accidental. They are embedded in city plans, funding decisions, and legal structures. Design responses must acknowledge and challenge this history. Rather than using culture as a thematic overlay, urban designers must address the material and spatial mechanisms of dispossession. Interventions should be rooted in economic justice, community control, and place-based resistance. This thesis responds to racial capitalism by designing spaces that center those who have historically been excluded, offering not only symbolic recognition but tangible forms of support and visibility.

2.5 : Pluriversal Urbanism

Pluriversal urbanism, a term grounded in the work of Arturo Escobar (2018), challenges the notion that there is a singular narrative to the urban. Instead, it asserts the validity of multiple, coexisting worldviews and ways of knowing, being and seeing the city. AbdouMalik Simone (2019) also critiques the totalizing logics of modern urbanism. He sees cities as “fields of maneuvering” where people improvise, make space through informality, and challenge the dominant spatial order. His work in African cities shows how the informal is not lack but another logic of organizing. In the context of Seattle, pluriversal urbanism means recognizing that the city is layered with histories and futures of many communities. The Indigenous Coast Salish presence, Black cultural life in the Central District, the Japanese American legacy of Nihonmachi, and the Chinese community’s past and ongoing struggles all constitute valid urban narratives. These communities carry different relationships to land, memory, and governance, and those differences should not be collapsed into a single story. The Remembrance Trail proposed in this thesis draws from this pluriversal approach. Rather than unifying history into a singular memorial narrative, it places different community stories in proximity, allowing them to speak to one another while maintaining their distinctiveness. This method resists both flattening and hierarchy. In doing so, it offers a way to design with complexity, holding tension and multiplicity as essential urban qualities.

2.6 : Place Memory

Place memory refers to how physical environments embody and transmit cultural memory. Dolores Hayden (1995) emphasizes that urban landscapes hold the memories of marginalized communities, particularly those whose histories have been suppressed in official narratives.

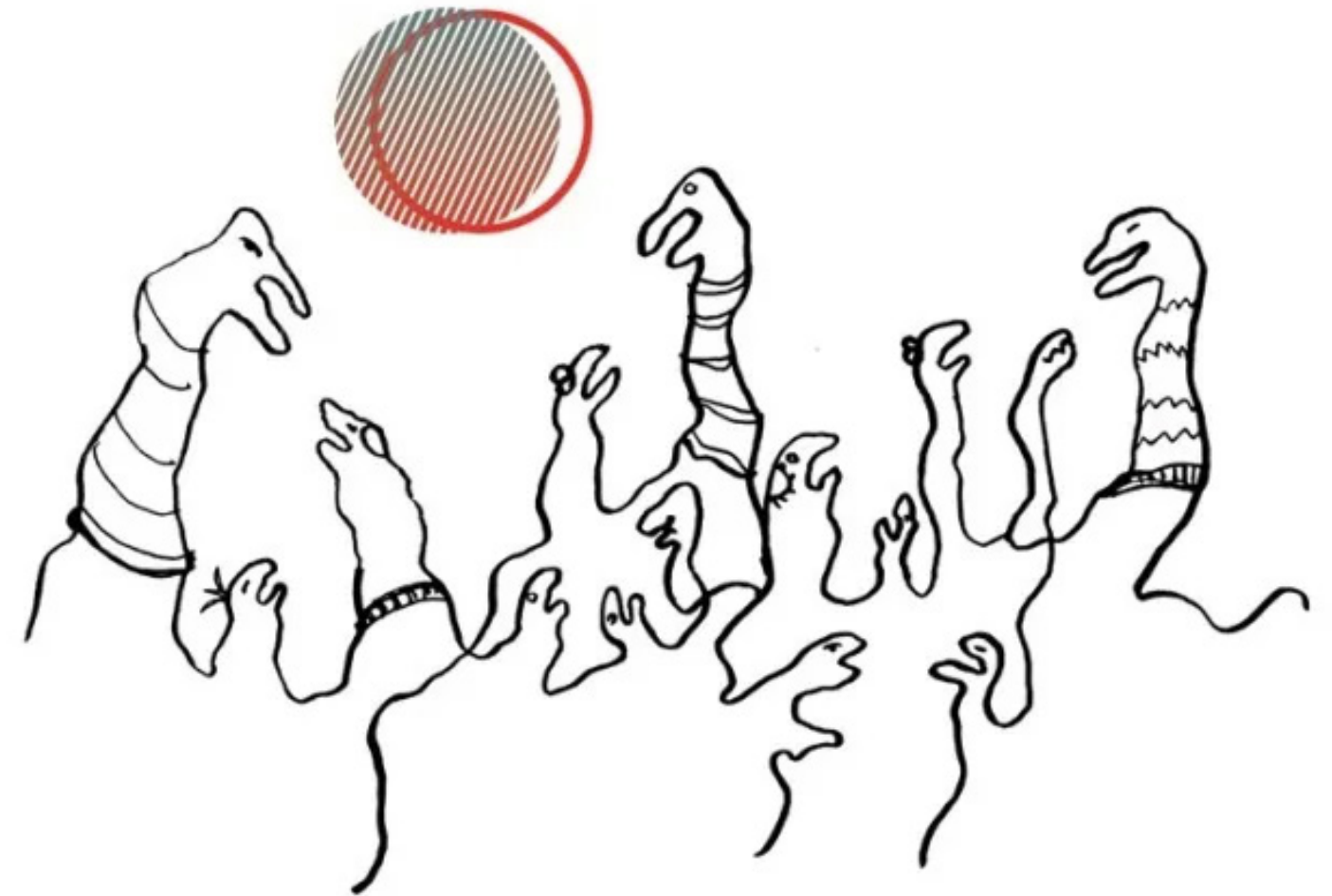
Marianne Hirsch’s (2008) concept of “postmemory” is key in multigenerational communities shaped by displacement. She describes how the children and grandchildren of those who experienced trauma “remember” events through stories, images, and built environments. In cities like Seattle, this kind of memory work is crucial to resisting urban amnesia.

Saidiya Hartman (2008) offers a powerful methodological lens here: “critical fabulation.” She argues that where historical archives are silent, we must tell stories that are both ethically responsible and imaginatively grounded. Design can participate in this practice by creating spaces that suggest possibility, grief, and resilience.

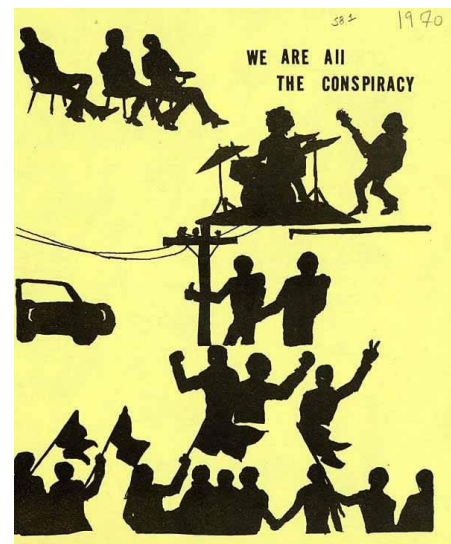
In spatial practice, place memory should not be relegated to plaques or niche museums. It must shape how we walk through the city, how we gather, and what we are allowed to see. This thesis’s four interventions attempt to do just that insisting that public space carry the stories of exclusion and resistance in its very form.

[Figure 2.5] →
Cover of the podcast
confronting HIERARCHIES
about (de)coloniality, peace
and conflict

[Figure 2.6]
For revisionists, slavery’s end
simply ushered in a new phase of
exploitation.
Illustration by Keith Negley



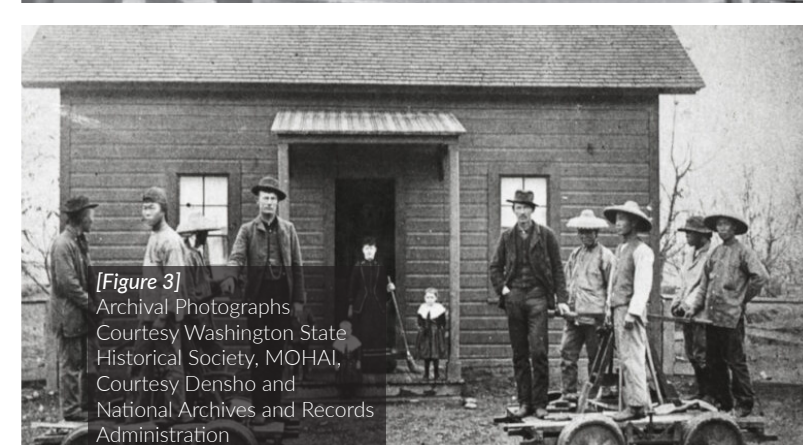
[Figure 2.7]
Property of Special Collections,
University of Washington Libraries,
Vietnam War Era Ephemera Call





C H A P T E R T H R E E

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



[Figure 3]
Archival Photographs
Courtesy Washington State
Historical Society, MOHAI,
Courtesy Densho and
National Archives and Records
Administration

Research Methodology

This thesis uses an interdisciplinary, multi-scalar methodology to understand how histories of spatial erasure have been produced in Seattle and how design might respond to them. The approach combines archival research, spatial mapping, timeline construction, ethics, and critical urban theory. Drawing on Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) concept of decolonizing methodologies, this project recognizes that research is not neutral. The way we gather, interpret, and present information shapes the narratives that endure. Therefore, the methods used here aim not only to recover erased histories but to do so with care, accountability, and respect for the communities and territories involved. It is also important to note that the conflict between what survives in the records and what does not is itself revealing. Often, dominant narratives overpower minoritized ones, so a critical lens is necessary when reviewing historical sources.

3.1 : Archival Research

Archival research was used to trace the layered histories of Seattle's urban development, particularly moments of displacement, resistance, and community formation. This involved studying a wide range of materials, including:

- Fire insurance maps (e.g. Sanborn Maps, 1880s–1940s)
- Planning documents from the City of Seattle archives
- Housing covenants and redlining maps from the HOLC
- Historical newspapers (e.g. The Seattle Times, International Examiner, The Northwest Enterprise)
- Photographic archives from the Wing Luke Museum and MOHAI
- Treaties and land use documents (e.g. Treaty of Point Elliott, 1855)

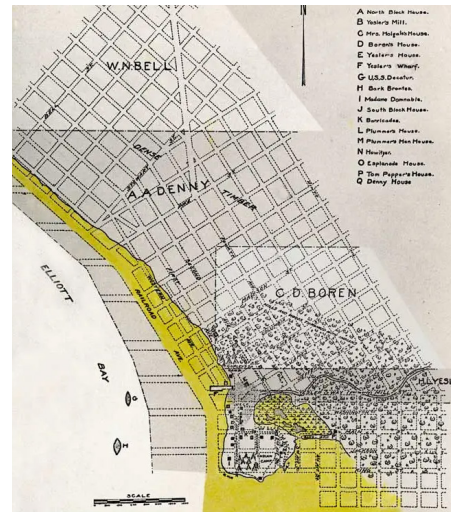
Rather than treating these sources as objective records, the research approached them as colonial documents that reflect both what was valued and what was omitted. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) argues in *Silencing the Past*, power operates not only in what is remembered but also in what is archived and made visible. Particular attention was given to the absence of Indigenous place names, the use of language such as “hills and woods thronged with Indians,” “blight,” or “slums” to justify displacement, and the visual erasure of nonwhite communities from planning maps. These patterns of omission were often as instructive as the documents themselves.

3.2 : Timeline

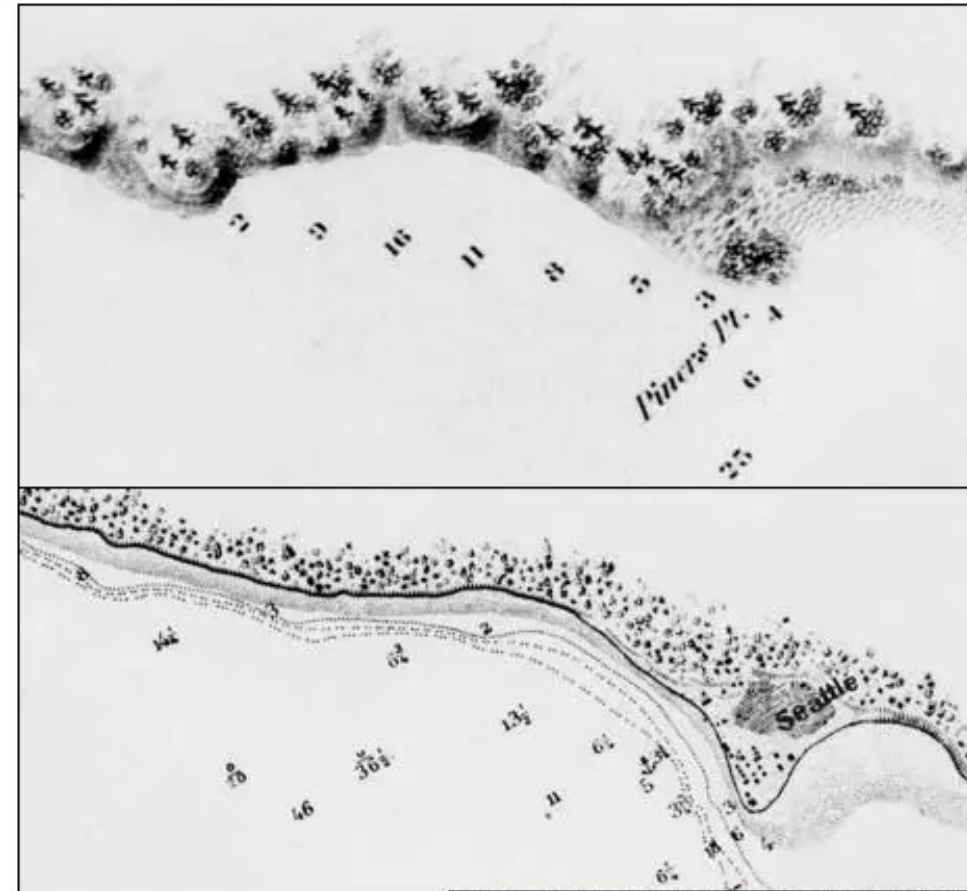
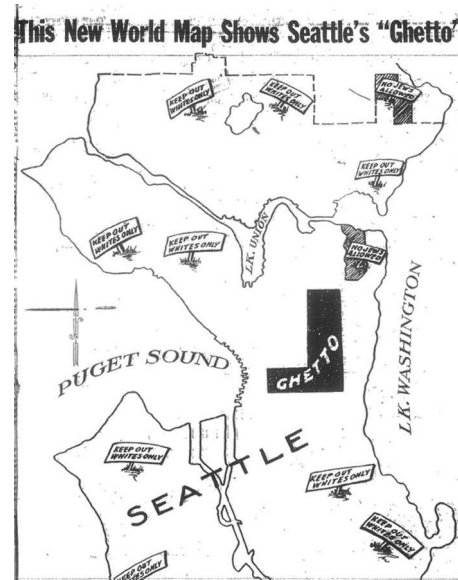
The timeline developed in this project is not just a chronological tool but a structural and spatial narrative. Inspired by the method of chronopolitics (Rifkin, 2017), which interrogates how settler societies organize time to legitimize land theft and displacement, this timeline resists linearity and instead foregrounds continuity. Rather than isolating events as distant injustices, it traces how historical processes such as exclusion, dispossession, and racialized planning continue through present-day gentrification, infrastructure policy, and symbolic place-making.

[Figure 3.1] →
Seattle's Waterfront
Subjects include pioneer
settlement, the first “dis-
coverers,” names – native
and European – and maps.
Courtesy of Seattle Now &
Then Paul Dorpat

[Figure 3.2]
Pioneer claims and street map su-
perimposed on an extended version
of Phelps Map from 1855-56
Courtesy of Seattle Now & Then
Paul Dorpat



[Figure 3.3]
“The Communist Party Newspaper,
New World, published articles at-
tacking racial restrictive covenants
in 1948”



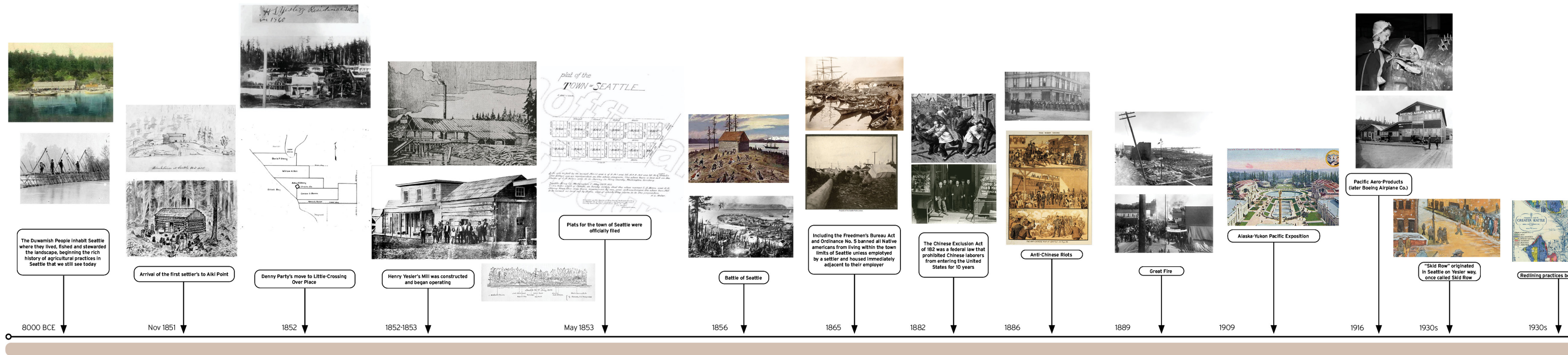
1841 Navy Expedition Map
of Piners Point, future site
of Seattle. Expedition led by
Lieu. Wilkes

1854 Coast Survey Map of
Seattle, a then two-year-old
settlement on Piners Point.

1853 Town Survey Map for
Seattle



Detail from ca. 1875
Topographical Map of Seattle
by Coast Survey



- Indigenous
- African American
- Chinese
- Japanese

[Figure 3.4]
 Archival Photographs
 Courtesy Washington State
 Historical Society, MOHAI, Courtesy
 Densho and National Archives and
 Records Administration, Seattle
 Room Digital Collections

The place now called Seattle sits within the ancestral homelands of the Duwamish people and other Coast Salish nations. These communities lived in longhouse villages such as Dzidzilalich and Shilshole, engaging in fishing, gathering, and ceremonial life connected to the Salish Sea. Their seasonal movements followed ecological rhythms, establishing a network of kin-based relations across land and water. Colonial settlement began in earnest in the 1850s, driven by the Donation Land Claim Act (1850) and solidified by the Treaty of Point Elliott (1855), which coerced Coast Salish leaders into ceding vast territories in exchange for restricted reservation land and unfulfilled promises of fishing rights, education, and health care.

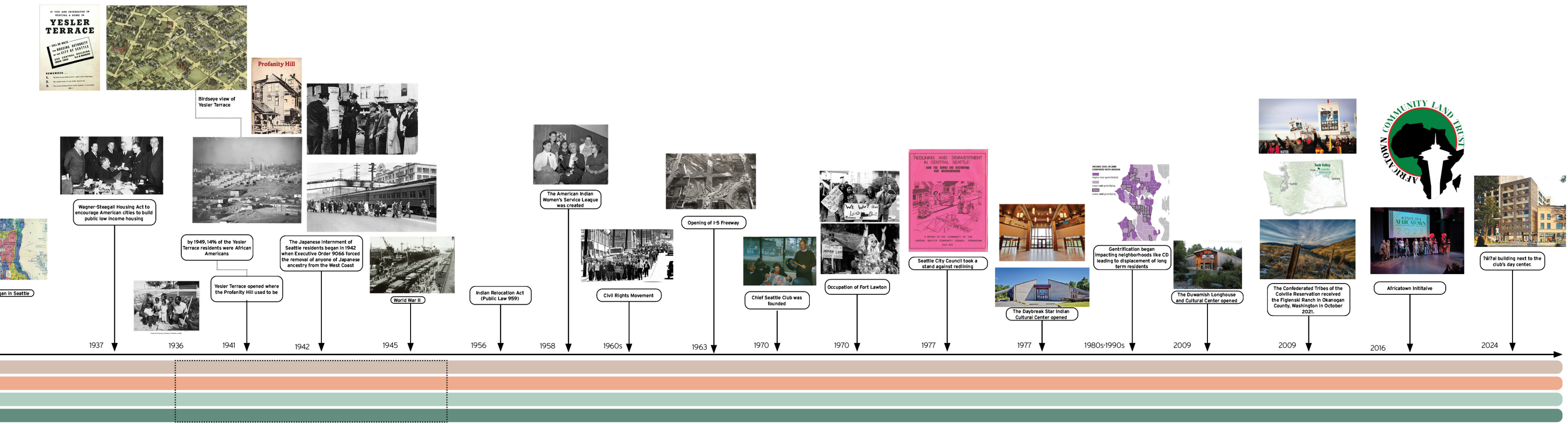
Despite displacement, Indigenous peoples have continued to assert their presence in the city—from the 1970 occupation of Fort Lawton, led by Bernie Whitebear and the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, to the founding of the Chief Seattle Club and Urban Indian health centers. This continuity challenges dominant narratives that treat Indigeneity as rural or historical rather than ongoing and urban (Ramirez, 2007; Thrush, 2007).

Seattle's growth also relied heavily on the labor of Chinese workers, who were among the first large nonwhite groups to arrive in the mid-19th century. They were recruited to build railroads, clear land, and work in mills and laundries. Their presence was met with hostility, culminating in the anti-Chinese riots of 1885 and 1886, when white mobs forcibly

expelled hundreds from the city with little to no consequence (Pfaelzer, 2007; Yip, 2021).

Japanese immigrants arrived in greater numbers in the early 20th century, building communities like Nihonmachi (Japantown). Many became small business owners, farmers, and workers until Executive Order 9066 in 1942 led to their forced removal and incarceration during World War II. Neighborhoods like Nihonmachi were never fully restored after internment (Densho, 2023; Asaka, 2022).

African American communities in Seattle, particularly those in the Central District, emerged during the early and mid-20th century, with many arriving from the South during the Great Migration. Denied access to housing elsewhere through racial covenants and redlining, Black families built vibrant cultural, political, and religious life in the Central Area (Taylor, 1994; Taylor, 2019). The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) maps of the 1930s codified racial exclusion. Neighborhoods with "Negroes," "Orientals," or "foreign-born" residents were marked as "hazardous" and "declining," preventing investment and accelerating cycles of disinvestment and state neglect. Despite these barriers, Black Seattleites organized to create schools, jazz venues, newspapers, churches, and community institutions such as the Black Panther Party chapter, Africatown, and the Liberty Bank Building—spaces that represent both resistance and resurgence (Janes, 2021; Thrush, 2007).



- Indigenous
- African American
- Chinese
- Japanese

Filipino and South Asian workers were also recruited through colonial labor circuits but were often excluded from citizenship and land ownership through restrictive laws. Filipinos in particular found seasonal work in Alaska canneries and the service economy in Seattle, while South Asian laborers were often denied legal recognition despite their economic contributions.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, refugee and immigrant communities from Vietnam, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea became central to Seattle's cultural and civic life. Many settled in South Seattle neighborhoods such as Rainier Valley and White Center, only to face renewed gentrification, rising rents, and displacement in recent decades.

The timeline developed for this thesis highlights key significant events and processes:

- Pre-1850s: Indigenous seasonal life-ways and village sites
- 1855: Treaty of Point Elliott and legal frameworks of dispossession
- 1886: Anti-Chinese riots and labor exclusion
- 1930s–1950s: Redlining and restrictive housing practices
- 1960s–1980s: Urban renewal, displacement, and resistance
- 1990s–present: Gentrification, cultural erasure, and LandBack activism

Events were selected based on their spatial implications—where they happened, how they reshaped neighborhoods, and what communities resisted or rebuilt in their aftermath. This framing aligns with Christina Sharpe's (2016) theory of wake work, which understands memory as an active practice of living with the enduring structures of racial and colonial violence.

[Figure 3.4]
 Archival Photographs
 Courtesy Washington State
 Historical Society, MOHAI, Courtesy
 Densho and National Archives and
 Records Administration, Seattle
 Room Digital Collections

3.3 : Mapping Spatial Analysis

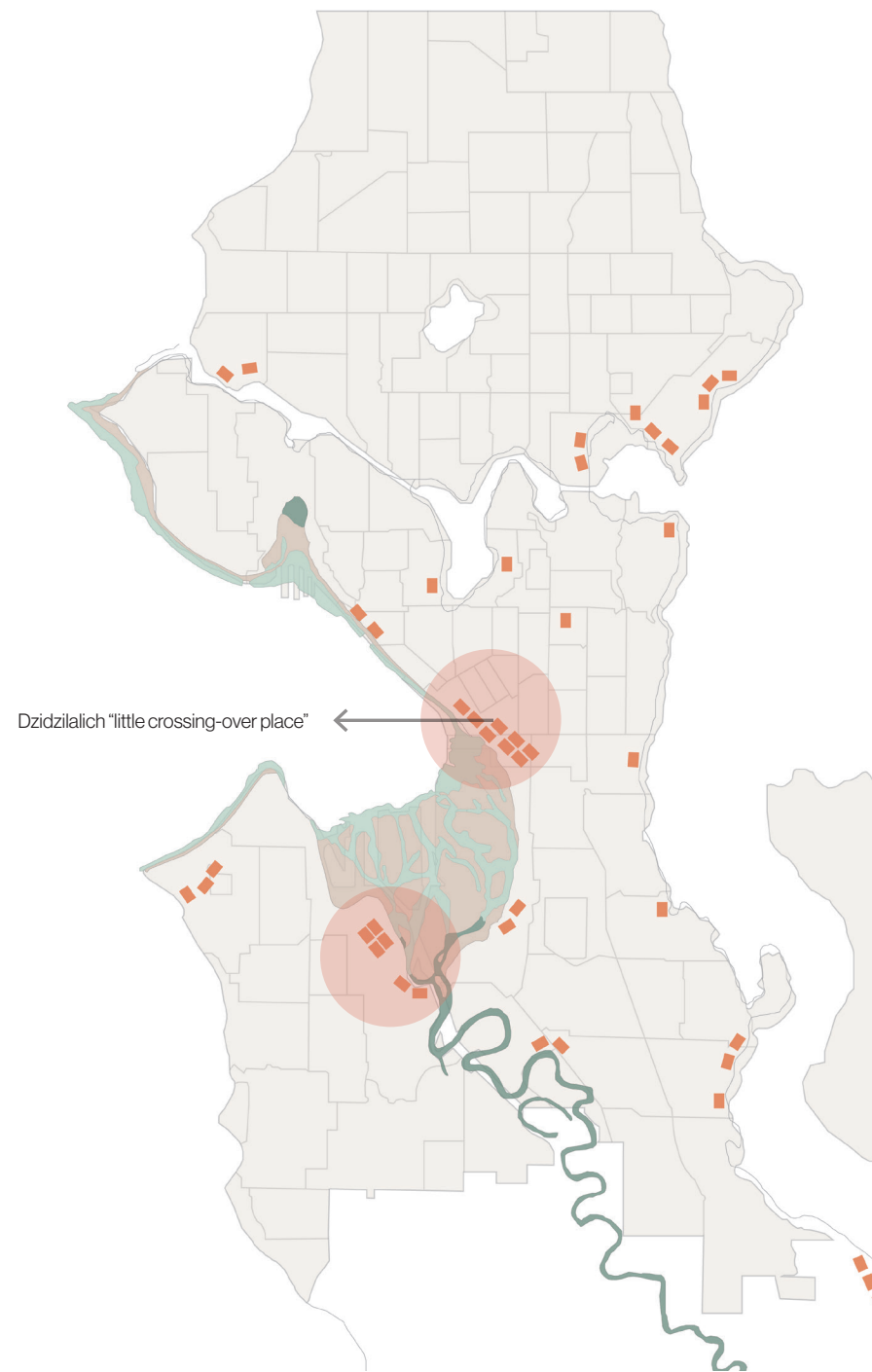
Mapping was a central methodology, used both as a diagnostic and propositional tool. Drawing on traditions of critical cartography (Harley, 1989; Wood & Fels, 2008), this mapping approach did not assume objectivity. Instead, maps served to surface hidden patterns of exclusion, resistance, and relationality.

One key data source was the Civil Rights & Labor History Consortium at the University of Washington, which mapped race and segregation in Seattle and King County from 1940 to 2020. These maps, along with historical minority trends data, were used to trace the movement patterns of marginalized groups examined in this thesis.

For earlier data, I drew from Social Trends in Seattle (1944) by Calvin F. Schmid, a University of Washington sociology professor. This study documented population trends and demographic characteristics in Seattle between 1920 and 1940. Together, these sources informed a series of movement maps that connect historical patterns of marginalization to present-day displacement.

A. INDIGENOUS SPATIAL HISTORIES

Historical Coast Salish village locations were highlighted on the first map, alongside contemporary urban Indigenous presence in Seattle. The map demonstrates how Indigenous presence persists in the city, despite historical efforts to erase it. At one point, Indigenous people were banned from living in Seattle unless employed by white settlers, yet today their presence continues in both visible and relational ways.



[Figure 3.5]
Duwamish and Seattle from Chief Seattle by David M. Buerge
Orange rectangles on the map identify longhouses, the number per site derived from Claimnants' Exhibits W-2 and Y-2 in the Court of Claims of the United States, the Duwamish, et. al, Tribes of Indians versus the United States of America

[Figure 3.6]
Diagram showing the Indigenous Presence within the limits of Seattle
Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center, Chief Seattle Club and Duwamish Longhouse and Cultural Center as nodes of representation

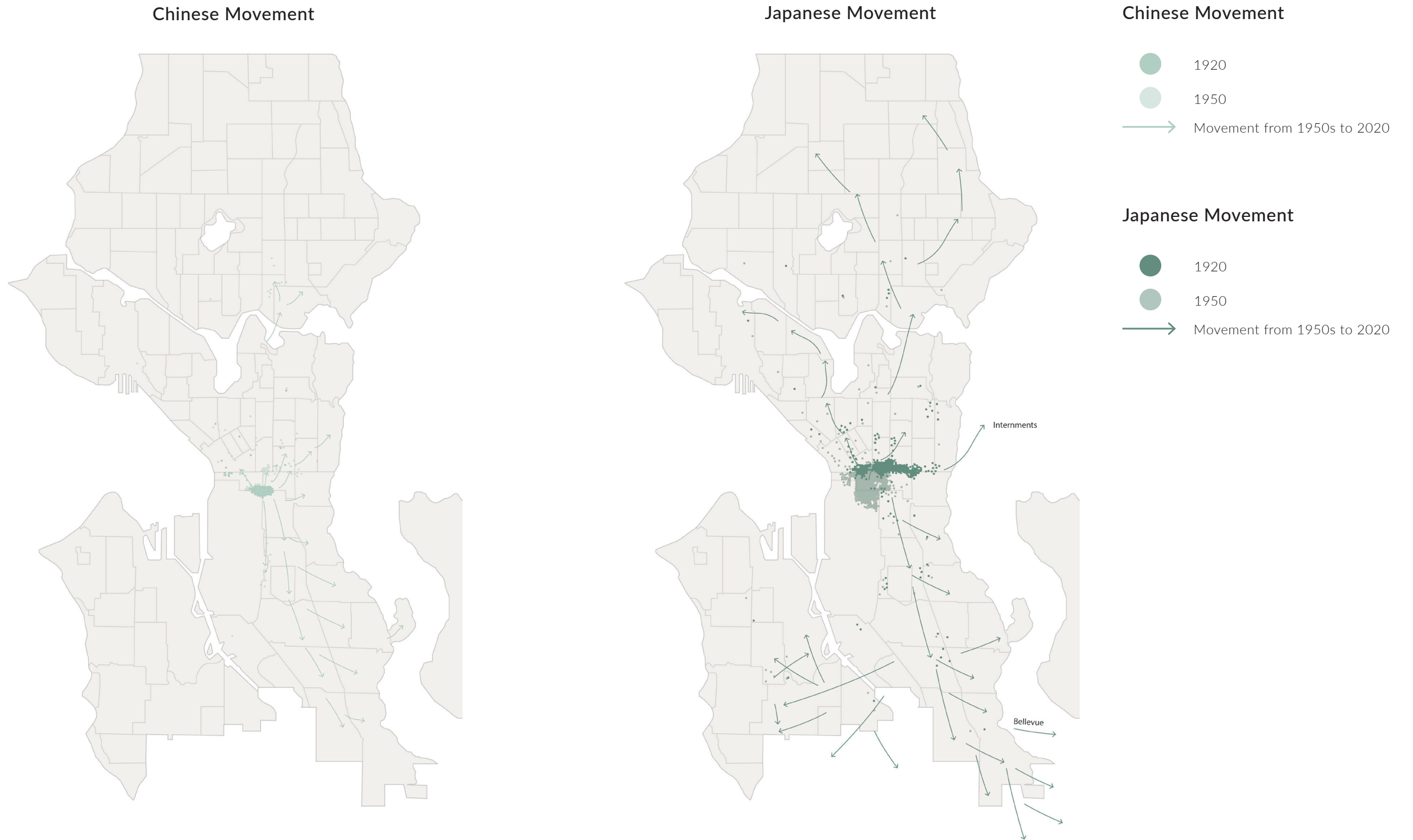
B. MIGRATION & DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS

These visualizations tracked the movements of Black, Japanese, and Chinese communities from 1920 to 2020. Arrows and density maps illustrated how communities were funneled into certain neighborhoods through policy and then pushed out again by speculative redevelopment.

The act of mapping also became part of the design process. It helped identify intervention sites—places where historical erasure and contemporary resistance intersect. For example, Pier 48 was selected not only for its historical significance but also for its present-day spatial invisibility and potential as a site for community-led reclamation.

[Figure 3.7, 3.8]
 Chinese and Japanese Movement in Seattle
 Phase I: Sourced by the book *Social Trends in Seattle, 1944* by Calvin F. Schmid

Phase II: Sourced by the Civil Rights & Labor History Consortium by University of Washington mapped *Race and Segregation in Seattle and King County* between the dates of 1940-2020.



C. REDLINING & RACIALIZED HOUSING

Using HOLC maps from the 1930s, this research highlights how neighborhoods such as the Central District, International District, and Beacon Hill were systematically labeled as “hazardous” or “declining” due to the presence of Black, Asian, and immigrant communities. These classifications justified disinvestment and exclusion from home loans and public resources. When analyzed alongside census data and present-day real estate trends, these same areas continue to show heightened vulnerability to gentrification. The historical logic of redlining where race was tied to land value still structures patterns of displacement and speculative development today.

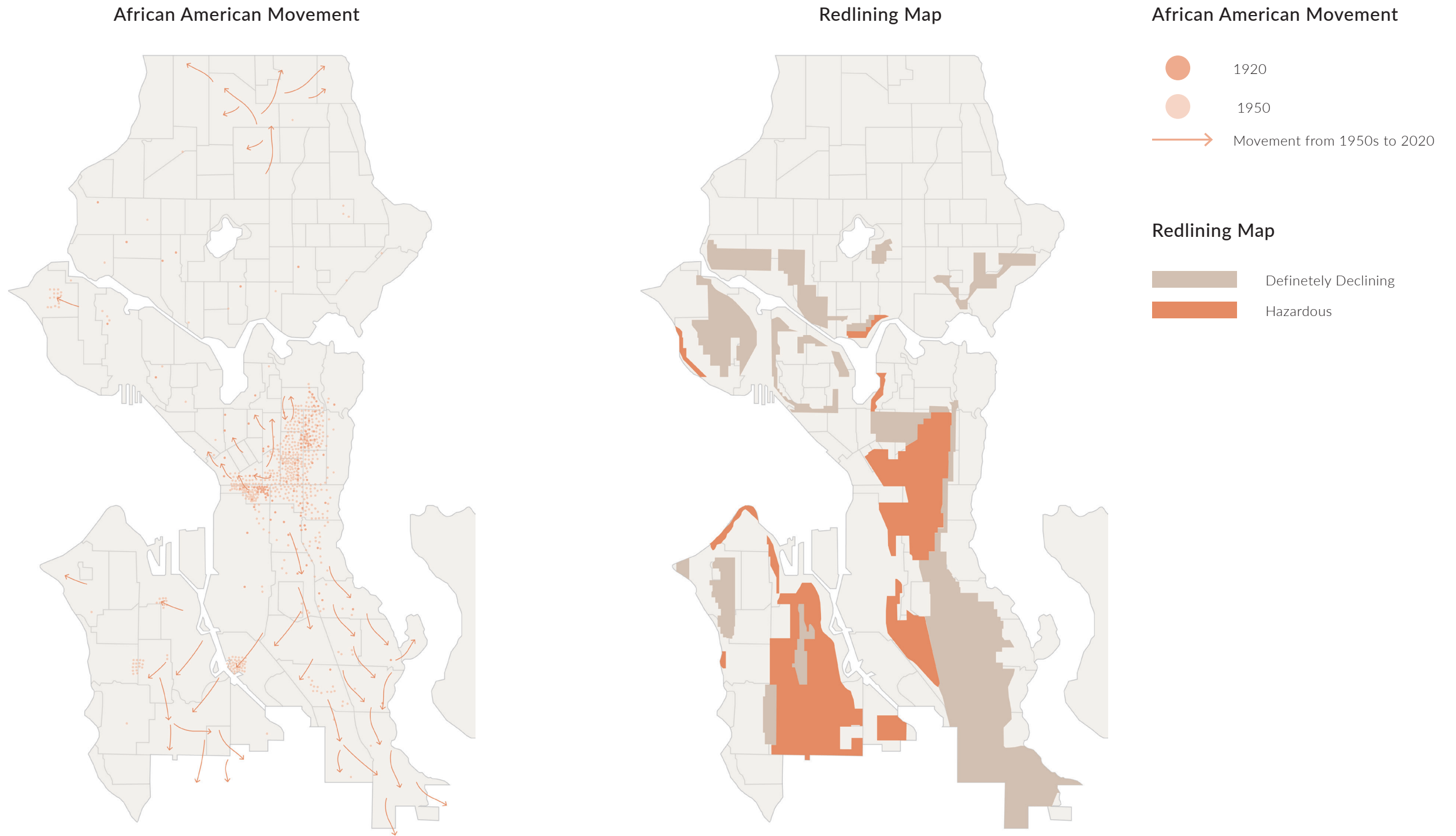
[Figure 3.9]
African American Movement in Seattle
Phase I: Sourced by the book *Social Trends in Seattle, 1944* by Calvin F. Schmid

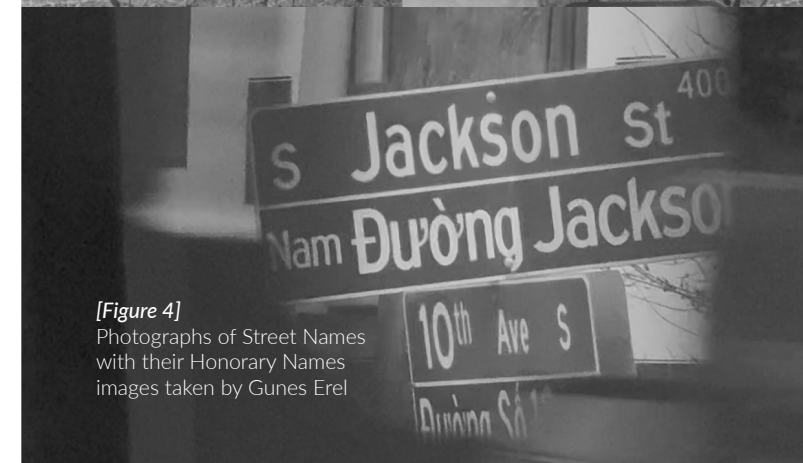
Phase II: Sourced by the Civil Rights & Labor History Consortium by University of Washington mapped Race and Segregation in Seattle and King County between the dates of 1940-2020.

[Figure 3.10]
Redlining Map of areas “definitely declining” and “hazardous”

Sourced from Commercial Map of Greater Seattle with “grade of security” designations, 1936

National Archives. Records Group 195. Records of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board [FHLBB], 1933-74





C H A P T E R F O U R

DESIGN PROPOSAL

[Figure 4]
Photographs of Street Names
with their Honorary Names
images taken by Gunes Erel

4.1: FOCUS AREA & DESIGN INTENT

[Figure 4.1] (left)
Early Map of Seattle 1856
from Battle of Seattle

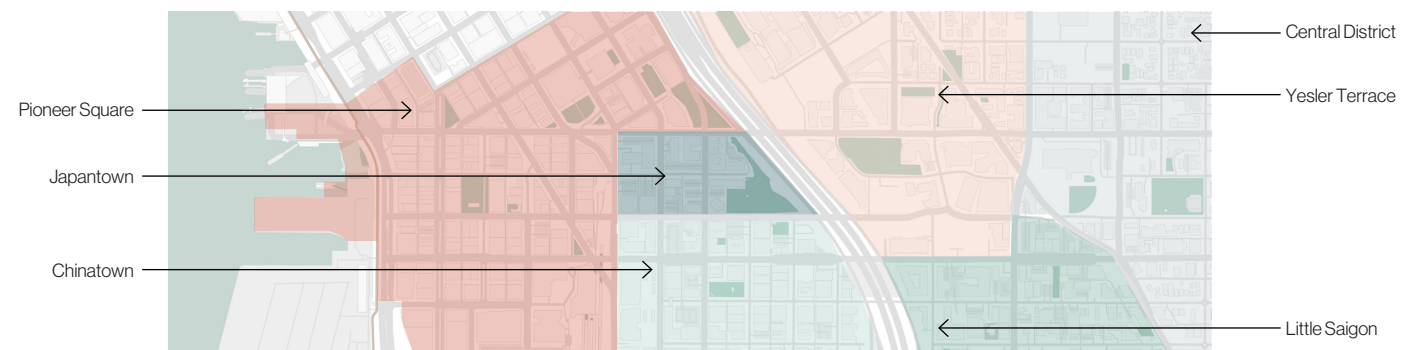
[Figure 4.2] (left)
2025 Downtown with
Neighborhoods shown

The design focus of this thesis centers on a cluster of neighborhoods adjacent to Seattle's downtown: Pioneer Square, the Chinatown International District, Yesler Terrace, and the Central District. These areas were not chosen arbitrarily; they represent a geographic nexus where colonial foundations, racialized labor histories, and contemporary displacement converge. As some of the first zones of contact between Indigenous peoples and settlers, these neighborhoods also became sites where Black, Chinese, Japanese, and Indigenous workers helped build the settler city's infrastructure while being systematically excluded from its civic life. Together, they offer a powerful lens into how urban space in Seattle has been contested, racialized, and reclaimed across time.

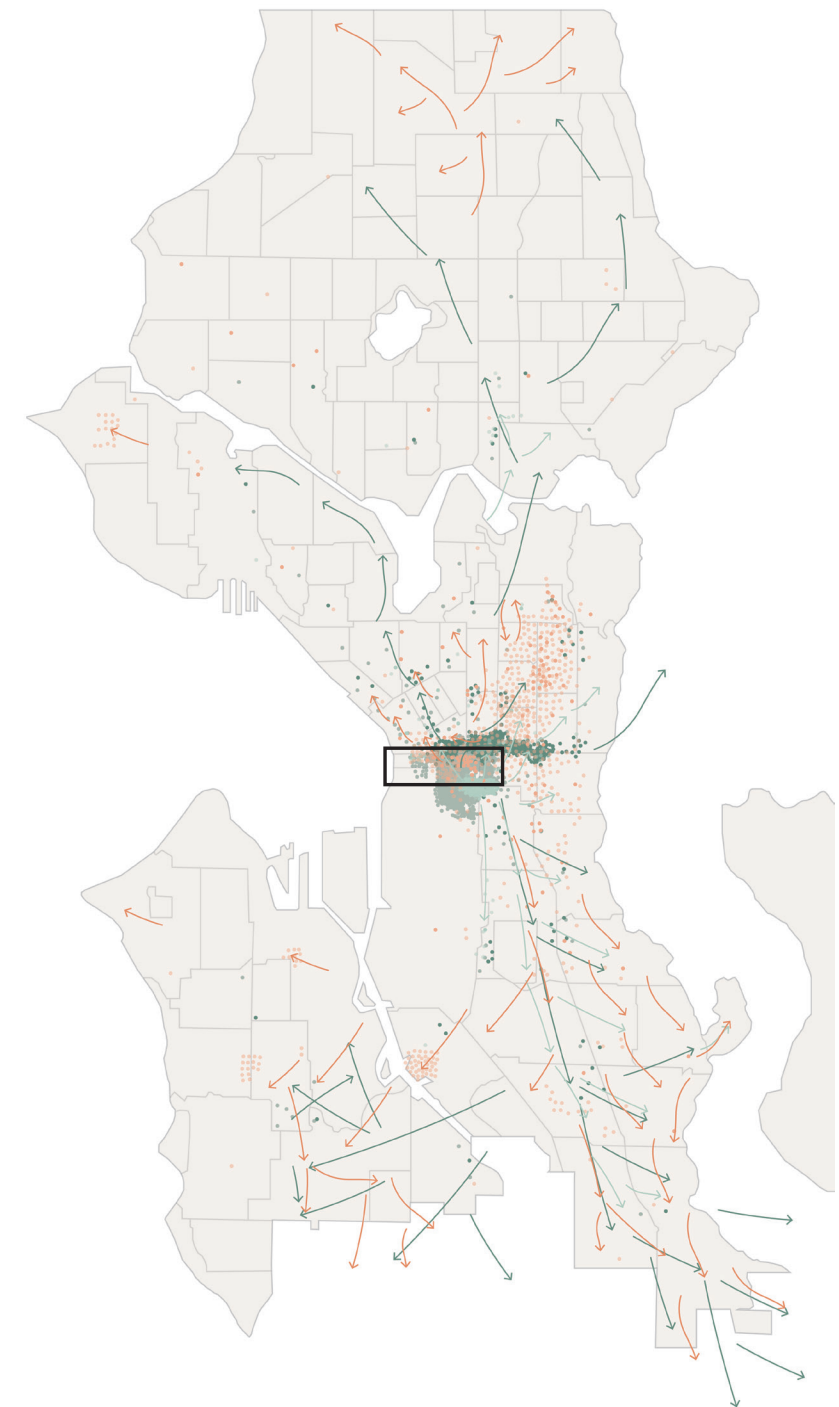
Drawing on theorists such as AbdouMaliq Simone (2019) and Neil Brenner (2013), this thesis views the urban not as a fixed entity but as a layered and conflictual process shaped by overlapping forces of extraction, resistance, and imagination. By focusing on this interconnected cluster of neighborhoods, the project locates design interventions where multiple injustices are visible at the street level. Here, design becomes a tool for memory work, political critique, and spatial repair. These neighborhoods are not only sites of harm but also of resilience, where community organizing, mutual aid, and cultural continuity persist.



Early Map of Seattle 1856

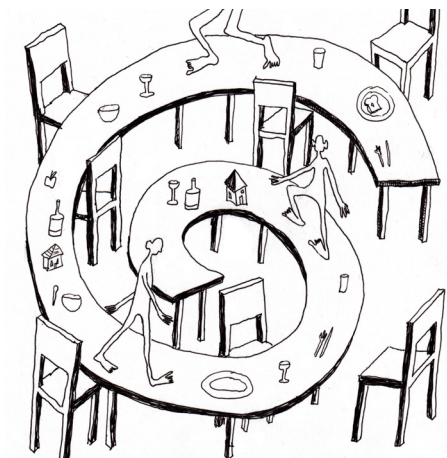


Seattle 2025-with Neighborhoods

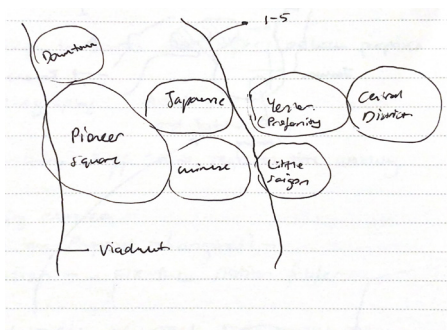


[Figure 4.3]
Seattle minority movement
maps superimposed together
with marked focus area

- Indigenous
- African American
- Chinese
- Japanese



[Figure 4.4]
Future Faada Adda with AbdouMaliq Simone from podcast Architecture Talk



[Figure 4.5]
Sketch by Gunes Erel showing the Neighborhoods and dividers

[Figure 4.6] →
Proposed Design Interventions

4.2: DERIVATION OF THE INTERVENTIONS

PHASE 1: Spatial Timeline

Historical locations were highlighted to transform the chronological timeline into a spatial narrative, connecting past events to Seattle's present-day urban experience. This mapping effort initiates the reinscription of memory into the city's fabric. The second map highlights these sites once again, this time through the lens of design. The project proposes strategies for storytelling that draw attention to these historically significant locations.

In some cases, the sites include preserved historic buildings. In others, the built environment has been completely erased. Some locations are now active spaces of cultural resistance, marked by public art or used for community gatherings. The plaque designs communicate the historical relevance of these sites. Multiple forms of visual interpretation are used, including infographics and plaques with QR codes that invite passersby to engage more deeply with erased histories.

PHASE 2: Pathways

The Remembrance Trail is a central design strategy in this thesis: a multi-nodal path that links sites of historical trauma, cultural survival, and ongoing resistance across central Seattle. It is not a conventional heritage trail or linear tour. Instead, it functions as an evolving, relational, and participatory infrastructure for spatial justice. This approach draws from Dolores Hayden's concept of "urban landscapes of memory," which embed cultural histories into the everyday cityscape rather than isolating them in monuments.

The trail does not center a singular event or identity. Instead, it weaves together multiple histories—Indigenous, Chinese, Japanese, and Black—while centering each community's specific experiences of displacement and resilience. This plurality aligns with Arturo Escobar's vision of design for the pluriverse, where diverse worldviews coexist without being reduced to a single narrative.

The trail helped guide the site selection process for the four architectural interventions. It identified intersections between sites of historical erasure and present-day community activity. It supports storytelling and spatial design as intertwined strategies for justice, challenging the spatial amnesia that often accompanies urban development. Drawing on Saidiya Hartman's notion of "critical fabulation," the trail acknowledges archival silences while offering care and imagination to rebuild collective memory.

The Remembrance Trail is designed as an iterative and expandable framework. Future nodes may be added through collaborations with community organizations, artists, and educators. The structure remains open and adaptable, not fixed or finalized.

PHASE 3: Interventions

Guided by Elizabeth Grosz's writing on spatial multiplicity, this thesis resists a one-size-fits-all approach. Each intervention is context-specific, responsive to site conditions and community needs. Some interventions are more architectural and spatially intensive. Others focus on strengthening existing cultural practices and spaces, using them as stepping stones for deeper engagement.

Each of the four primary design interventions is situated along the Remembrance Trail. Each one reclaims a site of erasure and transforms it into a place of presence, visibility, and cultural continuity:

- Dzidzilalich Cultural Center at Pier 48 – A site for Indigenous governance, ecological restoration, and ceremonial gathering
- Chinese Expulsion Memorial Park – A space of public memory and resistance, commemorating the 1886 expulsion
- Nihonmachi Green Alley – A revitalized alley connecting green spaces
- Central District Healing Garden and Music Venue – A cultural and performance space supporting Black community healing and celebration



Dzidzilalich Cultural Center



Chinese Expulsion Memorial Park



Nihonmachi Green Alley

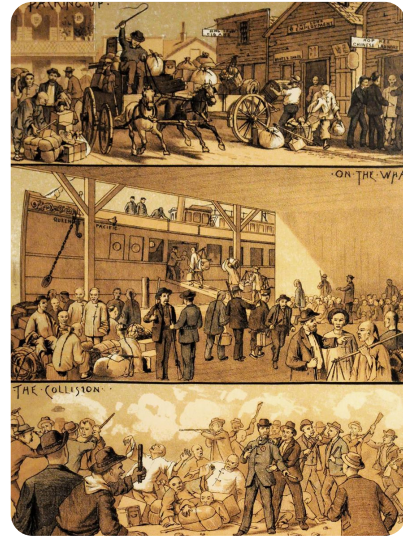


Central District Healing Garden and Music Venue

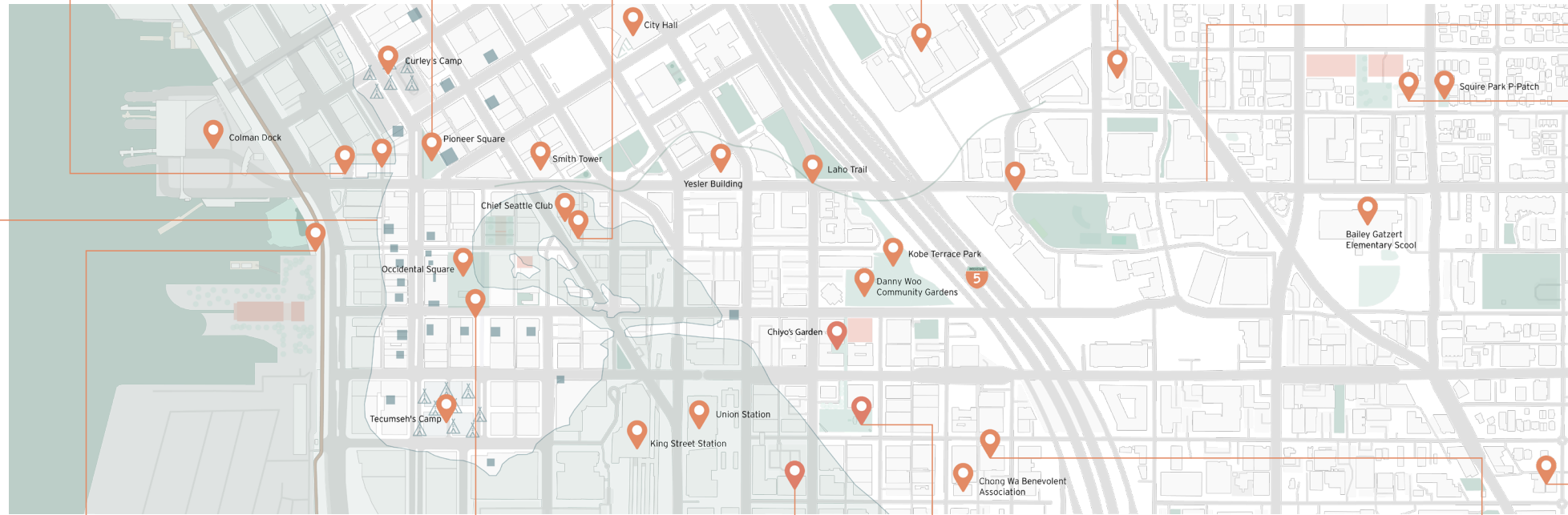
PHASE I: Spatial Timeline with Historical References

[Figure 4.7]
Archival Photographs
Courtesy Washington State
Historical Society, MOHA, Courtesy
Densho and National Archives and
Records Administration, Seattle
Room Digital Collections

[Figure 4.8]
Early Map of Seattle superimposed
with current downtown map with
historical locations marked



The Chinese at the Wharf



Washington Hall



Native American Camps in Ballast Island



Anti-Chinese Riot gathering of
Washington State Militia



Seattle Indian Center



Hing Hay Park

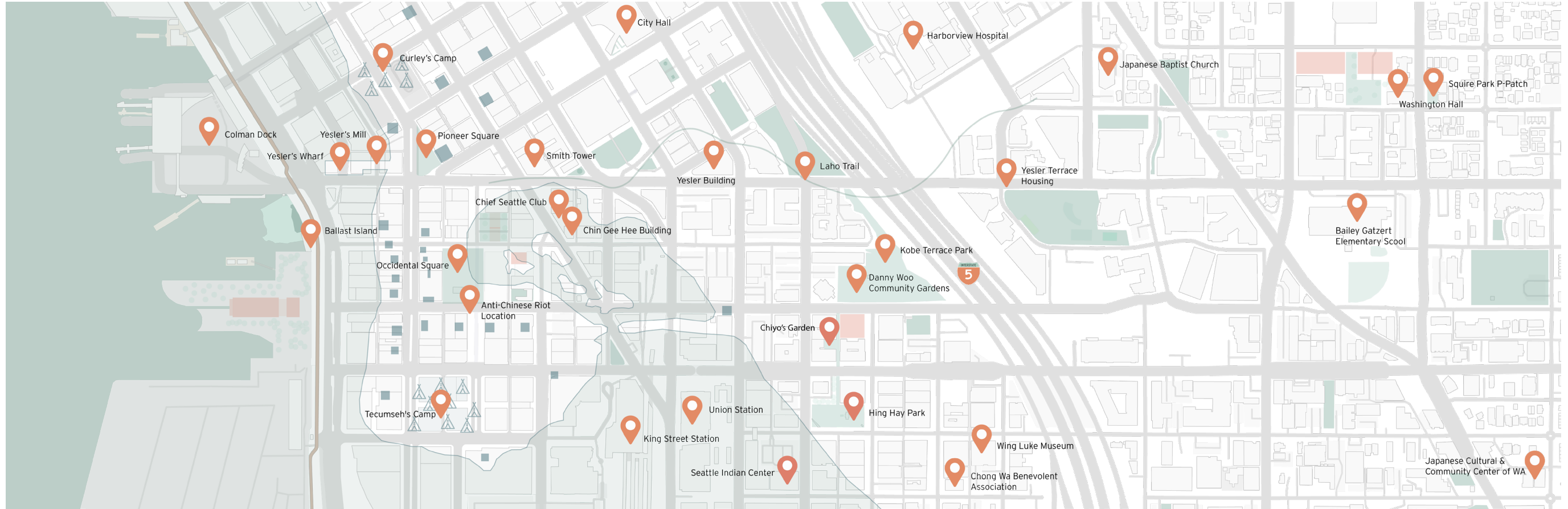


Wing Luke Museum



Japanese Cultural and
Community Center of WA

PHASE I: Spatial Timeline



[Figure 4.8]
Early Map of Seattle superimposed with current downtown map with historical locations marked

[Figure 4.9]
Example of the historical plaque designed



[Figure 4.10]
Villers Abbey informational timeline



[Figure 4.11]
Indigenous placemaking in a rill/water feature at Algonquin College.



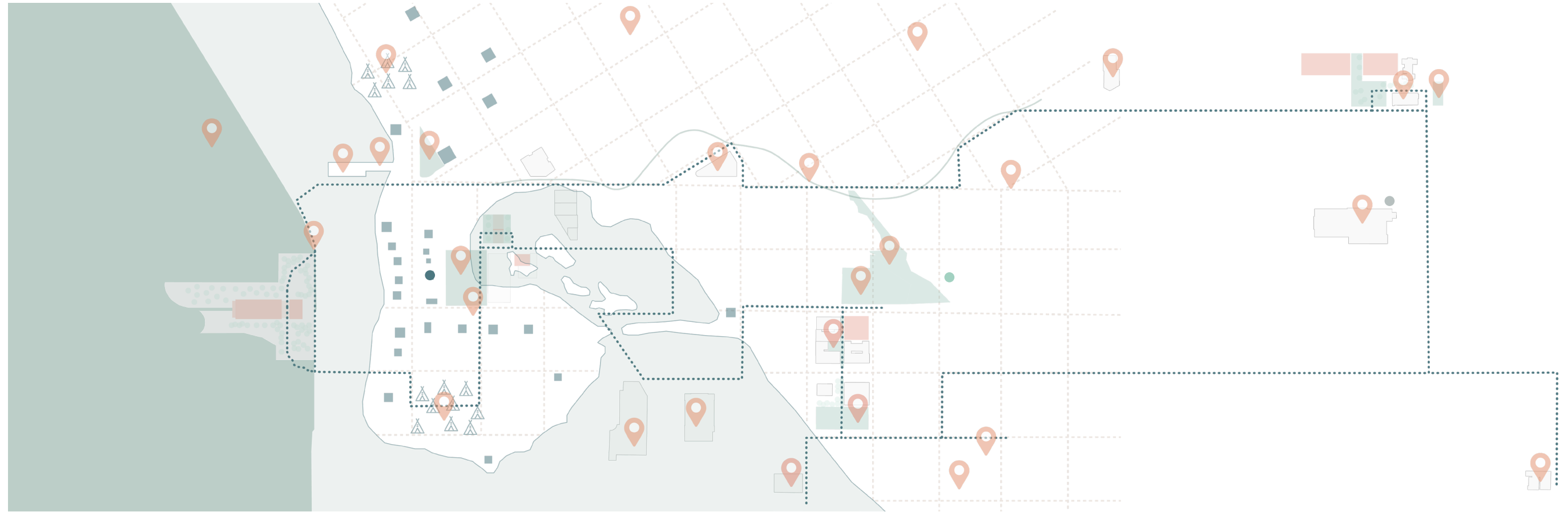
[Figure 4.12]
Example of metal signage for way finding in Barcelona, Spain



[Figure 4.13]
Example of wayfinding for pathways integrated with timeline



PHASE 2: Pathways

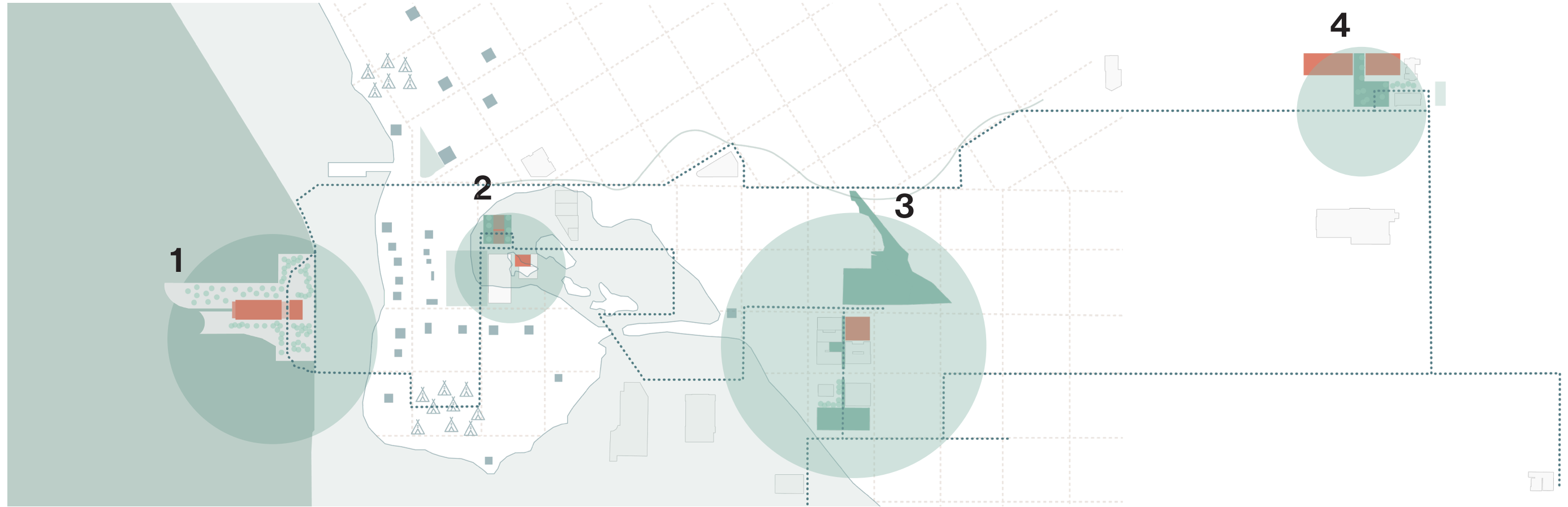


[Figure 4.14]
Early Map of Seattle with pathways
superimposed with historical
locations marked

[Figure 4.15]
Views from the path highlighting
the different qualities and
experiences



PHASE 3: Interventions



[Figure 4.14]
Early Map of Seattle showing the proposed intervention sites

[Figure 4.6]
Proposed Design Interventions



1. Dzidzilich Cultural Center



2. Chinese Expulsion Memorial Park



3. Nihonmachi Green Alley



4. Central District Healing Garden & Music Venue

4.3 : DZIDZILALICH CULTURAL CENTER AT PIER 48

Pier 48 sits atop one of Seattle’s most historically and spiritually significant sites: Dzidzilalich, meaning “Little Crossing-Over Place” in Lushootseed. Long before settler colonization, this area was a tidal inlet with shellfish beds, canoe routes, and seasonal encampments that linked Coast Salish communities across the Salish Sea. Today, however, Pier 48 is fenced off and largely absent from the city’s public memory. This proposal reclaims Pier 48 not just as a place of historical recognition, but as an active Indigenous cultural center—a site for ceremony, governance, and ecological restoration. It builds upon Indigenous frameworks of space-making that prioritize relationality, sovereignty, and continuity rather than monumentality. The architectural form draws inspiration from the Coast Salish longhouse—a typology rooted in collectivity, ceremony, and ecological harmony. Longhouses were not simply dwellings, but spiritual and political centers where knowledge was transmitted through performance, governance, and daily life.

The proposed structure is elongated and low, oriented along the east-west axis of the pier. Its key elements include:

- A ceremonial hall with two chimneys and hearths, supporting storytelling, drumming, and gatherings.
- Gallery spaces to display art and ceremonial canoes
- A west facing canoe landing with gentle ramp for intertribal protocol landings.
- Restorative gardens surrounding the building, using native plants and integrating traditional ecological knowledge.

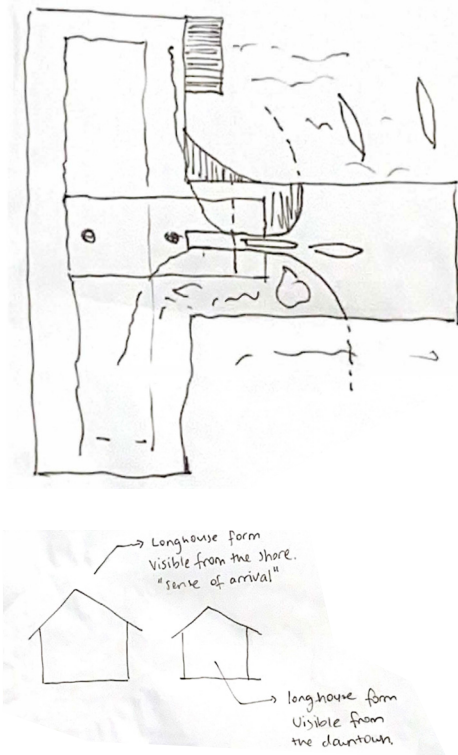
The longhouse structure resists settler-modernist aesthetics in favor of a responsive, embedded architecture that engages light, wind, tides, and ceremony. Inspired by architect Alfred Waugh’s work with the Lílwat Nation, this design follows the principle that “form must follow culture.” Following Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2021), who writes that “ceremony is not an interruption of life—it is life,” the building is designed not for symbolic presence but for ongoing use by Coast Salish peoples.

Potential programming includes:

- First Salmon ceremonies
- Winter dancing
- Workshops for Indigenous youth
- Canoe gatherings linked to Tribal Journeys
- Exhibits curated by local tribes

Importantly, the site is proposed to be governed by Coast Salish tribal leadership or an intertribal foundation—not by the City of Seattle. This challenges the settler tendency to manage Indigenous spaces through state institutions and instead affirms Indigenous jurisdiction on ancestral lands.

Ecological restoration is integrated into the core of the design, aligning with the LandBack movement’s emphasis on rematriating not just land, but relationships with ecosystems. Floating gardens and intertidal shelves will support habitat regeneration. Rainwater harvesting systems will irrigate the native plant gardens and reduce runoff. These interventions build upon models like Daybreak Star and the nearby Habitat Beach project but extend them through Indigenous governance and ceremonial use.



[Figure 4.15]
Hand sketches of design concept

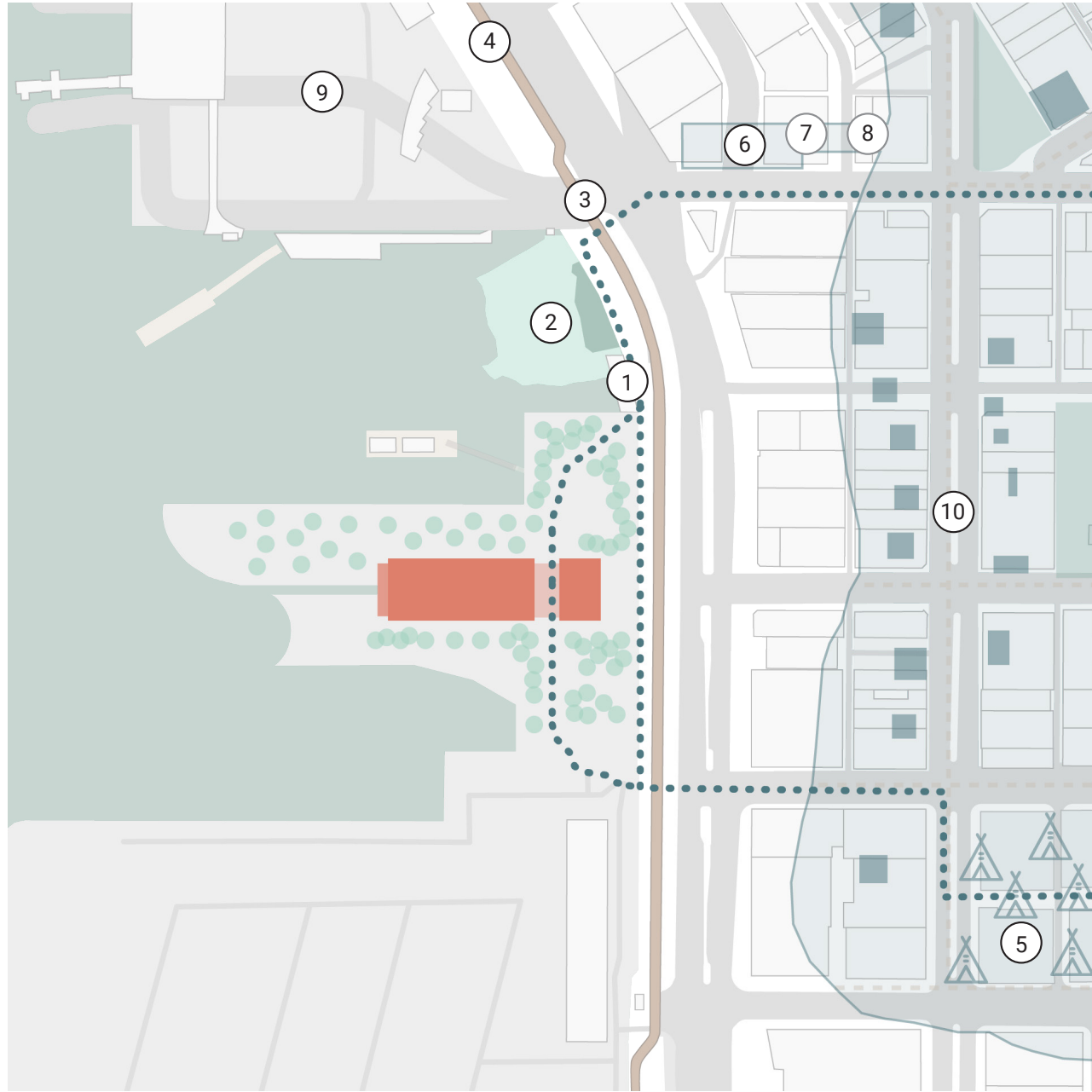
The pier’s cracked surface is reshaped in organic curves to create a more harmonious edge between land and water. A central axial cut brings water through the pier itself, forming a continuous relationship between land and sea.

By situating an Indigenous cultural center at the heart of Seattle’s waterfront—adjacent to sports arenas, ferry terminals, and tourist attractions—this intervention repositions Indigenous presence as central to the city’s urban experience. It challenges the city’s reliance on performative land acknowledgments, asserting instead a practice of Indigenous jurisdiction, permanence, and visibility. Dzidzilalich is not a relic of the past—it is a living place, holding both ancestral memory and the vision of a just, sovereign future.

[Figure 4.16]
Dzidzilalich Cultural Center
Rendering showing the relationship with the water and land.



Context Map for Dzidzilalich Cultural Center



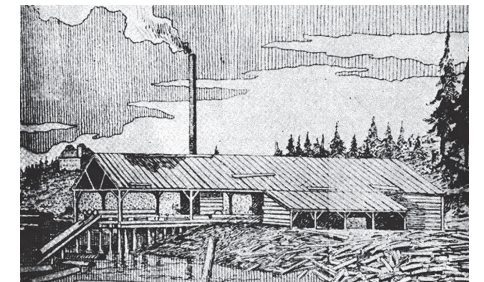
[Figure 4.17]
Early Map of Seattle superimposed with current downtown map with historical locations marked. Numbers showing the important locations adjacent to the site.



1 | Washington Street Boat Landing



3 | Migration Stage - Buster Simpson



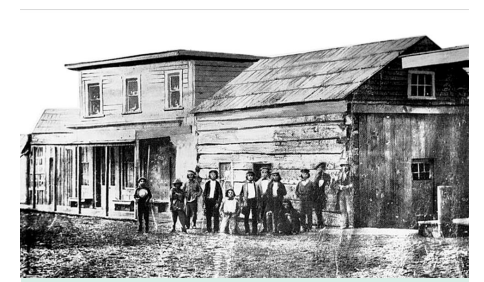
7 | Yesler's Mill



1 | Ballast Island



4 | Oscar Tuazon



8 | Yesler's Mill Cookhouse



2 | Pioneer Square Habitat Beach



6 | Yesler's Wharf

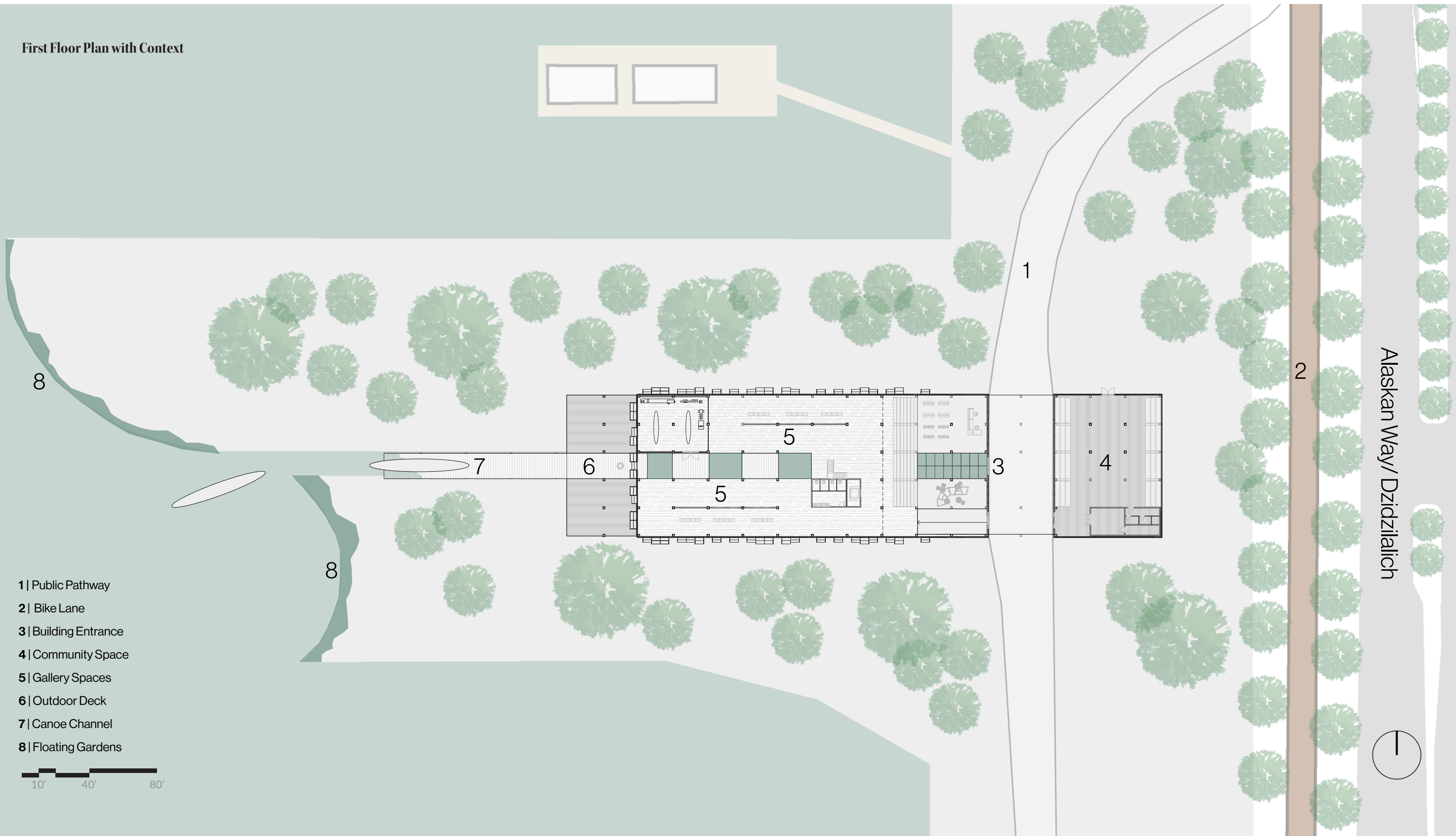


9 | Colman Dock

[Figure 4.18]
Context map highlighting unillustrated historic locations
5 | Tescumpeh's Camp
10 | First Settlements

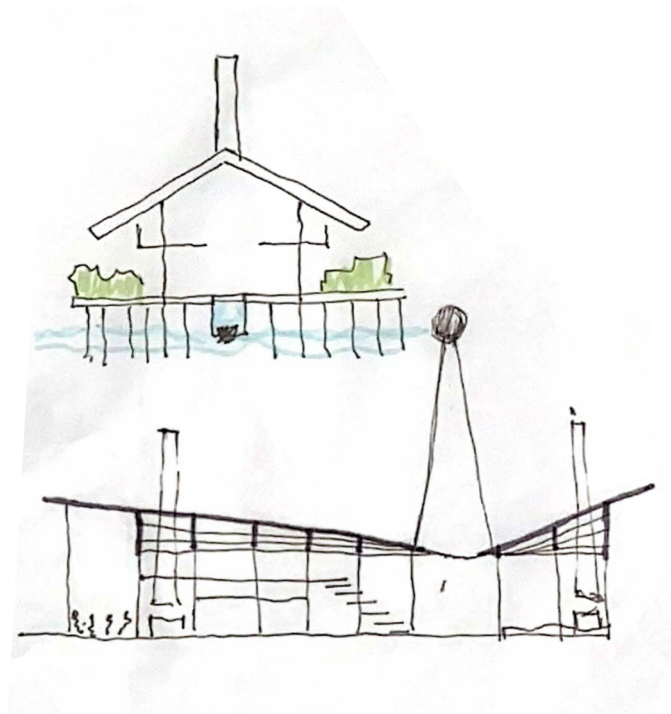
[Figure 4.19]
Site photographs from the new Seattle Waterfront near the Intervention Site 1

First Floor Plan with Context



- 1 | Public Pathway
- 2 | Bike Lane
- 3 | Building Entrance
- 4 | Community Space
- 5 | Gallery Spaces
- 6 | Outdoor Deck
- 7 | Canoe Channel
- 8 | Floating Gardens

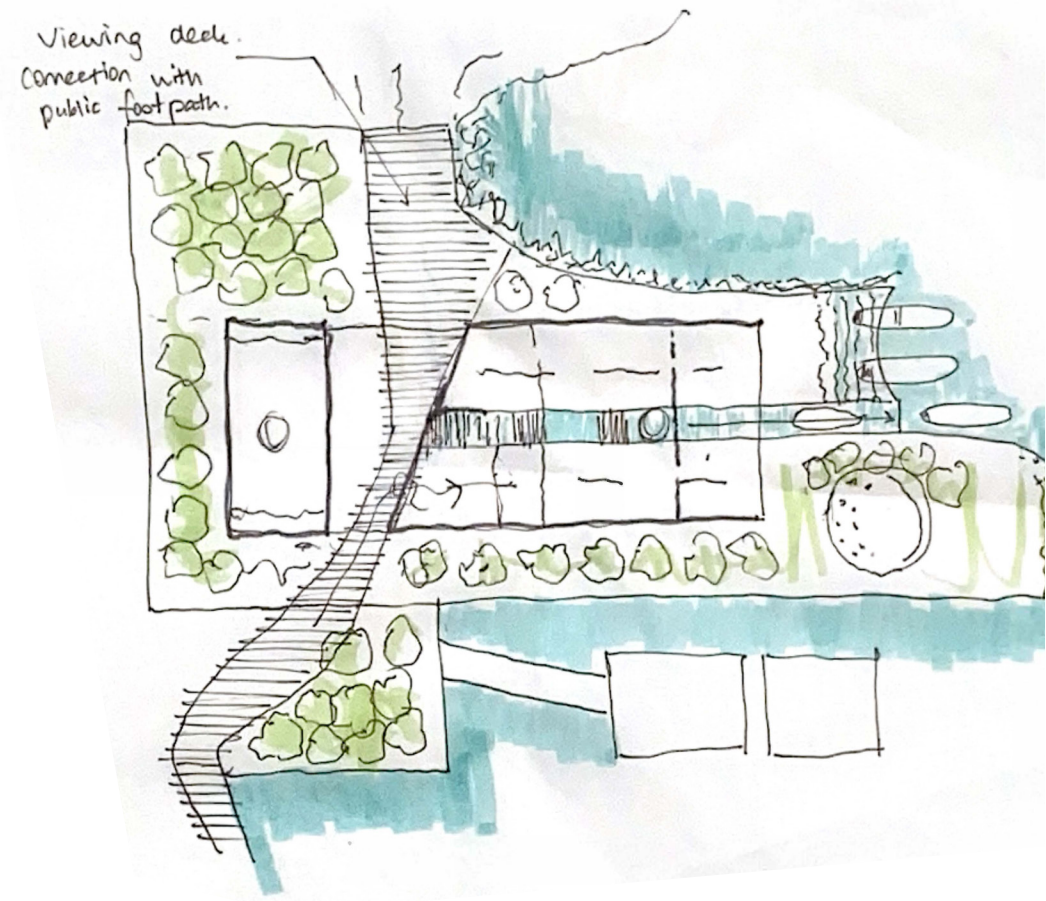
10' 40' 80'



[Figure 4.20] Design concept sketches for Pier 48 showing form of the building

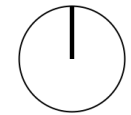
[Figure 4.21] → Conceptual design of floating gardens for ecological restoration

[Figure 4.22] → Second-floor plan and sectional cut



10' 40' 80'

Second Floor Plan



[Figure 4.23]
Visualization of a second-floor
craft studio

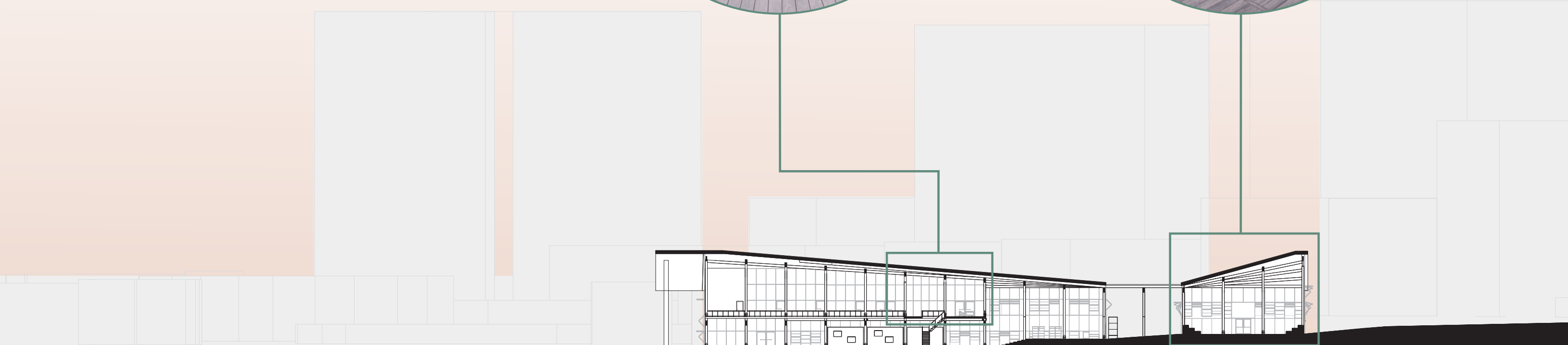


[Figure 4.24]
Visualization for Community Gath-
ering Space



10' 40' 80'

[Figure 4.25]
Section showing the pier 48 and
the ramp



4.4: CHINESE EXPULSION MEMORIAL PARK

Occidental Square is a prominent public space in downtown Seattle, framed by historic brick buildings, frequented by tourists and office workers, and shaded by mature trees. Despite its centrality in Seattle’s contemporary urban fabric, this site conceals a critical and often neglected history of racial violence. Beneath its surface lies the largely unacknowledged memory of the 1886 anti-Chinese riots, a pivotal event in the city’s past.

In February 1886, a mob led by white labor organizers and tacitly supported by local officials forcibly expelled over 200 Chinese residents from Seattle’s original Chinatown. Part of a broader wave of anti-Chinese violence along the West Coast, this expulsion aimed to erase Chinese laborers from the city, violently enforcing white supremacy and racial exclusion (Pfaelzer, 2007). Although recognized in historical scholarship, this event remains notably absent from the built environment, unmarked by public memorials or monuments.

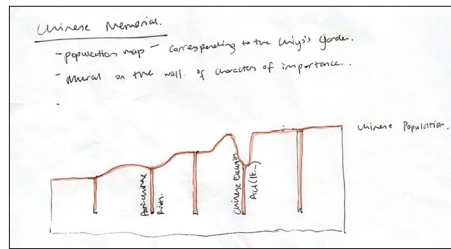
This design intervention proposes a memorial park near Occidental Square to confront this historical absence directly, honor those expelled, and foster reflection at the heart of the settler city. Drawing from James E. Young’s (1993) concept of the “countermonument,” the memorial intentionally avoids triumphalism and conventional monumental aesthetics. Instead, it embraces themes of absence and memory through subtle but powerful gestures. The central feature of the memorial park is the wall with carved with the fluctuating presence and enforced absence of Seattle’s Chinese community through history. The carvings also correspond to the specific events that caused this fluctuation in the population change. This guides visitors toward contemplation, grief, and accountability.

The planting design around the memorial reinforces the interconnected themes of resilience, migration, uprooting, and return. Plants native to the region, such as red-flowering currant and Pacific bleeding heart, are paired with species historically associated with Chinese immigrant communities, notably ginkgo trees and Chinese witch hazel. The staggered blooming cycles ensure the memorial continuously evolves throughout the year, embodying the dynamic nature of memory and cultural continuity.

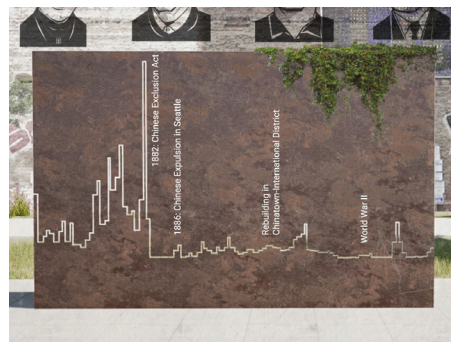
Rather than solely providing passive remembrance, the memorial park design includes dedicated areas for small gatherings, public readings, educational programming, and school visits. These spaces activate the memorial, transforming it into a site for ongoing dialogue, collective learning, and community engagement. By weaving historical knowledge into everyday urban activity, the memorial both interrupts the narrative of unchecked urban progress and opens possibilities for more just and inclusive urban futures, grounded in truth-telling and accountability.

The Chinese Expulsion Memorial Park is also a response to the community efforts for visibility by many organizations. Currently, no public installation commemorates the 1886 anti-Chinese riot at the Seattle waterfront, where much of the violence unfolded, despite recent major redevelopment in the area. The city’s Waterfront Program has not provided funding for a dedicated commemorative installation, citing policy limitations. Instead, a grassroots group known as the Chinese American Legacy Artwork Project (CALAP), initiated by Bettie Luke (sister of the late Wing Luke) and community advocate Ron Chew, has been actively raising funds to install a memorial along Alaskan Way South. The initiative emerged from Luke’s longstanding efforts to publicly remember the 1886 expulsions through rallies and events, highlighting the need for a permanent, visible reminder of these critical histories.

[Figure 4.26]
Sketch of Chinese Expulsion Memorial concept



[Figure 4.27]
Final memorial design showing the number of documented migrants from Asia to the United States between 1820 and 1957 and events that affected the population



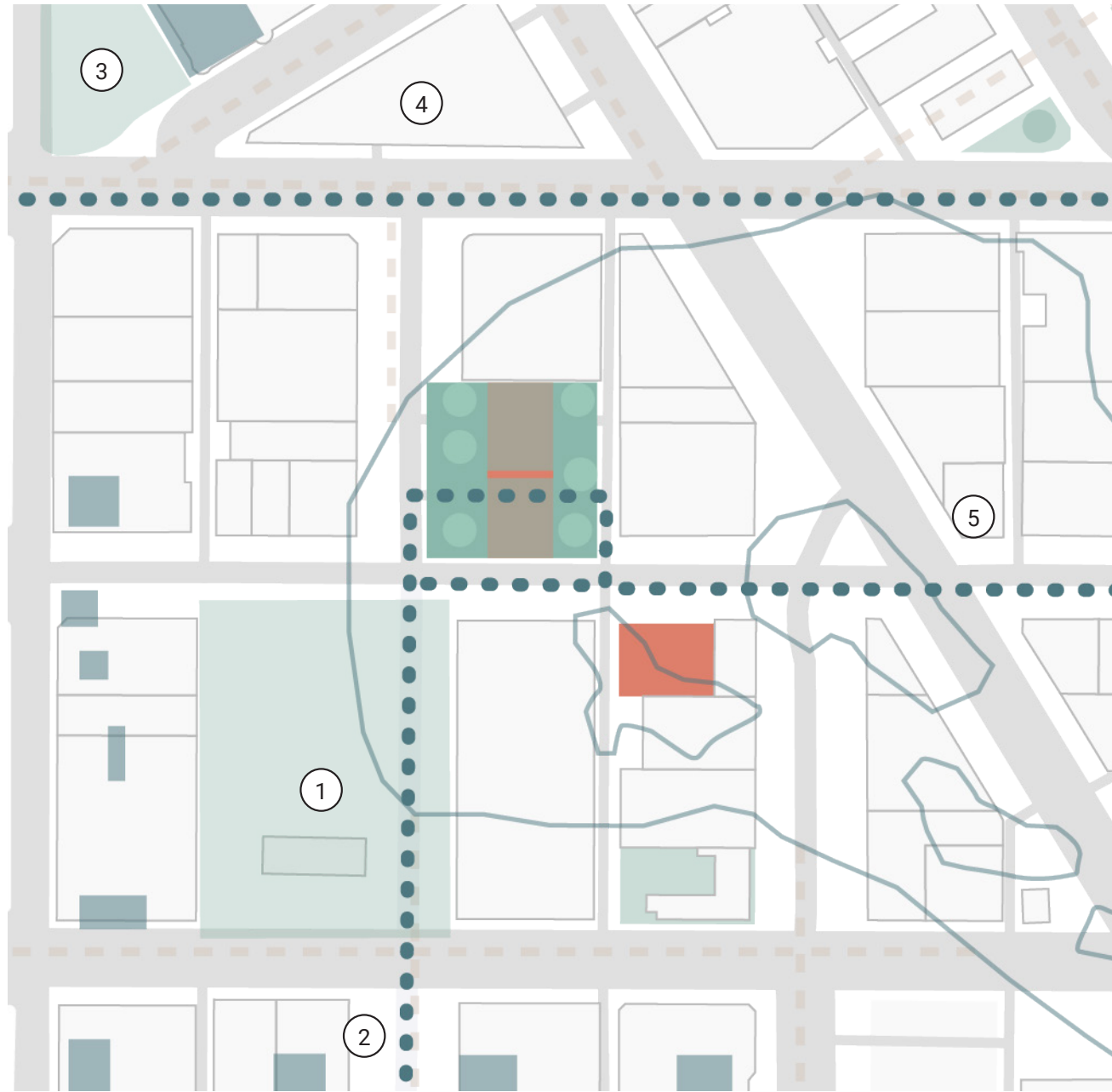
Although CALAP secured a reserved space within the new waterfront development, the city declined to financially support the project, placing the responsibility of funding entirely on community advocates (Chin, cited in personal communication).

Other cities in the Pacific Northwest have begun addressing their histories of anti-Chinese violence through permanent memorials—such as Tacoma’s Chinese Reconciliation Park and the memorial dedicated to Chinese miners massacred near Oregon’s Snake River. Seattle’s proposed memorial park at Occidental Square would similarly provide lasting acknowledgment, fostering civic responsibility, cultural education, and spatial justice at the center of the city.

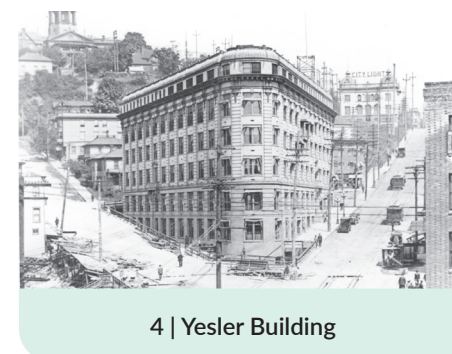
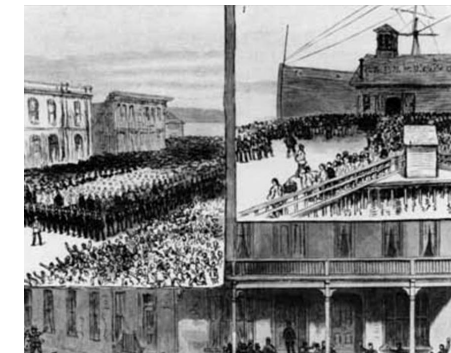
[Figure 4.28]
Visualization of the Memorial Park during weekday as people pass by or pause in the space.



Context Map for Chinese Expulsion Memorial Park



[Figure 4.29] Early Map of Seattle superimposed with current map with historical locations marked. Numbers showing the important locations adjacent to the site.



[Figure 4.30] → Context Images near the Intervention Site 2

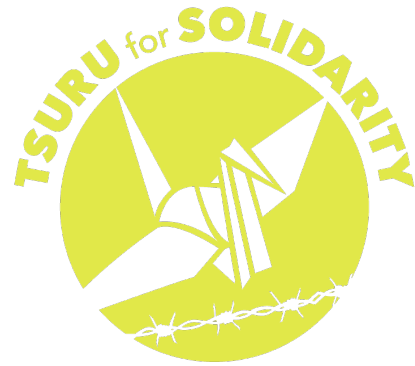


[Figure 4.31] Memorial Park during a protest gathering about Chinese Expulsion Remembrance

4.5 : NIHONMACHI GREEN ALLEY

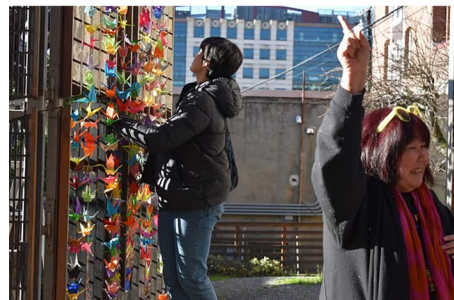
[Figure 4.32]

Tsuru for Solidarity is a nonviolent, direct action project of Japanese American social justice advocates and allies working to end detention sites and support directly impacted immigrant and refugee communities that are being targeted by racist, inhumane immigration policies. We stand on the moral authority of Japanese Americans who suffered the atrocities and legacy of U.S. concentration camps during WWII and we say, "Stop Repeating History!"



[Figure 4.33]

A community member at Chiyo's Garden during the event. (Photo: Dany Villarreal Martinez, courtesy of the International Examiner)



Seattle's Nihonmachi, or Japantown, was once a vibrant cultural and commercial district. Anchored by Japanese-owned hotels, shops, bathhouses, and community institutions, it formed part of a multiethnic urban landscape shaped by racial segregation and labor exclusions, adjacent to Chinatown and Pioneer Square. This thriving neighborhood was devastated in 1942 by Executive Order 9066, which led to the forced removal and incarceration of over 7,000 Japanese Americans from Seattle. Most never returned to reclaim their homes or businesses. In the aftermath, the neighborhood suffered decades of vacancy, neglect, and cultural erasure.

This design proposes the revitalization of a historically significant alleyway in Nihonmachi—once a communal space behind hotels and shops—into a corridor of remembrance and reconnection. Often overlooked or treated as utilitarian, the alley is reframed as an intentional space for cultural continuity, anchoring historical experience within the daily life of the city.

This specific alley was chosen for its connective potential: it links Danny Woo Garden, Chiyo's Garden, and Hing Hay Park—three important cultural and community spaces in the Chinatown-International District. By stitching these sites together, the intervention forms a green pedestrian spine through the historic core, offering both physical and narrative continuity across the neighborhood.

Drawing on the concept of urban acupuncture (Lerner, 2014), the project introduces precise, layered interventions that catalyze broader social and spatial healing. Oral histories from Densho recall that alleys in Nihonmachi once supported informal gatherings, communal access, and daily interaction. This design affirms that memory is not only preserved in monuments but also sustained through lived experience and movement.

A central visual element is the Tsuru Artwork: a translucent installation of paper cranes folded by community members and laminated within recycled acrylic panels. Referencing the Tsuru for Solidarity movement, the cranes symbolize healing, remembrance, and resistance to ongoing injustice. The artwork echoes the community's history of activism, tying past struggles to contemporary commitments. The alley's walls also feature Erin Shigaki's mural honoring Japanese American incarceration and resilience. These visual elements already layer memory into the environment, making the alley a space of both witness and invitation.

Ecologically, the alley becomes a micro-habitat corridor, blending Pacific Northwest native plants with culturally significant Japanese species. The planting design includes ferns, mosses, and shade-tolerant varieties, creating a soft, biodiverse edge that thrives in urban conditions while promoting environmental stewardship. Lighting inspired by traditional Japanese gardens adds warmth and safety, supporting gentle nighttime use.

In contrast to conventional commemorative forms, this project centers intimacy and everyday sensory engagement. It honors what Asaka (2022) calls "ghost landscapes"—urban places marked by absence but filled with cultural resonance. Through partnership with local organizations, the alley is imagined as a living cultural and educational site—hosting storytelling events, school visits, field trips, and public programs.

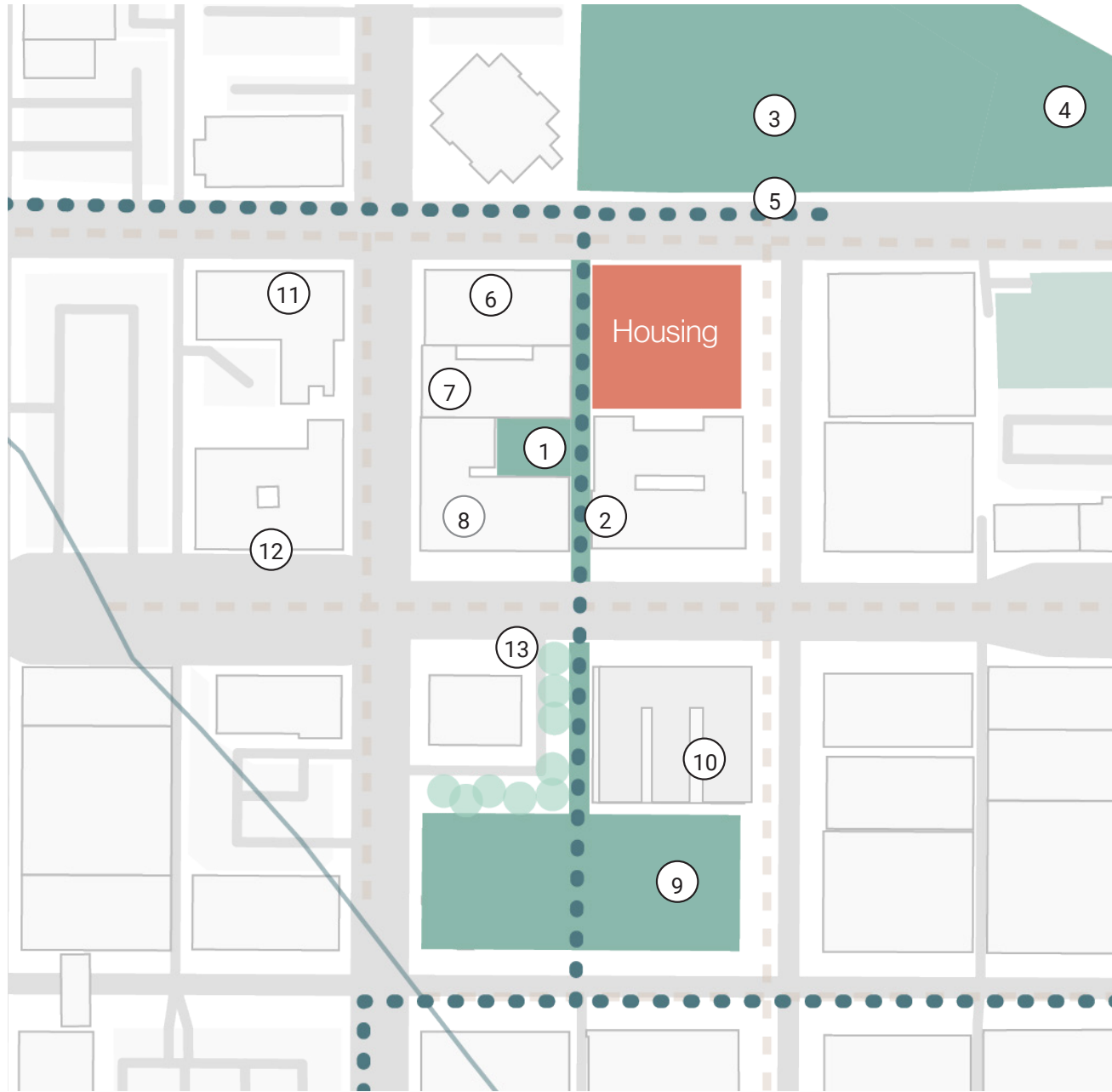
By weaving together existing community assets like Danny Woo Garden and Chiyo's Garden, activating forgotten infrastructure, and embracing visual storytelling through art, the Nihonmachi Green Alley affirms that memory is not static—it moves, adapts, and re-emerges. This intervention quietly resists historical erasure, inviting the city to pause, remember, and walk differently.

[Figure 4.34]

Nihonmachi Alley Visualization with greenery implemented, new paving, artwork installed and storefronts repaired



Context Map for Nihonmachi Green Alley



[Figure 4.35] Early Map of Seattle superimposed with current map with historical locations marked. Numbers showing the important locations adjacent to the site.

[Figure 4.36] → Context Images near the Intervention Site 3



1 | Chiyo's Garden



6 | NP Hotel



10 | Bus(c)h Hotel



2 | Erin Shigaki's "Never Again is Now" Mural



7 | Osami's Barber Shop



11 | New Chinatown



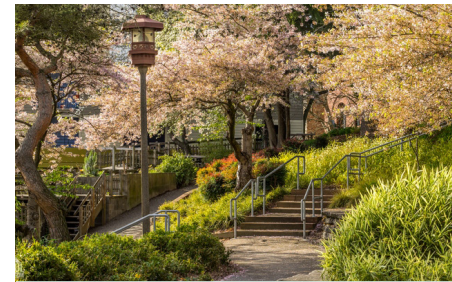
3 | Danny Woo Community Garden



8 | Panama Hotel



12 | Ebony Cafe



4 | Kobe Terrace



9 | Hing Hay Park



13 | The Green Dot



5 | Nihomachi Terrace Mural



9 | Hing Hay Park



[Figure 4.37]
Parking lot next to Bush Hotel
converted to a green corridor
with informational plaque

4.6 : CENTRAL DISTRICT HEALING GARDEN & MUSIC VENUE

[Figure 4.38]
Historical performance posters from Washington Hall



[Figure 4.39]
Jimi Hendrix performing with The Rocking Kings, late 1950s-early 1960s in Washington Hall



[Figure 4.40]
Filipino American Dance in the 1940s. Photo courtesy of FAHNS



Seattle's Central District (CD) was once the heart of the city's Black community. During the mid-20th century, over 70% of Seattle's Black residents lived here—shaped not by choice, but by redlining, exclusionary zoning, and racially restrictive covenants that barred them from living elsewhere in the city. From these constraints emerged a thriving cultural, political, and social landscape that included churches, jazz clubs, mutual aid networks, and Black-owned businesses that made the CD a center of Black life in the Pacific Northwest.

Yet beginning in the 1980s and accelerating into the 2000s, gentrification and speculative real estate development rapidly reshaped the Central District. A combination of state-led disinvestment, rising property values, and predatory housing practices led to the displacement of long-time residents. Homes that once passed between generations were flipped or foreclosed. Black families were priced out by luxury apartments, tech-fueled development, and a flood of new white residents. By 2020, the Black population had dropped to less than 15% (Taylor, 2019), and the neighborhood's cultural and political presence became increasingly residual.

This transformation has not only displaced people—it has displaced memory. While some projects like the Liberty Bank Building and Africatown Plaza have worked to retain and restore Black presence, public space in the Central District remains largely neutralized, with few sites that visibly reflect the neighborhood's Black history or ongoing community life. In a city that often celebrates diversity symbolically, the physical and cultural absence of Black communities in the CD raises urgent questions about who is remembered, who belongs, and who controls the narrative of urban progress.

In response, this thesis proposes a Healing Garden and Music Venue at a historically significant site near 23rd and Union—a place at the center of both Black cultural life and gentrification-fueled transformation. The proposal reclaims this space as a community-led site of cultural memory, intergenerational healing, and future-making.

At its heart is an open-air performance stage designed for music, spoken word, storytelling, and celebration. From jazz and gospel to hip-hop and protest songs, music has long served as a vessel of survival and political resistance in the CD. The stage affirms this sonic lineage, making space for the expressive traditions that continue to carry memory, protest, and joy.

A mosaic-tiled path leads visitors into the garden, each tile handcrafted in community workshops hosted at Wa Na Wari, Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute, and other cultural hubs. These tiles feature quotes from elders, gospel lyrics, and Afrofuturist imagery—embedding personal and collective memory directly into the land.

The surrounding healing garden draws on Afro-Indigenous ecological knowledge, prioritizing species with cultural and medicinal significance: sweetgrass, okra, yarrow, collard greens, lavender, and sage. These plants are not only beautiful but functional, anchoring the garden in Black traditions of care, nourishment, and ecological stewardship. Native trees like dogwood and elderberry provide shade and habitat, while pollinator-friendly beds ensure year-round ecological regeneration.

This is not a passive memorial—it is a living intervention. The space will support cultural programming, workshops, performances, field trips, and intergenerational storytelling. It invites neighborhood elders, youth, and displaced community members to reclaim a stake in the Central District's future—not through nostalgia, but through active re-inscription of Black presence and imagination into the built environment.

By reasserting Black presence in a gentrified landscape, this project challenges the dominant narrative that urban development must come at the cost of cultural erasure. This Healing Garden and Music Venue stands as a counter-narrative to displacement—a spatial refusal to let Seattle's Black history be overwritten, and an invitation to gather, celebrate, and regenerate community in the heart of the city.

[Figure 4.41]
Music Venue Visualization in the Healing Garden for performances



Context Map for Central District Healing Garden and Music Venue



[Figure 4.42]
Early Map of Seattle superimposed with current map with historical locations marked. Numbers showing the important locations adjacent to the site.

[Figure 4.43] →
Context Images near the Intervention Site 4



1 | Washington Hall



2 | Squire Park P-Patch Community Garden



4 | Mixed-use Housing



1 | Washington Hall



3 | Norman Mitchell Manor Low Income Housing



4 | Mixed-use Housing



1 | Washington Hall



4 | Mixed-use Housing



5 | Denise Louie Education Center



[Figure 4.44]
Visualization of the Healing
Garden with Washington
Hall in the background with
informational plaque



[Figure 4.45]
Origami cranes hanging on the
gate of the Chiyo's Garden

C H A P T E R F I V E

CONCLUSION

Conclusion & Future Directions

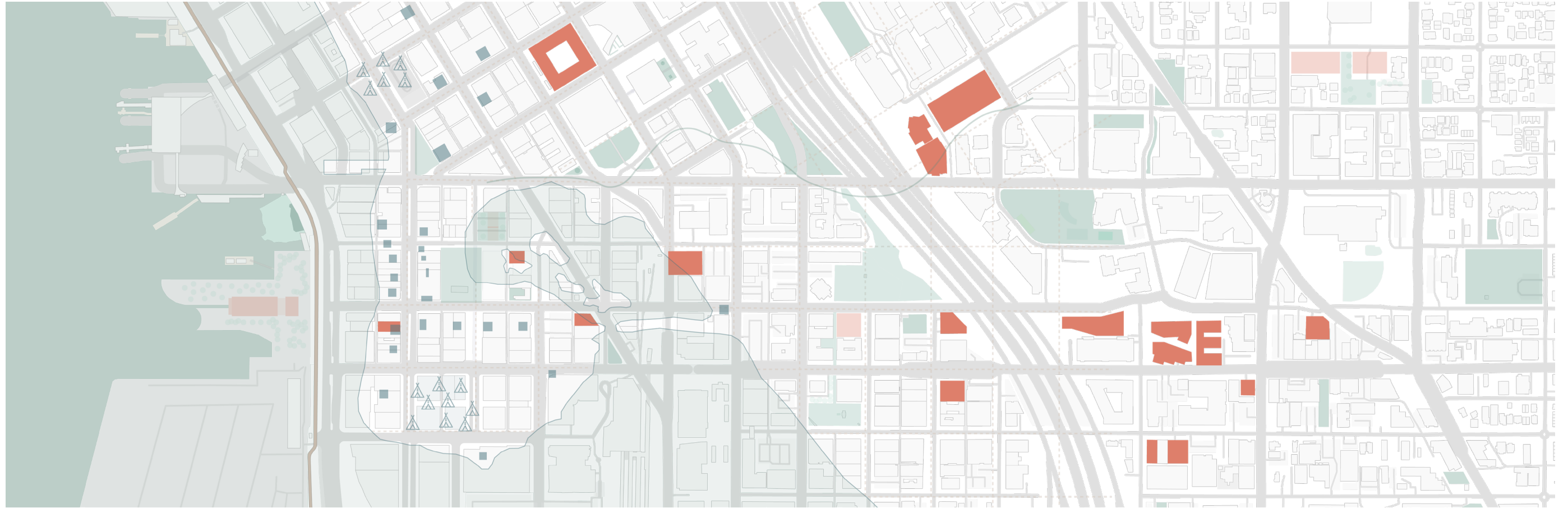
The trail frames the city not as a static grid, but as a living archive—one that can remember differently and more justly, while acknowledging that it is always transforming. These interventions are intended as starting points for broader collaborations, inviting tribal governments, local nonprofits, and public agencies to co-lead processes of implementation and stewardship. Public memory should not be confined to museums; it belongs in parks, plazas, transit stops, and schools. This project could evolve into a curriculum or walking tour—shared in classrooms, community centers, and design studios. Digital maps or oral history platforms could further animate these sites with living memory. At the same time, this work is inherently partial. While it proposes architectural and spatial interventions, it does not claim to speak for the communities it references. Each proposal would need deeper co-design and participatory processes to take form in the real world. The scope is limited to four sites, while many other histories across Seattle remain unacknowledged. Though grounded in archival research, further collaboration with community members would deepen the relevance of each intervention. While this project is centered in Seattle, the approach is transferable. Cities like Oakland, Minneapolis, Vancouver, and Chicago are undertaking similar efforts to re-center erased histories through spatial justice. The use of layered theory, site-specific research, and contextual design offers a framework that can inform broader practices.

This thesis has explored how urban design can function as a tool for resistance, repair, and resurgence in the face of historical erasure. In Seattle—a city shaped by settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and uneven development—it centers communities whose stories have often been silenced or displaced from the public realm. Through four spatial interventions—the Dzidzilich Cultural Center, Chinese Expulsion Memorial Park, Nihonmachi Green Alley, and Central District Healing Garden and Music Venue—it proposes strategies for urban remembering that are alive, dynamic, and rooted in everyday life. Each intervention shows that memory is not passive. It is shaped through spatial choices, material language, jurisdiction, and intent. In doing so, the project challenges liberal multicultural models of commemoration and instead promotes decolonial, community-led approaches grounded in sovereignty, storytelling, and place-based knowledge. As Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us, decolonization is not a metaphor. It requires material shifts in land, power, and resources. These interventions aim to move beyond symbolic gestures toward spatial practices that support justice, visibility, and continuity.



[Figure 4.46]
Illustration from Historical Materialism journal article: "Reexamining Race and Capitalism in the Marxist Tradition" by Ashok Kumar and Robert Knox

PHASE 4: Future Directions



[Figure 4.47]
Early Map of Seattle superimposed
with current map showing
possibility of future interventions

[Figure 4.6]
Proposed Design Interventions



Dzidzilalich Cultural Center



Chinese Expulsion Memorial Park



Nihonmachi Green Alley



Central District Healing Garden & Music Venue

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