

Chocolate City Way Up South in Appalachia:
Black Knoxville at the Intersection of Race, Place, and Region

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Dedication

This dissertation is my love letter to Black Knoxville and I would like to dedicate it to all the community members that so willingly shared their stories with me formally and informally.

I would also like to dedicate this work to little Black girls in chocolate cities throughout the world. Those girls include: the ones from good homes and the ones from dysfunctional homes, the ones who live in well-resourced neighborhoods and the ones who live in struggling neighborhoods, the ones who attend the best schools and the ones who attend school nobody cares about, the ones who know what PhDs are and the ones who have never heard of a PhD. This dissertation is for those Black girls.

Acknowledgments

I am humble and honored to have been able to pursue this level of education. These have been six of the most challenging, yet satisfying years of my life. My completing this degree is a testament to strength of the people who came before me and those who walk with me. I do not take it lightly that many people have had to take many steps and make many sacrifices for me to get to this place.

Somebody survived the middle passage so I could be here

Somebody bought Victoria village so I could be here

Somebody traveled from St. Lucia to Guyana to find work

Somebody sent her daughter to sewing lessons

Somebody saved pennies at a time to buy the materials she would used to build the house I grew up in

Somebody sent their teenage son to the military, he became an renowned artist that move to the states and drove a bus so I can be here

Somebody thought me reading, math, social studies and science

Somebody followed me on Facebook and liked every single thing I've posted so I can be here

Somebody loved the hell out of me so I could be here

Somebody fed me and moved me into their house

Somebody talked with me for hours and listen to all my frustrations about this research so I could be here today

Somebody danced with me with spirits in my soul

Somebody laughed with me

Somebody cussed me out

Somebody comb my hair

Somebody cried with me so I could be here

Somebody sent their baby girl thousands of miles to the United States so I could be here

Somebody told me stories of black Knoxville

Somebody read my exams

Somebody did laundry permanently so I could be here

Somebody read my papers and gave me feedback

Somebody took me shopping so I could be here

Somebody sat on the edge of the couch and watch TV with me when I was having a bad day so I could be here today

Somebody read books so I could be here

Somebody gave me book to read so I can be here

Somebody cheered me on, sent me kind words

Somebody played school with me so I could be here

Somebody answered my question, asked me questions and prayed for me so I can be here

Somebody was, somebody wasn't somebody did and somebody didn't so I can be here

To all those somebodies... Thank you!

Abstract

Popular perceptions of Appalachia depict a rural region populated by poor, "backward," uneducated whites. Despite a more than two-hundred-year black presence in Appalachia, the perceived racial homogeneity of the region and the scholarly discourse that downplay racial difference (c.f., Coleman 2001) create a story of Appalachia focused on poor (white) problems that ignore race. Through an ethnographic case study of Knoxville, this dissertation seeks to disrupt popular and scholarly conceptions of Appalachia by considering how scholars might research, recognize and think about race in the region not simply through the experiences of whites, but through an examination of the lives of the sizable but almost invisible population of blacks. Using qualitative data, mainly in-depth interviews with 36 native and long-term residents of Knoxville and participant observation examine Black Appalachian experiences at the intersection of race and place—both at a contextual level as well as experiential level. Three primary questions drive this research: 1) What are the historical, structural, racial, and cultural practices that have shaped the relationship between Blackness and place? 2) How might understanding Black experiences facilitate a reimagining of place? and 3) How does Black place-making occur? /What are the major sites of Black place-making? To answer these questions and otherwise conceive the Black Appalachian experience in Knoxville, I draw and expand on literature in the theoretical tradition of Black geography and urban Black sociology –specifically Chocolate City Sociology. I argue that in the context of invisibility, erasure, and exclusion from narratives of Knoxville (Appalachia), Black Knoxvilleans develop a sense of place characterized by a sense of being out of place. Due to a history of racial violence against Black neighborhoods, i.e. urban renewal and urban disinvestment, Blacks also develop a strong sense of loss of place in Knoxville. Still, it is neighborhoods, not the region or the city, that are linked to Black

Knoxvillians' collective identity. While vehicles of racial violence, Black neighborhoods simultaneously function as sites of Black safety and collective place-making.

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Chapter 1: “I don’t identify as being Appalachian...Mountain people are Appalachian”

I don’t identify as being Appalachian. I recognize that our culture and East Tennessee is influenced by Appalachia. I definitely recognize that is a part of it. I have an appreciation for the mountains, but I wouldn’t consider myself as Appalachian. I can understand why people when they see where we are on the map.... Mountain people are Appalachian. Ah..Um...I understand. I went to Virginia to visit my aunt in high school, and I was there for a summer. I remember we were outside and whatever high schoolers do...just sitting outside like throwing rocks or something. And one of the kids was like do “y’all wear shoes?” They were asking me these random questions. They asked me if we wore shoes in Tennessee and in Knoxville were the roads paved (laughter) and I’m like were you really asking me that? And I had to explain.... yeah we wear shoes and we got paved roads. But there’s still sometimes this perception that we backwoods country in East Tennessee. And I just think I would never have to explain in Virginia where is still technically part of the South that we wore shoes and we don’t have dirt roads.

I think that we believe that we are from the South and I think that it takes an Appalachian or someone reference us as Appalachian for us to be reminded of that. Because I don’t think that we think of us as being Appalachian...cause we don’t think we are any different from Atlanta, Chattanooga, or Nashville. We think we’re the same. Until an outsider comes in and says, “Something’s different here” (Laughter).... And they all do! They all do! Every new graduate student, black faculty member (I don’t know what it is) (Laughing) they’ll say to me I’ve never.... I’ve never been to a place like this...

(Jamie)

1.0 Introduction

Speaker 1: He suggested that we make our proposal broader to include more places. That will make them more likely to give us the money to build the facility. He suggested maybe adding Appalachia.

Speaker 2: No, no.

Speaker 1: That's how we gonna get it done.

Speaker 3: No, don't say Appalachia. If you say Appalachia they gonna give the money to them white folks.

African Americans have long dwelled in Appalachia, as evident even today in remaining antebellum slave-built buildings and fences (Guy 2010). Slaves inhabited every county of Appalachia prior to the Civil War (Campbell 2011; Gardner 2014). For example, in 1860, in the city of Knoxville, Tennessee, Blacks were 20.3 percent of the population, and during the Union Army's occupation of the area, more Blacks flocked to Knoxville in search of jobs and new opportunities (Gardner 2014). In the early part of the twentieth century, Blacks also migrated to coal-mining areas of Kentucky, West Virginia, and Virginia in larger numbers to fill the voids in employment left by white men in the wake of World War I. Coal-mining companies were particularly aggressive in recruiting Black labor, and Appalachian coal fields became a migration destination for Black Southerners. By 1920, there were 80,841 Black residents in West Virginia alone, many of them coal miners (Coleman 2001). With the resulting Great Migration, large numbers of Blacks left Appalachia, joining others leaving the South. Nevertheless, in 1980, 1.3 million, or one in every fourteen Appalachians, were Black (Cabbell 1980) and in 2006, Blacks made up 8.2 percent of Appalachia's population (Myadze 2006).

Despite the long history and significant presence of African Americans in Appalachia, many people are surprised to learn that there are Blacks in the region. Blacks have largely been invisible in popular and scholarly presentations of Appalachia (including in Black and Appalachian studies), although Afrolachian Studies has emerged recently as an area of inquiry in sociology and other fields. The problem of invisibility is so pervasive that Griffin (2004) scolded

Appalachian studies scholars for continuing to suffer from a “color-blindness,” which has resulted from and perpetuates the social construction of Appalachia as the making of whiteness. This race-making process has had profound consequence for the people of color in Appalachia. Because race is usually studied in the context of the presence of people of color—and that presence is relatively small in the Appalachia—issues of race and racism have been deemed irrelevant in Appalachia (Smith 2004). As a result, whites have been presented as having “racial innocence” (Smith 2004); the racial practices—overt or covert—structuring the lives of Blacks and other groups are seen as race-neutral or nonexistent, and the structures supporting white domination can prevail.

Traditionally, when Blacks are mentioned in an Appalachian context, there is a tendency to portray healthy race relations, as seen in such comments as, “Black coal miners in Appalachia fared better than their contemporaries in other industries” (Coleman 2001: <http://www.wvculture.org/history/wvhs/wvhs1502.html>). Mostly, race has been ignored in the nearly exclusive focus on class. Typically, scholars studying Appalachia highlight “exploitation, oppression, and redemptive collective action by victimized highlanders” (Griffin 2004:7). These highlanders, however, are presumed white; and even when scholars try to define class, status, and power dynamics in Appalachia, they fail to recognize Black experiences. Ultimately, the production of whiteness in Appalachia perpetuates whiteness as a generic identity—i.e., one that is “normal”—which serves to obscure a racial analysis of the region. But despite its invisibility, race—in both insidious and heroic ways—has shaped Appalachia (Griffin 2004). It is only through the exclusion of race and the invisibleness of Blacks from the Appalachian narrative that certain myths about Appalachia can be maintained (Griffin 2004). These myths include the idea that the number of Blacks in Appalachia is tiny, that people who live in the mountains are “poor,

white hillbillies,” and that Appalachia has “white [poor] problems,” not the race problems that the rest of America has.

This dissertation seeks to challenge those myths and contribute to the long-neglected but important inquiry of Black Appalachian scholarship. Beyond the dominant discourses that render Black people invisible in conceptions of Appalachia, I also grapple with the racial, structural, and cultural practices that have historically reproduced that invisibility. However, based on the understanding that race is produced through space, I argue that this invisibility, in both the regional and local contexts, is a very place-based experience; therefore, I am interested in understanding Black Appalachian experiences at the intersection of race and place—both at a contextual level as well as experiential level. I approach both race and place as socially constructed ideas that are inextricably linked such that race is spatialized and place is racialized (Lipsitz 2007). While Appalachia’s racialization suggests a white space, Black places in the region are ignored, and Black people are subjected to cycles of displacement, dispassion, and other racialized and, therefore, spatialized experiences.

I recognize that Blackness is traditionally understood in the context of places with large Black populations, usually Northern migration destinations, like New York and Chicago, or Deep South locations, like Memphis and Atlanta. This dissertation draws on those understandings of Blackness but expands on them. However, my interests in studying Blackness in Appalachia is not simply to highlight another region; likewise, I am not satisfied with simply pointing out the region’s diversity or making a place for Blacks in Appalachia’s history. Though all of these tasks are important, I am more concerned with how centering the Black experience in studying this space may usher a reimagining and reconstruction of the region that contradict or otherwise complicate the region’s racial exceptionalism. Further, I hope to demonstrate how the

common perception of Appalachia as a poor white place erases a complex Black experience in the region. Particularly, I am interested in how Black people, within their own geographies, i.e., Black neighborhoods, respond creatively to local structural inequalities and racial violence. Focusing specifically on the Black Appalachian experience in Knoxville, Tennessee, there are three primary questions that drive this research:

1. What are the historical, structural, racial, and cultural practices that have shaped the relationship between Blackness and place?
2. How might understanding Black experiences facilitate a reimagining of place?
3. How does Black place-making occur? /What are the major sites of Black place-making?

To answer these questions and otherwise conceive the Black Appalachian experience in Knoxville, I draw and expand on literature in the theoretical tradition of Black geography and urban Black sociology –specifically Chocolate City Sociology, which is an asset-based approach to understanding Black communities. These theoretical traditions are particularly suitable for understanding Blackness in a place context. While not ignoring the weight of structural inequality, these traditions are centered on Black geographic agency and the ways in which Black people construct, contest, and complicate their understanding of place. Furthermore, they uncover Black maps and other ways that Black people have made and remade particularly cities, despite and in spite of struggles against racism. I build on insights gained from these frameworks to argue that in the context of invisibility, erasure, and exclusion from narratives of Knoxville (Appalachia), Black Knoxvillians develop a sense of place characterized by a sense of being out of place. Due to a history of racial violence against Black neighborhoods, i.e. urban renewal and urban disinvestment, Blacks also develop a strong sense of loss of place in Knoxville. Still, it is

neighborhoods, not the region or the city, that are linked to Black Knoxville's collective identity. While vehicles of racial violence, Black neighborhoods simultaneously function as sites of Black safety and collective place-making. I develop the concept of Black safety—place-based safety predicated on freedom against white supremacy and from a perpetual white gaze—to demonstrate the necessity and importance of Chocolate Cities, black neighborhoods, enclaves, sides of town etc., in white-dominated places. In addition, I introduce Black schools as a major site of place-making within Black neighborhoods, or Chocolate Cities otherwise.

Methods

My dissertation is a case study of Black residents in Knoxville, Tennessee. Relative to the rest of the South, African Americans—due to their underrepresentation in the region—are very seldom associated with Appalachia. For many people, the term “Appalachia” usually invokes images of poor, white, rural people and places. However, there is a substantial number of Blacks, particularly in urban areas in Southern Appalachia. Knoxville, Tennessee is one such Appalachian city with a sizeable Black population. Knoxville is located in East Tennessee and is one of the state's largest cities. Although the populations of Blacks in Nashville (in middle Tennessee) and Memphis (in west Tennessee) are larger than its own, Knoxville, like these cities, has had a significant Black presence from the time it was settled by whites in the eighteenth century. Both freed and enslaved Blacks were among Knoxville's population prior to the Civil War. Following the Civil War and later with the onset of World War I, many Blacks from rural areas in the region, as well as throughout the Deep South, poured into Knoxville in search of employment.

Specifically, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the city boasted of peaceful relations among the whites and Blacks. Furthermore, Knoxville's leaders set the city

apart from the rest of the South by highlighting that in 1860, Black citizens could vote and hold public office, be police officers, and sit on juries (Lakin, 2000). From 1909 to 1919, Knoxville was also home to the region's largest Black newspaper, *The East Tennessee News*. In addition, Knoxville was the location of one of the earliest and regionally recognized Black educational institutions to be established after the Civil War, Knoxville College (KC). Knoxville College, in the heart of the historic African American neighborhood of Mechanicsville, functioned as a beacon in the city's Black community, not only educating and producing a professional class of Black workers but also playing a central role in community-organizing, producing cultural activities, supporting Black businesses, and recruiting Blacks to the region. KC maintained this role until it lost accreditation in the early 2000s. Today African Americans make up almost 17 percent of the city's population, and Knoxville and the Knoxville metropolitan area serve as a hub for Blacks in surrounding cities and counties.

Given the number of African Americans who call Knoxville home and the historical significance of the city for African Americans in Eastern Tennessee and surrounding areas, Knoxville presents an ideal city to conduct a case study of African American experiences and identity in Appalachia. Context is important in case study research; it provides the real-life setting within which the phenomenon being studied takes place (Yin 2003). My interest is in the Black Appalachian experience, but because of contested boundaries and changes in definition over time, as well as the physical size of the region—the contours of Appalachia being difficult to pinpoint and study—the case study is therefore a suitable approach for this research. It will allow me to study Black Appalachian experiences within the physical boundaries of the city of Knoxville, which is a space that is overwhelmingly understood to fall within the bounds of Appalachia due to its location and culture. As an Appalachian space, Knoxville is the context for

this research. My research questions once again are 1) What are the historical, structural, racial, and cultural practices that have shaped the relationship between Blackness and place? 2) How might understanding Black experiences facilitate a reimagining of place? and 3) How does Black place-making occur? /What are the major sites of Black place-making?

This dissertation draws on the epistemological foundations of Black sociologists and ethnographers, tracing back to W.E.B. DuBois. Accordingly, I designed the study as an investigation into everyday Black life and experiences in Knoxville. I structured my data collection primarily around two techniques, in-depth interviews and participant observation. I used semi-structured interviews for this research because while they allow for some structure in the interview process, there is a great deal of flexibility whereby the conversation is free to vary depending on the participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2010). This interview style acknowledges participants as experts of their own experience and thus are the best ones to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon (Darlington & Scott 2002). Observing Black neighborhoods and communities, as well as cultural and intellectual spaces where Blacks have participated in constructing or spaces to which Blacks have been restricted, provided insight into how Black identities are constructed, maintained, and contested in these spaces. Among other places, these data collection techniques often led me to three African American neighborhoods.

Like many cities in America, housing is racially segregated in Knoxville. There are three geographic spaces that have historically been associated with African Americans in the city, and they make up what I refer to as the East Knoxville-Mechanicsville-Lonsdale triad. East Knoxville is located immediately east of uptown Knoxville and is currently being annexed by the expansion of the uptown area. During the 1950s and 1960s, urban renewal projects in Downtown Knoxville displaced hundreds of African American residents, many of whom relocated to East

Knoxville, an area made up of several smaller neighborhoods that remain highly populated by African Americans of different class and generational backgrounds. This community is home to Vine Middle School and Austin-East High School, where many African Americans attended and continue to attend school. Mechanicsville is named for the large number of “mechanics” and other industrial workers who lived in the area in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is to the immediate west of uptown. It is the oldest intact African American community in Knox County. Lonsdale is northwest of Mechanicsville. Both Mechanicsville and Lonsdale have also been affected by urban renewal since the 1980s and, as is the case for East Knoxville, “there is a mixture of incomes and types of housing in the [communities,] ranging from public housing projects to historical district homes” (Scott 1993:17). East Knoxville is separated from Mechanicsville by uptown, and Lonsdale is separated by Beaumont. These three communities have a common culture, and there is constant and significant contact between and among their residents; many are kin, schoolmates, and friends. In addition, many residents in each of these neighborhoods have generational ties to the neighborhoods.

Data

Over the course of the study, I collected formal interviews with 35 native and long-term Black residents of Knoxville. I employed snowball sampling to recruit participants for this study. Having lived in Knoxville for the past six years, I relied on some of the networks I have built. I also took advantage of casual encounters with people I interacted with in everyday life or via social media in order to locate participants. In addition, I asked study participants to share my contact information and brief information about the study with others they believe might be interested in being study participants. I ended up with 9 individuals who identified as male and 26 who identified as female. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 86 years old, with most falling

between 25 and 45 years old. Because it was important for my analytical focus to understand urban renewal in Knoxville, I was intentional about interviewing participants who were old enough to have directly experienced urban renewal. Five of my participants had experienced one or more phases of urban renewal. There were 25 people who were native Knoxvilleans and 10 who were long-term residents, having lived here for 10 years or longer. Of the long-term residents, one had been living in Knoxville since she was 3 years old but had Appalachian roots from Kentucky. Also with Kentucky Appalachian roots, the oldest person in my study has been in Knoxville since she was 16 years old. Others had moved to Knoxville mainly for job or school opportunities. Sixteen of my native Knoxvillean participants attended Black schools for elementary or secondary education, and 11 attended predominantly white schools for elementary and secondary education. Fifteen of my participants lived in Black neighborhoods, and 20 lived in other neighborhoods. Of those who lived in other neighborhoods, there were 5 who maintained strong ties and frequented Black neighborhoods either because their family home was there or they had a business in a Black neighborhood. There were others who maintained connections through going to church or participating in community work and social and cultural activities in the Black neighborhoods. Interviews lasted for as little as 30 minutes to as many as 4 hours, though most lasted for about 80 minutes. I conducted follow-up interviews with 10 participants, including one whom I met with over ten times. All interviews except the ones with one participant, the one I met with most frequently, were recorded with a standard Tape recorder. Interviews typically took place between only one participant and me and were conducted at either the participant's residence, my residence, or a common community space. After each interview, I recorded my own reflection.

I documented my participant observations in different ways. I audio- or video-recorded” public meetings such as community, school board, and city council meetings. I also carried a notebook with me and took handwritten notes during or after these meetings. For other meetings that were less public, I took handwritten notes from memory usually after the event in a more private environment. I also used talk-to-text and voice recording to take notes after observations. For cultural and social activities like neighborhood homecomings or sorority parties, I captured my observations with photographs, which was a part of an effort to comprehensively document Black places and place-making in Knoxville.

The study also relied on archival data, mainly newspapers and a range of supplementary data types, including content from social and public media. While conducting fieldwork, I collected print and/or digital copies of articles to supplement or triangulate interview data. This is particularly useful in my inquiry into urban renewal. Over the course of my study, I also collected newspaper articles that overlapped with my study or pertained to Black Knoxville generally. I also drew from Facebook posts, videos, and comments. These included video campaigns released by the city of Knoxville, e.g., a campaign by the mayor that illustrated the extent of Black invisibility in the city. Other things included community comments, posted in a community group page, on public works announcements or the comments of Black Knoxville residents concerned about defunding programs in Black schools.

Researcher Reflexivity

As a sociologist, I understand that who I am, my identity, the social locations I occupy, and my background in general shape my entire approach to this study. Even my decision to study Black Knoxville was shaped by my position. As an African American who grew up in Atlanta, when I moved to Knoxville to attend the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, I was immediately

shocked by the racial demographics of the city. Knoxville is one of the “whitest” places that I have experienced. I noticed soon after moving here that even though the Black population was so significant, Blacks lived in segregated neighborhoods. Even on the university campus, it was very common to go through a day without Black interaction. The few Black graduate students I encountered during my first few years were all just as eager as I was to complete their graduate education and leave Knoxville. Yet I noticed that race relations were seldom discussed, and the dominant narrative seemed to tell a story of healthy race relations between African Americans and whites. My research interest grew out of my wanting to understand what it meant to be Black in this context.

Once I began my field work, my social characteristics also impacted all of my field interactions. Being an African American gave me access to Black spaces without being perceived as an outsider. Similarly, it gave other Blacks I encountered at the grocery store and elsewhere a level of comfort around me that I sometimes took advantage of to find participants. Knoxville’s Black community is very close-knit, and it can be very difficult to penetrate this closeness, even as a Black person. Therefore, whereas being Black often gave me initial acknowledgement, being a non-native, at times, made me stand out. However, my husband has been a long-term resident of Knoxville. Having attended Knoxville College, the historically Black college in Knoxville, and having taught in predominantly Black schools for several years, he was able to gain acceptance and insight into the Black community. I often leveraged his social capital in my encounters, especially with native Knoxville residents. In addition, my husband also relied on his networks to help me with recruiting participants. My interactions with non-natives, who had moved to Knoxville for work or school, were sometimes smoother as they perceived similarities between themselves and me. Over the course of my study, through interactions with

different individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, and initiatives, I too began to be accepted into Black Knoxville and often found myself in Black political, cultural, and other spaces.

Another thing that shaped my interactions with participants was my affiliation with the University of Tennessee. For some participants, the University of Tennessee was perceived as a respected and reputable institution in the region, so it legitimized me and my work. For other participants, the racist histories between Black communities and universities in general, as well as a specific disconnect between the University of Tennessee and Knoxville's Black community, were more apparent. These participants were more skeptical of me, my intentions, and the work that I was going to produce. Several of these participants ended up being reoccurring interviewers, and it often took them seeing me in different community spaces— particularly my involvement in community-organizing initiatives—for them to recognize that my research intentions and commitment to Black Knoxville transcended my dissertation. Regardless of which camp they fell in, I recognized that this particular aspect of my positionality is tied up in particular power dynamics, and at times I felt it influenced what participants shared. At times, they told me what they thought I wanted to hear, and at times I sensed that participants felt they needed to control the narrative and protect the image of Black Knoxville.

The final noteworthy way in which my position affected my interactions with participants is that, during a large part of my field research, I was either pregnant or had a baby. This experience, to my surprise, resulted in favorable outcomes with my participants. Women, especially mothers, connected with me over what they perceived to be a familiar experience, and many were expressively proud of me for what they perceived to be my commitment. Men, on the other hand, particularly older men, were protective of me and were more willing to meet at

places that were more convenient for me to do our interviews. Also, my child, who was born in Knoxville, was received well by participants as a Black Knoxvillean, and I often felt that the experience of having her allowed for a kinship to develop between some participants and me.

Throughout this process of data collection, I tried to remain cognizant not only of how my position affected my interaction with participants but also of how my power and privilege impacted the types of questions I asked, how I asked them, and my feelings about participants' responses. I tried to be mindful of my body language and subtle things that I may or may not have been communicating to participants in my speech, tone, etc. Furthermore, it was very important that I centered my participants' voices in my analysis, so in addition to reading transcripts, while writing my analysis, I also listened to recordings, and throughout this dissertation I intentionally flooded my pages with direct quotes from participants.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 introduces the study by interrogating Appalachia's whiteness and offers a racial analysis that emphasizes place as important for reconstructing Appalachia and understanding Blackness in this context. Chapter 2 explores the theoretical traditions that inform my work: urban Black sociology's "Chocolate Cities" and Black geography. In this chapter, I explore the debates between structure and agency in social science literature that has informed how we understand Black experiences in America. I expand particularly on the more agency-based work housed in the traditions of Black geography and Chocolate City sociology by bringing Appalachia into understandings of Blackness. Chapter 3 traces the history of Blacks in Appalachia's challenging narratives of racial homogeneity and idea of Appalachian's "distinctiveness" and "racial exceptionalism." This chapter departs from the rural, coal-mining narratives of Appalachia in order to emphasize an urban Appalachian experience as a context for

understanding Black experiences in the region. Finally, in the chapter, I provide a brief history of Blacks in Knoxville. Chapter 4 deals with Black people's sense of place in Knoxville. In this chapter, I argue that negative experiences have shaped Blacks' sense of place, characterized by feelings of being out of place and a loss of place or placeless-ness. I argue that the stress of being such a large minority and being subjected to an invisibility in social, economic, political, and other arenas have produced a sense of being out of place for Blacks in Knoxville. I also situate urban renewal as a critical juncture that set into motion traumatizing structural and social changes—cycles of displacement, dispossession, and disinvestment—that reverberate over generations in a collective sense of Black placeless-ness within Knoxville generally.

Chapter 5 shows that Black neighborhoods in Knoxville are places where, despite cycles of structural violence and trauma, Black people experience a type of safety they do not otherwise experience in greater Knoxville. I advance “Black safety” as an idea of safety predicated on freedom that goes beyond more carceral understandings of safety. Chapter 6 positions Black neighborhoods as distinct places. In the Black collective consciousness, they are separated from the city of Knoxville and operate as Black-life worlds. The chapter explores how Black schools function as major sites of place-making within these neighborhoods. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation by considering how a racial analysis might uncover parallel stories of Appalachia that can reshape how the region is depicted and perceived by America in general. Such a reimagining of Appalachia is important in its own right, but in the face of a poor region, it can also have implications for more equitable approaches to the region's problems.

Chapter 2: 400 Mulvaney Street

Except from “400 Mulvaney Street”

When we were growing up Knoxville didn't have television, let alone an airport. It finally got TV but the airport is in Alcoa. And is now called Tyson Field. Right? Small towns are funny. Knoxville even has a zip code and seven-digit phone numbers. All of which seems strange to me since I mostly remember Mrs. Flora Ford's white cake with white icing and Miss Delaney's blue furs and Armetine Picket's being the sharpest woman in town—she attended our church—and Miss Brooks wearing tight sweaters and Carter-Roberts Drug Store sending out Modern Jazz Quartet sounds of *Fontessa* and my introduction to Nina Simone by David Cherry, dropping a nickel in the jukebox and *Porgy* coming out. I mostly remember Vine Street, which I was not allowed to walk to get to school, though Grandmother didn't want me to take Paine Street either because Jay Manning lived on it and he was home from the army and very beautiful with his Black face and two dimples. Not that I was going to do anything, because I didn't do anything enough even to think in terms of not doing anything, but according to small-town logic “It looks bad.”

The Gem Theatre was on the corner of Vine and a street that runs parallel to the creek, and for ten cents you could sit all day and see a double feature, five cartoons, and two serials plus previews for the next two weeks. And I remember Frankie Lennon would come in with her gang and sit behind me and I wanted to say, “Hi. Can I sit with you?” but thought they were too snooty, and they, I found out later, thought I was too northern and stuck-up. All of that is gone now. Something called progress killed my grandmother. Mulvaney Street looked like a camel's back with both humps bulging-up and down-and we lived in the down part. At the top of the left hill a lady made ice balls and would mix the flavors for you for just a nickel. Across the street from her was the Negro center, where the guys played indoor basketball and the little kids went for stories and nap time. Down in the valley part were the tennis courts, the creek, the bulk of the park, and the beginning of the right hill. To enter or leave the street you went either up or down. I used to think of it as a fort, especially when it snowed, and the enemy would always try to sneak through the underbrush nurtured by the creek and through the park trees, but we always spotted strangers and dealt. As you came down the left hill the houses were up on its side; then people got regular flat front yards; then the right hill started and ran all the way into Vine and Mulvaney was gone and the big apartment building didn't have a yard at all.

Grandmother and Grandpapa had lived at 400 since they'd left Georgia. And Mommy had been a baby there and Anto and Aunt Agnes were born there. And dated there and sat on the swing on the front porch and fussed there, and our good and our bad were recorded there. That little frame house duplicated twice more which overlooked the soft-voiced people passing by with “Evening, ‘Fessor Watson, Miz Watson,” and the grass wouldn't grow between our house and Edith and Clarence White's house. It was said that he had something to do with numbers. When the man tried to get between the two houses and

the cinder crunched a warning to us, both houses lit up and the man was caught between Mr. White's shotgun and Grandfather's revolver, trying to explain he was lost. Grandpapa would never pull a gun unless he intended to shoot and would only shoot to kill. I think when he reached Knoxville he was just tired of running.

...

Gay Street is to Knoxville what Fifth Avenue is to New York. Something special, yes? And it looked the same. But Vine Street, where I would sneak to the drugstore to buy *Screen Stories* and watch the men drink wine and play pool-all gone. A wide, clean military-looking highway has taken its place. Austin Homes is cordoned off. It looked like a big prison. The Gem Theatre is now some sort of nightclub and Mulvaney Street is gone. Completely wiped out. Assassinated along with the old people who made it live. I looked over and saw that the lady who used to cry "Hot fish! Good hot fish!" no longer had a Cal Johnson Park to come to and set up her stove in. Grandmother would not say, "Edith White! I think I'll send Gary for a sandwich. You want one?" Mrs. Abrum and her reverend husband from rural Tennessee wouldn't bring us any more goose eggs from across the street. And Leroy wouldn't chase his mother's boyfriend on Saturday night down the back alley anymore. All gone, not even to a major highway but to a cutoff of a cutoff. All the old people who died from lack of adjustment died for a cutoff of a cutoff.

...

And I went to Knoxville looking for Frankie and the Gem and Carter-Roberts or something and they were all gone. And 400 Mulvaney Street, like a majestic king dethroned, put naked in the streets to beg, stood there just a mere skeleton of itself. The cellar that had been so mysterious was now exposed. The fireplaces stood. And I saw the kitchen light hanging and the peach butter put up on the back porch and I wondered why they were still there. She was dead. And I heard the daily soap operas from the radio we had given her one birthday and saw the string beans cooking in the deep well and thought how odd, since there was no stove, and I wanted to ask how Babbi was doing since I hadn't heard or seen *Brighter Day* in so long but no one would show himself. The roses in the front yard were blooming and it seemed a disgrace. Probably the tomatoes came up that year. She always had fantastic luck with tomatoes. But I was just too tired to walk up the front steps to see. Edith White had died. Mr. Ector had died, I heard. Grandmother had died. The park was not yet gone but the trees looked naked and scared. The wind sang to them but they wouldn't smile. The playground where I had swung. The courts where I played my first game of tennis. The creek where our balls were lost. "Hot fish! Good hot fish!" The hill where the car speeding down almost hit me. Walking barefoot up the hill to the center to hear stories and my feet burning. All gone.

...

So they took me up what would have been Vine Street past what would have been Mulvaney, and I thought there may be a reason we lack a collective historical memory. And I was taken out to the beautiful homes on Brooks Road where we considered the

folks “so swell, don't cha know.” And I was exhausted but feeling quite high from being once again in a place where no matter what I belong. And Knoxville belongs to me. I was born there in Old Knoxville General and I am buried there with Louvenia.... Mommy's old bridge club, Les Pas Si Betes, gave me beads, and that's the kind of thing that happens in small towns where people aren't afraid to be warm. And I looked out and saw Miss Delaney in her blue furs. And was reminded life continues. And I saw the young brothers and sisters who never even knew me or my family and I saw my grandmother's friends who shouldn't even have been out that late at night. And they had come to say *welcome home*. And I thought Tommy, my son, must know about this. He must know we come from somewhere. That we belong.

Introduction

When one of my respondents suggested I read an essay by Nikki Giovanni for a better understanding of how Black neighborhoods in Knoxville were destroyed, I am not sure what I expected. I had heard that her roots were in Knoxville and that she had attended Austin High school, but apart from a short piece she had written called “Knoxville,” I didn't know much about the author. I figured that, at best, the essay would give me a good quote or two about urban renewal. I was not expecting Giovanni to identify so strongly with Knoxville, nor was I expecting that, in its engagement of themes of space and place, this piece would resonate so strongly with my research.

The concepts of space and place and their relationship to had long interested me. Informed particularly by research traditions in sociology of urban Black America, where there has been a resurgence in scholarship that emphasizes place matters, I sought to explore the dialectic relationship between people and place. However, when I began this study, it was Appalachia broadly and Knoxville specifically that drove my inquiry into space and place. I wanted to understand how structural practices had shaped Black experiences in the context of Appalachia and how Blacks in Knoxville conceive and navigate their racial identity in a place where their race had made them largely invisible. Over the course of the study, space and place began to emerge as important themes for understanding the Black experience *in* Knoxville. I

began to realize that to understand what it means to be Black in Knoxville was to understand Black people's relationship to place. As I grappled with the realization that Black life was inseparable from the production of place and that "Black matters are spatial matters" (McKittrick 2006), my dissertation was taking form. I was therefore thrilled to find in Giovanni's essay that at the center of her reflection on Knoxville then and now, on her grandparents' migration from Georgia to East Tennessee, on the sights and sounds of her old neighborhood, on the memories of her family's home, and on the shape, size, and structure of Mulvaney Street, Giovanni had provided a well-documented and richly detailed illustration of the "[s]patiality, territoriality and locality" (Hanafi 2018:267) that is so necessary in the formation of Black life.

Nikki Giovanni's "400 Mulvaney Street," published in her 1971 *Gemini*, is a literary expression that bolsters Black place, the production of Black geographic knowledge, and Black place-making practices. My research provides the theoretical and empirical components that complement this essay. I draw on traditions in Black geographies—a relatively new tradition in the discipline of geography that focuses on the spatial knowledge and practices of Black communities throughout the diaspora—that contribute to the production of space and place (McKittrick 2006; McKittrick and Woods 2007). I also utilize insights taken from Hunter and Robinson's (2018) *Chocolate Cities* sociology, also a new approach, which examines how in spite or in response to institutional discrimination, Black people have made and lived in their own maps. These traditions allowed me to explore Black geographic knowledge and Black place-making, on the one hand, while grounding the discussion in the discourse of urban Black America, on the other hand. The outcome of these explorations is a better understanding of the relationship between Blackness and place that can facilitate the reimagining of Black spatial imagery and Black place.

To understand why such a project would be necessary, it is important to understand the social construction of space and place and the role of race in this construction. In this chapter, I offer an overview of the conceptualization of space and place as social constructions imbued with power-reflecting societal dynamics; then, I add race to the analysis, focusing specifically on the major themes that have defined the relationship between Blackness and place. Next, I introduce Black geographies and Chocolate City sociology as theoretical traditions that can offer alternative understandings of the relationship between Blackness and place. Finally, I situate Appalachia as an important site on the Chocolate Map, from which insight can be garnered for a more nuanced understanding of urban Black America.

Conceptualization of Space and Place

The concepts of space and place and their relationship to people have increasingly been explored by researchers in various disciplines (Creswell 2004). These concepts are not easily defined, and though they are often used in the same context and almost interchangeably, researchers distinguish between them. The consensus especially in human geography is that space, detached from material form and cultural interpretation, is value-free, undifferentiated, unrecognized, and abstract in nature (Gieryn 2000; Hanafi 2018). Place, on the other hand, imbued with meaning and value (Tuan 1977), is a “distinct spatial unit and setting within which social relationships transpire” (Lobao 1996:78). Essentially, a space becomes a place when meaning is attached to it. It is through human interaction that these meanings are established, and while meaning-making processes are complex, generally, the meanings people attach to a place are determined by the things that shape how they experience that place individually or collectively. In addition to meanings, through human interactions, places also take on histories and identities. They become entities that can be interpreted, perceived, narrated, felt,

remembered, experienced, understood, and imagined (Gieryn 2000). But in the same way that people shape places, places also shape people. Research suggests that due to the nature of the human-place interaction, place becomes an anchor of people's identity (Hay 1998). Moreover, through their interaction with place, over time people acquire experiences that shape their sense of place or how they relate to a place. It is important to note, however, that place and how people feel about it, having emerged out of the interworking of materiality and culture, can change over time and in different locations. Additionally, their meanings can be contested politically.

This understanding of place as a product of individual and community meaning-making processes is informed by a social constructionist analytical tradition. This approach “addresses historical, cultural, and political processes by which humans seek out, create, evaluate, and contest specific place meanings” (Williams 2000:77 as cited in Trentelman 2009: 83). One aspect scholars of this approach underscore is that place is constructed through power, exclusion, and systems of inequality. Geographer David Harvey (1993) contends that place, by no means, occurs naturally; rather, it is constructed by materiality and power dynamics. More specifically, he suggests that the decisions related to how a place is built, designed, and used is made by those in power, and it is usually organized to serve their needs and interests. Those who have power are the ones who assign meaning to places, usually done in a manner that excludes some people and what they represent. Similarly, Massey (1994) explains that within social relations, space and place are “inevitably and everywhere imbued with power and meaning and symbolism” (3).

Essentially, place operates as a tool of the social, political, and economic elite whereby certain articulations of place have been used discursively to control those that are deemed “out-of-place” (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2018). Having identified space as one of the most important predictors of uneven development and social access (Smith 1984), scholars find that a

spatial analysis of the social order can teach us things we cannot know by other means. Because the organization of space and how people are situated within it reflect social hierarchies such as race (Shabazz 2015), scholars have increasingly employed a spatial analysis of the American racial project.

Race, Space, and Place

As a “fundamental category of (dis)empowerment,” race functions as a central organizing principle in social life, deeply structuring political, economic, and social relations (e.g., how people interact with the state, social institutions, other groups, and their in-group; Omi and Winant 2015:2; Robinson 2014). Thus, despite not carrying any biological significance, racial categories, which are socially constructed, have real consequences for the life experiences and life consequences of people, particularly those in subordinated racial groups. Also socially constructed, place has operated historically as an element of the creation and maintenance of racial inequality. Scholars highlight the process of imperialism as a demonstration of how the racialization of people and groups has always been linked to the control of space. Moreover, this connection between race, place, and power is rooted in policies and practices ranging from “Indian removal in the age of westward expansion; restrictive covenants during the industrial era; and urban renewal and urban restructuring in the late industrial and early post-industrial periods” (Lipsitz 2007:12). Through these racializing processes that have also been spatializing processes, scholars highlight the monopolization of space by whites and the spatial control of non-whites. Sociologist George Lipsitz (2011), for example, points out that whiteness in America has become less of a color and more of a condition, meaning it is “a structured advantage that channels unfair gains and unjust enrichments to whites while imposing unearned and unjust obligations in the way of Blacks” (2011:3). As a function of this condition and also

reproducing this condition, Lipsitz (2011) describes two distinct spatial imageries for Black and white Americans, suggesting that these groups experience place differently.

Where the Relationship between Blackness and Place Is Full of Structure

Three main features have characterized mainstream understandings of the relationship between Blackness and place. The first is that, through residential and other forms of segregation, Blacks have been confined to separate spaces, resulting in a sense of place shaped by negative experiences. This denial of the freedom to choose their space has solidified Blacks as a marginalized group and has also led to the second feature, which is the stigmatization of places that have been racialized or designated as Black spaces. The last feature is that space is not for Blacks; not only do Blacks not have possession of place, but they have no geographic knowledge.

Research particularly in the field of urban sociology, going as far back as W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), has been prolific in its exploration of African American experiences, specifically in cities. Hunter and Robinson (2016) offer a thorough review of sociological research on urban Black America since the late nineteenth century. This literature spans post-Emancipation life in the urban South, Black life in migration destinations, and the transformation of Black life in the wake of deindustrialization and neoliberalism (Hunter and Robinson 2016). Even though not directly focused on place, research in this tradition explores how, through interpersonal, institutional, and community-level processes, space has been a tool of Black subjugation and the (re)production of racial inequalities in American cities. Much of the work in the sociology of urban Black America fits into what Hunter and Robinson (2016) call the deficit frame of understanding Black urban life. The deficit frame, they clarify, "is a structural approach emphasizing the consequences for Black mobility and quality of life of societal

systems and policies such as institutional racism... post-World War II uneven urban development ... racial residential segregation, and the disappearance of manufacturing and other forms of work in urban America” (387). The dominant narrative coming out of the deficit frame is centered on the systematic segregation of African Americans and how concentrated poverty in segregated neighborhoods has created harsh outcomes for Blacks in American cities.

Research by Massey and Denton (1993) states that historically Blacks have been and remain the most residentially segregated racial group in the United States. Residential segregation has not primarily resulted from choice; rather, the state and institutional actors such as real estate agents, insurers, mortgage lenders, and appraisers have all played a fundamental role in limiting Blacks spatially. During the Great Migration, for example, tens of thousands of Black Americans left the rural South for various urban areas in the South and beyond in search of safety, freedom, employment, and generally a better life. Upon arrival to their destinations, however, redlining and steering practices confined Blacks to undesirable and often hazardous neighborhoods (Shabaz 2015). Further, not only were Blacks relegated to under-resourced, densely populated, and high-poverty Black enclaves with poor and limited housing, but in many cases the land itself was taken from Black people through eminent domain policies like urban renewal (Fullilove 2016).

While focusing on how living in segregated, high-poverty neighborhoods affects the “quality of schools, security, appreciation of property values, political clout, and availability of desirable amenities” (Patillio 2013:30), the deficit frame failed to provide an account of cultural life in these spaces. Nevertheless, it has been effective in influencing popular understandings of urban America and advocating for policy intervention at the local, state, and/or federal level (Hunter and Robinson 2016). Additionally, coming out of this analysis of Black urban life is an

understanding of the types of experiences that shape Black people's sense of place in American cities. In emphasizing the structures that negatively impact Black urban life, the deficit frame has provided a context for understanding not only that Black sense of place is distinct from white sense of place but also that sense of place can be shaped by negative experiences, which is not usually the focus of research concerned with the development of sense of place. Further, in works emphasizing neighborhood effects, not only does Black agency get downplayed but also Black space, rendered fixed, is denigrated.

The work of William J. Wilson (1978; 1987), as well as that of Wilson and Kelling (1982), profoundly impacted the stigmatization of Black neighborhoods. In the wake of the growth and suburbanization of a Black middle class in the post-civil rights period, Wilson drew attention to the lives of poor Blacks left behind in segregated, divested urban neighborhoods. He claims that the Black underclass, or truly disadvantaged (Wilson 1987), were trapped in urban neighborhoods where manufacturing jobs had disappeared and low-wage service sector jobs were on the rise. With no skills and little to no job prospects and trapped in extreme racial isolation, the Black poor adopted a "culture of poverty" which included the expansion of an underground economy. Wilson and Kelling (1982), in their "broken window" theory, further constructed Black urban neighborhoods as sites of deviance. In these neighborhoods, they argue, the appearance of "broken windows,"—graffiti, public intoxication, garbage, and abandoned and damaged properties—reinforces the ideas that people who reside in these places are indifferent to their place and therefore invite further disorder and serious crime. In works emphasizing neighborhood effects, not only did Black agency get downplayed but Black places became synonymous with slums, ghettos, violence, and crime.

In the context of a racially hierarchical society, studies like these helped to reproduce popular stereotypes that link urban Blacks to social images of crime, violence, disorder, welfare, and otherwise undesirability. These stereotypes, however, are not limited to working-class Blacks or people in poor Black neighborhoods. African Americans of all class backgrounds are readily believed to be violent and criminal. Furthermore, whereas urban sociologists like Wilson (1987) have argued that residential segregation is a matter of economic status, research on middle-class Blacks has proven this claim false. Disparities in Black and white experiences extend beyond high-poverty neighborhoods, and “Blacks of all socioeconomic statuses tend to be confined to a limited geographic space” (Lacy 2007; Pattillo 2007; 2013:25). According to sociologist Mary Pattillo (2013), a majority of Blacks in large cities live in predominantly Black neighborhoods, and these spaces have been “formally designated by the discriminatory practices of banks, insurance companies, and urban planners” (25). Pattillo’s work demonstrates that even when middle-class Blacks try to integrate white neighborhoods, they still end up living in predominantly Black neighborhoods as “whites consistently move out of neighborhoods with growing Black populations” (Schelling 1971; as cited in Quillian and Pager 2001:719). Moreover, a study by Quillian and Pager (2001) found that the percentage of a neighborhood’s Black population, particularly Black males, is significantly linked with perceptions of the amount of crime in that neighborhood. So regardless of the economic status of the people in the neighborhood, the construction of Black places is “epitomized by the urban ghetto, as the hub of all social ills and negativity, the source of violence, danger and criminality; the sign of human degradation and debasement; a containment zone for the undesirable, outcast, and disposable segment of the population; and the residential location of the other” (Hanafi 2018:282).

While research, primarily in the deficit frame, provided for an understanding of Black urban life that emphasized Black spatial isolation and the denigration of Black space, opportunities were missed to explore the very paramount spatial aspect of Black cultural and social life. Furthermore, the last feature of the relationship between Blackness and place is that Blackness has historically been de-spatialized. European conquest, colonialism, and transatlantic slavery were spatial processes that, among other things, have situated Blacks outside of mainstream understandings of the people-place dialectic. As a result, Black populations, and their attendant geographies, have been deemed “ungeographic” (McKittrick 2006). Transatlantic slavery disrupted Black people’s connection to Africa, the place they were rooted, and subsequently deemed them property and therefore incapable of owning place. The legacy of this dehumanizing process has involved various practices of spatialized violence that have produced and reproduced the erasure of a Black-centered understanding of place. Moreover, since European conquest of America, “space was and continues to be, racially identified as white unless otherwise specified; and any attempt at transgressing or defying this norm has been generally met with stiff resistance and retaliation from whites” (Hanafi 2018:280). Not only are whites the only ones capable of having and controlling space but they also have been the subjects of the study of people’s relationship to place. As a result, McKittrick (2006) points out that Black people and places have been understood as subjects and sites of containment rather than sources of important geographic information. In the section that follows, I explore how insights from Black Geographies and Chocolate City Sociology have provided an asset-based framework for understanding the relationship between blackness and place in Urban Black America.

Mapping Black Agency in Chocolate Cities and Black Geographies

Hunter and Robinson (2016) highlight the asset frame in sociology of urban Black America as a counter-frame that emerged to challenge the monolithic view of Black life and focus on the cultural contributions of urban Black America. Work in this tradition attempted to find balance between structure and agency and provide a more complete depiction of Black urban life. Thus, this work has largely been concerned with collective efficacy and informal social networks that Black people have relied on for survival in marginalized neighborhoods. Hunter and Robinson (2016) note that, in many of this tradition's earlier works, research has tended to reject but also reinforce the deficit frame, and often asset-based research devolved into discussions of deviant subcultures that resulted from Blacks' living in marginal structural conditions. However, through several iterations, the asset frame has produced particularly ethnographic research, often emphasizing place, that demonstrates processes of Black agency. Hunter and Robinson (2016), in collaboration as well as independently, are among scholars of urban Black sociology who are doing asset-based ethnographic research that is focused specifically on place in their examination of urban Black life. These scholars are among new sociologists drawing on the sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells and other early Black ethnographers to illuminate the intersection of race and place. Their work emphasizes Black peacemaking and city-making as fundamental to our understanding of how Black urban life straddles the lines of structure and agency. In claiming that structure and agency are mutually constructed, they propose Chocolate City sociology to understand how Black Americans have "exploited as much as possible the assets of particular places; exerting individual and collective energies to remake the structures intended to constrain them" (Hunter and Robinson 2016:398). The type of understanding of Black urban life that the Chocolate City framework proposes

requires a reconceptualization and reimagining of Black people's relationship to place. Such a process is conceived out of a Black geographies framework.

Black geographies is a theoretical and empirical framework that drew insights from urban studies in its development of the idea that "Black matters are spatial matters" (McKittrick 2006:xiv). It is concerned with the relationship between Black populations and geographies, which it defines as "spaces, places and location in their physical, materiality and imaginative configuration" (McKittrick 2006:x). Scholars of this tradition understand that there are different ways of knowing the world and call for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary interventions. McKittrick notes Kathleen Kirby's (1996) call specifically for a reconceptualization of geography's language and concreteness along with its overlapping physical, metaphorical, theoretical, and experiential contours. As a geographer, McKittrick answers this call, suggesting that Black lives and Black histories can be conceptualized and discussed in new ways within geography. She draws on Black histories, Black people, and Black places to make visible and contest how Blackness has been de-placed, displaced, and otherwise rendered ungeographic. Ultimately, her work emphasizes that Black people are not only shaped by but are also constantly challenging geographic arrangements and, therefore, should be understood as possessing and engaging spatial knowledge and practices. With McKittrick as a pioneering scholar, Black geographies emerged as a framework of uncovering geographic agency (Allen, Lawhon, and Pierce 2018) of Black diasporic communities, centering a Black sense of place, and promoting the humanization of Black place (Eaves 2017). Much of Black geographies' work relies on non-traditional sources such as the body, creative work, spiritual text, etc. for insight, and the emphasis is always on Black life and humanity.

Because Black geographies is not just a body of work but also an ontological practice (Eaves 2017), it provides for the comprehensive re-understanding of Black communities that Chocolate City sociology undertakes. Hunter and Robinson's (2018) *Chocolate Cities* is a remapping project. It suggests that the current maps of US Black life are incorrect and completely overhauls how we discuss and understand Black places and the United States in general. One of the fundamental tenants of Chocolate Cities framework is that "the South" is central to understanding Black geographies. Hunter and Robinson (2016) conceptualize the South not just as a physical geographic location below the Mason-Dixie Line but also as an embodiment of patterns of racism, white domination, and oppression. They claim however, in line with Malcom X's proclamation that the South is everything under the Canadian border, that the entire United States is the South. There might be some regional variations, but the United States as the South is one large territory, rooted historically in a set of practices that we generally think of as characteristic of the "Jim Crow south: racism, residential segregation, disparate incarceration rates, poverty and violence" (Hunter and Robinson 2018:4). Chocolate Cities framework allows for an exploration of how, alongside the racial domination that has created the South, Black Americans have found infinite ways to invent place and, in doing so, change American cities. Beyond the timeframe demarked as the Great Migration, Black populations have been moving across the United States in a constant quest for equity, opportunity, safety, and freedom. Along the way of these different journeys, many of which began in the southern states of the United States, not only have Blacks taken the South, but they have also set up Chocolate Cities, which are Black towns, neighborhoods, sides of the track, etc. where "Black people have made and live within their own maps whether in response to or in spite of institutional discrimination" (Hunter and Robinson 2018:19). Hunter and Robinson (2018) do not ignore that

Blackness is diverse, but they pull stories from the chocolate map to suggest that Black people “share a critical epistemology of space and place born of language, culture, experience and resistance” (30).

Way Up South on the Chocolate Map

One of the central arguments Hunter and Robinson (2018) make in their conception of the Chocolate City framework is that “our current maps of Black life are wrong” (3). Rejecting the commonly understood linear progression of Blacks from the rural South to the urban North, they propose the chocolate map alternative as a conception of a United States made up of multiple Souths. The chocolate map, for them, is a more accurate reflection of the lived experience of Black Americans. It highlights Black neighborhoods, cities, enclaves, etc. as “windows into Black migration, urbanization, rural and suburban life and racial inequality” and emphasizes the connections between Black people across place and time (Hunter and Robinson 2018:4). Moreover, it is these Chocolate Cities, in their respective locations across America, that Hunter and Robinson (2018) use to remap and reanalyze geography and inequality in United States. Chocolate maps, informed by the movements, histories, and lived-experience of Black Americans, are therefore alternatives to traditional US maps. The authors’ main configuration of the chocolate map offers a regional restructuring of America comprising of six regions. Instead of the traditional North, South, Midwest, Northwest, and West regions, the chocolate map consists of Up South, Down South, Deep South, Mid South, Out South, and West South. However, even as Hunter and Robinson, in this remapping of America, draw on Black life in places often excluded from traditional urban Black America research—which emphasizes northern migration destinations—there are places excluded from their map and analysis that can provide a more nuanced understanding of Black geographic agency. In this dissertation, I present

Appalachia as one such place and expand the Chocolate City framework to incorporate the region.

Though at times it may seem to overlap with the traditional Deep South, Appalachia — consisting of parts of 13 states and 420 counties—has a particular regional (or sub-regional) identity shaped by political, economic, and cultural power dynamics that often position it as distinct from the “South.” Moreover, particularly as it relates to race and racial inequality, Appalachia has been constructed in opposition to the Deep South, owing to the regions’ topographical characteristics and isolation in the highlands—both of which are suggested to have impacted the region’s involvement with transatlantic slavery, the underground railroad, the subsequent Civil War, and the overall underpopulation of African Americans in the region. Accordingly, despite always having had a Black presence and a history of slavery in the region, Appalachia has been represented and perceived as a white space, and seldom is the Black Appalachian experience highlighted. But even without a designation as a place for understanding racial dynamics and the larger Black experience, Appalachia has long been a place where particular insights into the Black American experience could be gained. For example, sociologist Karida Brown (2018) has argued, in line with Hunter and Robinson’s (2018) claim that, contrary to how it is often presented, the Great Migration was not always a direct south to north movement; rather for some Blacks—including Nikki Giovanni’s family, who came from rural Georgia to Knoxville before moving on to Ohio a generation later—this mass movement of Blacks was often a multigenerational process. Over the course of several decades, Blacks moved from rural towns to semi-industrial cities where they gathered resources before moving on to larger cities. Brown (2018) explores this migration pattern, situating Appalachia as a layover destination for many Blacks, particular those in Lynch, Kentucky.

In my inquiry into Black life in Knoxville and the intersection of race and place in the region, I draw on *Chocolate City* as a framework to argue that insights born from Black people and Black places can provide for a reimagining of Appalachia that brings it into the chocolate map as one of the many Souths. Thus, I offer Appalachia as the seventh South on the chocolate map: Way Up South. Not only does this reconceptualization of Appalachia as Way Up South depart from an emphasis on regional differences, but it also hones in on how patterns of racism, white domination, and oppression have created inhospitable and unequal circumstances for Blacks historically, shaping their sense of place in the region. Simultaneously, this analysis makes visible Black people and places in Appalachia, reiterating their presence, redefining them around Black experiences, and ultimately connecting them to understandings of Black culture, power, and place-making throughout America. This brings me back to Giovanni's "400 Mulvaney Street."

Without the familiar tools of maps and charts, in "400 Mulvaney Street," Nikki Giovanni grapples with two seemingly conflicting, place-based experiences and, in doing so, illuminates Black geographic sensibilities and the complexity of Black people's relationship with place in Knoxville. On one hand, Giovanni is dealing with a sense of place shaped by loss of place; on the other hand, through the memories of her childhood home and neighborhood, she is acknowledging Knoxville as home. As she describes the people, the places, and the activities that were so important in her understanding of Knoxville, she gives life to and retells the story of a neighborhood that was deemed valueless and erased from the map of a city. However, this retelling could have been a memory of *Chocolate City*, *Anywhere*, America. The migration story, the displacement, and the sights and sounds of Blackness ring true to Black places throughout America. Yet in this artistic, literary, and cultural expression, Giovanni gives us a

Chocolate City Way Up South in Appalachia. She is intentional and clear about her claims to Knoxville and, in doing so, moves the lines of the chocolate maps into the highlands. Her Chocolate City story—her expression of sense of place—challenges traditional physical, material, and imaginative geographic formulations of Black spaces but more importantly of Knoxville and therefore Appalachia. I graciously included excerpts from this piece in an attempt to emphasize the importance of this work not only for my dissertation but also for the Black people and places in Knoxville and Appalachia that exist almost invisibly.

Like Giovanni's piece, in addition to expanding the chocolate map to include Way UP South, my analysis makes visible Black people and places in Appalachia, reiterating their presence, redefining them to reflect Black experiences, and ultimately connecting them to understandings of Black culture, power, and place-making throughout America. I argue that in the context of invisibility, erasure, and exclusion from Appalachian narratives, it is neighborhoods, not the region or the city, that become a dominant feature in Black Knoxvilleans' understanding of the relationship between Blackness and place. I draw on Black geographies' ideas of a Black sense of place as distinct to demonstrate how a sense of being out of place shapes Black people's relationship to the city of Knoxville generally. I also seek to demonstrate how there is often a sense of loss of place associated with Black neighborhoods (and other places) because, as we see in Giovanni's "400 Mulvaney Street," Black neighborhoods function as sites of racial violence against Black communities through practices such as urban renewal and urban disinvestment. However, also as Giovanni shows, these neighborhoods simultaneously are sites where Black safety is experienced and place-making is facilitated by a collective Black identity. To introduce the concept of Black safety, I draw on the Chocolate Cities framework's understanding of Black neighborhoods as not being solely defined by the historical and

contemporary racial processes that structure and confine them. Based on insight gained from centering Black voices in the reimagining of Black neighborhoods in Knoxville, I argue that Black safety is a place-based conception of safety that is predicated on freedom against white supremacy. In developing this concept, I provide foundational insight into an understanding of why in the context of white-dominated spaces like Knoxville or Appalachia, where the white gaze is relentless, it is necessary and important for Chocolate Cities to exist. My analysis of a Chocolate City Way Up South in Appalachia also provides a concrete depiction of the concept of place-making that Hunter and Robinson (2016; 2018) introduce. It introduces the Black school as a major site of place-making within Chocolate Cities. This analysis is particularly useful in the context of understanding the larger urban Black experiences, as Black schools throughout the chocolate map of America are threatened with shuttering (Hunter and Robinson 2018). I highlight the Black geographic agency that is experienced in attending Black schools and other ways that Black schools are involved in the processes of defining and refining Black spaces and places generally.

Chapter 3: “When you address me you need to thank me for what I’ve done thus far,” “That’s how Knoxville treats the black community”

It’s like my life goal to figure out how we can get some power so that we aren’t able to be used...like when we went and spoke out against the Magnolia Redevelopment plan and you know we showed up to the meeting and I’m standing in the back of the city council room and the mayor is, I mean she’s not yelling but she’s projecting to the back of the room you know “I’ve already talked to Booker and he’s signed off on this.” (laughter) And I’m just looking around at folks like do you understand what this would be like if you had an issue and you walked in and they throw out some random white person’s name and say we already talked to that one person and uh that is Black Knoxville you know. That’s how Knoxville treats the black community. You get one or two spokespeople...

One of my thoughts goes to Mayor Rogero and one of her proud accomplishments is getting that performance space going to Vine Magnet and having the upgrades to the building so that they would have I guess the big auditorium that could handle performances and what not was supposed to attract people from all around the county. Um when you ask her what has she done for the black community that’s one thing that she will lift up and we’re like ok well that’s almost 20 years ago (laughter)

...once a year we need to do something for the black people and she was mad. I mean when we went and called her out on Magnolia redevelopment she said you need to start...when you address me you need to thank me for what I’ve done thus far and then we can address what you want going forward and I was like man you are really not trying to get on my good side. I wish there was like a videotape of that interaction but there’s not. Um, and so this is why with school pushout I have fought so hard. When an issue comes up I fight it til it’s dead and I don’t let go. Because my experience in Knox County schools has been, you know I mean there’s definitely a fatigue that occurs when talking about issues of race so when that comes up you’ve gotta like fight as hard as you can to get as much out of that as you can because it’s going to be a while before something else comes up. Where money you know, they may talk about an issue but apply money towards it, it’s a whole other issue...

And I’ve told this to the mayor. Every time there’s an issue with black folk you bring on the chief of police. You’re standing next to the chief of police and a pastor and its offensive. Think about that.

(Vanessa)

3.0 Introduction

In the summer of 2015, a local chapter of Black Lives Matter (BLM), the national movement of activists organizing against violence and systematic racism, was formed in Knoxville, Tennessee. Despite several demonstrations associated with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter in the past, it was not until a fire was set outside of College Hill Seventh Day Adventist Church, a predominantly Black church in the Mechanicsville neighborhood, that community members in Knoxville decided to formally establish the chapter. Outraged by the incident, which many believed to be a hate crime, community members began organizing. Within a month, in July 2015, several individuals who had previously been involved in different organizing efforts joined together and traveled from the East Tennessee city to Cleveland, Ohio for the first national convention of the Black Lives Matter movement. By August, the first official meeting of Black Lives Matter-Knoxville was held at My Place Performing Arts Center in East Knoxville. There were over 80 persons in attendance, all eager to identify and address pressing issues facing Knoxville's Black community.

The fact that a Black Lives Matter chapter was established in an Appalachian space like Knoxville, on the surface, seems quite odd. After all, the BLM movement is an urban phenomenon, and Appalachia serves as an unofficial symbol of rurality. The core of the BLM movement is grounded in New York, Chicago, and Oakland, with hub cities in Washington D.C., St. Louis, and Baltimore. Compared to these larger cities, the Black population in Knoxville seems almost irrelevant; Knoxville is not a place one would expect to find a Black liberation agenda or a place one would identify as a central location for understanding the larger Black experience. Appalachia denotes many things, but urbanity and/or Blackness is not among them. The region's urbanity is seldom represented in public images; instead, policymakers and news

organizations often overemphasize rural poverty, more specifically white rural poverty. Furthermore, in the public image, Appalachia has traditionally been excluded from the perils of the color line that Du Bois (1903) warned would haunt America in the twentieth century and beyond. Prior to a recent surge of Black Appalachian inquiries, Blacks have largely been erased from Appalachian narratives, except for times when Appalachia's exceptionalism—referring to peaceful race relations between Blacks and whites—is being highlighted. Given this conception of the region, the Black Lives Matter movement seems out of place in the context of Appalachia, even if it is urban Appalachia, which in itself seems contradictory. It is for these reasons that I chose to use the founding of the BLM-Knoxville chapter as a place of departure in this chapter. The presence of this movement in Knoxville turns many perceptions of Appalachia on their heads as well as perceptions of Blackness and perception of Black Appalachian-ness. Among other things, it positions Appalachia not only as a place where Blacks have a significant presence but also as a place where Blacks must struggle against systematic racism. Additionally, it brings urban Appalachia, specifically urban Black Appalachian experiences, to the forefront. There are particular places that are usually associated with a native or authentic Black identity (Robinson 2014). Appalachia is never one such place. Yet there is a native Blackness in Appalachia, and despite claims of exceptionalism, in many ways this Blackness is connected to Blackness throughout the United States. The aim of the chapter, therefore, is to challenge the misrepresentation of Blacks in the region, as well as Appalachian exceptionalism and the rural-centered depiction of Appalachia, while carving out an urban Black Appalachian narrative focused specifically on the experiences of Blacks in Knoxville.

Blacks Not New to Appalachia

Generally speaking, however, there were few Negroes in the Highlands in early times. Their number has gradually increased in the rich valley areas particularly where there has

been urban or industrial development, but they have never become a factor in rural mountain life. (Campbell 1921:94)

Though only recently becoming a topic of research, Blacks in Appalachia are not a new phenomenon. William Turner (1985), one of the foremost scholars on Blacks in Appalachia, noted that Blacks have been in the region long before the major migrations of white settlers. This, however, is not the impression one gets from reading accounts such as that of John Campbell (1921), whose landmark work stressed Blacks' insignificance to the region. Historically, Northern Europeans have been associated with Appalachia while Blacks have been overlooked. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that Black Appalachians, including enslaved people, freedmen, and rebels, could be found in the region as early as the 1500s. Historian Thada Perdue (1985) places Blacks in contact with the Cherokee of the region as early as 1526. He notes that following a slave revolt that year at a Spanish colony on the Pedee River, originating in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, Blacks remained in the region. In addition, prior to the settlement of the region by Europeans, Blacks accompanied French and Spanish explorers, were slaves on European ships, and were slave guides for white frontiersmen. Based on this evidence, Turner (1985) notes that "Blacks were one of Appalachia's first non-Indian populations" (xix). Moreover, he points out that it is very likely that Black Appalachians preceded enslaved Blacks of the Lower South and were possibly among America's first Blacks, who were previously thought to have arrived at Jamestown almost a century later. Despite this documentation, the history of Blacks in the Appalachia is often misrepresented, Black Appalachians are deemed insignificant, and Appalachia boasts of antislavery and egalitarian morals.

Blacks in Antebellum Appalachia: Slavery and Beyond

Throughout the history of Appalachia, Blacks have lived in both rural and urban areas and while some Black Appalachians today are first-generation migrants to the region, many others are the descendants of enslaved or freed people of the antebellum period and migrants who moved to Appalachia in the decades post-Civil War when industry was growing. While it has been more acceptable to acknowledge the post-Civil War Black migrant to the region, there have been many misconceptions and much misinformation about antebellum Appalachia; in some cases, slavery in the region is not acknowledged at all. Perhaps differing perspectives on Appalachian slavery is at the root of the misrepresentation of Blacks in the region.

Traditionally, scholars have largely left Blacks out of Appalachian history, claiming that slavery in the region did not exist or existed on an exceptionally small scale. Those that do engage slavery in Appalachia have often done so portraying a nicer, more humane form of the institution. They credit Appalachia's exceptionalism to a number of factors, central among them being the character of the people who populated the mountains. The Appalachian region was primarily settled by Germans; Scotch-Irish; and to a lesser extent Huguenots, Quakers, and poor whites who were former indentured servants. Historically, these groups have been described as seekers of political liberty, religious freedom, individual freedom, and personal responsibility. Their morals and beliefs in equality and a humble way of life were said to separate them from the aristocratic and planter classes of the Lower South, where slave societies flourished. Based on these traits—despite evidence that there were slaves among Appalachian society during the frontier years and the years of European settlement—Appalachian people have historically been portrayed as people who opposed slavery. African American scholar Carter G. Woodson, while credited as one of the earliest scholars to write of Black Appalachians, was among those that

maintained Appalachian exceptionalism. Championing Appalachia in early antislavery movements, he writes in his 1916 *Freedom and Slavery in Appalachian America*, “No aristocrat figuring conspicuously in the society of the East, where slavery made men socially unequal, could feel comfortable on the frontier, where freedom from competition with such labor prevented the development of caste” (Woodson 1985:32). In addition to the morality of its people, Appalachia’s poor soil, rugged terrain, and cooler climate have also been stated as reasons slavery was largely absent from the region.

Researchers such as John Inscoe, Wilma Dunnaway, and other contemporary scholars have challenged these ideas of Appalachia’s exceptionalism and suggested that slavery in the highlands of southern Appalachia was neither kinder nor more insignificant than it was in the lowlands of the South. In 1810, 17 percent of the region’s population was enslaved, and one-third of all Southern Appalachian farmers were slave-owners (Dunnaway 2015). During the antebellum period, every Appalachian state, with the exception of Kentucky, contained at least one county with as many as one thousand slaves (Murphy 1982). Some states, such as Virginia and Tennessee, had at least twenty such counties in 1860. Between the frontier years and 1860, depending on national trends and local dynamics, the enslaved populations in Appalachian areas either increased dramatically, remained relatively stable, or decreased. In many of the Appalachian counties where the enslaved populations were declining or growing slowly, it was not necessarily manumission that was the driving factor but rather exportation (Murphy 1982). Appalachian Kentucky, for example, exported slaves to more booming frontier areas, such as Appalachian Alabama and Georgia. In these areas, the value of slaves was greater and appealed to Appalachian slave-owners’ economic interests rather than anti-slavery sentiments.

Furthermore, the contempt for slavery that is usually associated with Appalachians came more from a desire to eliminate the economic system of free labor with which poor whites could not compete or the desire to eliminate Blacks altogether from American society (Inscoc 1989). For example, Imes (1919) brings attention to a 1931 article in the *Knoxville Register*, which “denounces slavery in no uncertain terms, but also grows bitter at the thought of free men of color even remaining in the State.” For Appalachian whites who could afford to own slaves or who could benefit from the system in positions such as slave traders, slavery served the same purpose in Appalachia as it did in the Lower South.

As it relates to the terrain being unsuitable for large scale agriculture, Dunnaway (2003) informs that there were indeed plantations in Appalachia. Most were smaller, but production of certain crops such as wheat, corn, hogs, tobacco, and cattle was above or equivalent to national averages in terms of per-capital output. The most productive farms were those where free labor was present. According to Dunnaway (2003),

farm owners who held slaves produced about one-half of the region’s corn, wheat, and cattle and two-fifths of its hogs and sheep. Slaveholding farms also dominated the region’s antebellum staple crop production. Two-fifths of Appalachian tobacco and nearly 70 percent of the regions cotton... (51)

Nevertheless, only a third of farmers held slaves, and agricultural work did not account for all slave labor. Inscoc (1989) suggests that diversity of economic activity is probably the factor that most distinguished mountain slaveholders from those of the Lower South. Slaves in Appalachia were more likely than non-Appalachian slaves to work outside of agriculture. According to Dunnaway (2003), at least a quarter of all slaves in the region worked solely in non-agriculture occupations. It was therefore not unlikely to find slaves working in the region’s town commerce, travel capitalism, transportation networks, manufacturing and extractive industries. Though the numbers were generally smaller—most slaveholders had less than 10 slaves (Dunnaway 2003)—

enslaved Blacks played an important role in local economies in the region including the region's agriculture, railroad, salt, iron, and gold industries.

In addition to enslaved Blacks, there were also small populations of free Blacks in Appalachia during the antebellum period. In 1860, only slightly more than 2 percent of the country's free Blacks resided in the region (Dunnaway 2003), and those Blacks could be found usually in large counties where slavery was well established (Stuckert 1993). In a demographic study of the Appalachian section of Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, where in 1800 the Black population was 36,956 or 12 percent of the total population, Stuckert (1993) found that free Blacks made up 7 percent of that population. By 1840, the percentage of free Blacks in the Appalachian section of these states had increased to slightly more than 10 percent of the Black population, but at this time the overall Black population had increased due to the expansion in slavery. In fact, between the years of 1844 and 1860, the enslaved population of Appalachia grew at a rate more rapid than the non-Appalachian enslaved populations (Stuckert 1993; Murphy 1982).

In a similar manner in which slaves were regarded, free Blacks in Appalachia were seen as inferior to whites, and laws regulated them in ways that kept them structurally and economically disadvantaged. Mostly landless and employed on small farms and other industries largely in rural areas, free Blacks were almost as exploitable as slaves in Appalachia. They competed primarily with whites economically (Stuckert 1993), and they were among the poorest of the poor in the region. Two-fifths of Appalachia's free Blacks lacked stable means of income and were unemployed three or more months every year (Dunnaway 2003). For Dunnaway (2003), it is this impoverished state of existence that is responsible for free Blacks' underrepresentation in the region. Stuckert (1993) expands this idea by suggesting that the

absence of free Black institutions may also have played a role. Whereas in non-Appalachian places, free Blacks established institutions such as churches, lodges, and schools, Stuckert (1993) notes that in Appalachia, the population of free Blacks was not enough to support such institutions; therefore, free Blacks were forced to rely on whites, which severely restricted opportunities for the development of free Black leadership.

During the antebellum period, Appalachian states varied in the size and distribution of their enslaved and freed Black populations, but like the rest of the South, southern Appalachia was intertwined in the political and economic system of a capitalist world economy. Despite some variation in political views concerning slavery, many Appalachian counties were very similar to the Lower South in their political views, ideas about Blacks, and most importantly their slaveholding. After all, Appalachia is made up of a number of counties that exist within the boundaries of states, where, prior to the Civil War, slavery was the law of the land for those that sat below the Mason-Dixie line. In these states particularly, the legislatures protected the inhumane institution and represented the economic interest of those who owned slaves. Therefore, a low Black population density and small slaveholding did not necessarily spare this region from the political, economic, and social impacts of enslavement. Regardless of the population size, Blacks were present and impacted the structure, attitudes, and values of antebellum Appalachian society (Inscoc 1989).

Blacks in Industrial Appalachia

Following the Civil War, the construction of major railroad systems, as well as the exploitation of the region's timber and mineral resources, led to an extensive industrial transformation of Appalachia. African Americans were greatly affected by this transformation. Appalachia's massive industrial expansion led to a great demand for laborers. As railroad

construction began and mines opened, companies sent recruiters throughout the South in search of workers. Many Black laborers, and their families from the plantation South, left for the mountains. From the end of the Civil War to the beginning of the twentieth century, southern Appalachia's Black population increased by 64 percent (Wagner and Obermiller 2004). Black migrant workers also came from other Appalachian areas. Stuckert (1987) notes that, between 1880 and 1900, the Black populations of 10 counties disappeared completely and during the first two decades of the twentieth century, an additional 14 counties lost their Black populations. While factors such as racial discrimination and terrorizing as well as the consolidation of landholding could be partially responsible for these changes, out-migration to lumbering and mining operations played a major role. Up until 1910, farming was the major way through which Blacks earned their living in Appalachia. Beginning in 1900, Black Appalachians began moving into other forms of employment. They joined Blacks from other parts of the South in the coal-mining, railroad, lumber, paper, and clay industries that became dominant in the industrial period. Blacks also worked in hotels and restaurant industries and domestic services.

The largest migration of Blacks into Appalachia took place between 1900 and 1930, and these migration flows were focused in the coalfields. By 1930, over 30,000 Black persons were employed in the coal industry. In 1940, the 15 Appalachian counties with the greatest Black populations were counties where coal mining was dominant. West Virginia and Kentucky had the fastest growing Black populations in their mining industries between 1910 and 1930 (Stuckert 1987). Many of the Black migrants to coal-mining towns did not necessarily see themselves as permanent residents of the region; however, the mountains provided access to well-paying jobs. Therefore, over time many workers who came for temporary employment in the mines would become skilled and settled in Appalachia.

It is this large migration of Blacks into the coalfields of Kentucky and Virginia that makes a Black Appalachian story usually a story of Black coal miners. However, the Black Appalachian story with which this dissertation is concerned is a story of Blacks in urban Appalachia, specifically Blacks in Knoxville, Tennessee. Perceptions of Appalachia center on mountains and rural spaces; even coal-mining towns carry a rural connotation. Urban Appalachia seems very oxymoronic. Nevertheless, cities have always had a central role in the development of the region, and Blacks could be found in Appalachian cities from the time they were established. Even as Appalachia remains rural-centered in its depictions, King (2011) highlights that nearly 60 percent of the region's 24.8 million people live in urban environments, a trend that is expected to grow.

Knoxville and Blacks in Urban Appalachia

Founded in 1786 by James White and incorporated in 1815, Knoxville was an early governmental and mercantile center for the Territory South of the River Ohio (Southwest Territory), which once admitted to the United States became Tennessee. Faulkner (2000) states that for a short while, it was capital of both the Southwest Territory and the State of Tennessee. Knoxville was also a jumping-off point and provisioning center for settlers moving west. Further, owing to its central location on the Tennessee River and at the juncture of two major railroads, three U.S. highways, and various state highways and turnpikes for almost 200 years, Knoxville has been a major city in Appalachia.

Slavery in Knoxville

Though much has not been written about Black life in Knoxville during the antebellum period, research suggests that enslaved Blacks resided in Knoxville from the time of earliest settlement. Since most of the first settlers of Tennessee were natives of Virginia, where slavery

was very common, it is likely that settlers brought their slaves with them to Tennessee; thus, it is believed that the first inhabitants of Knoxville included enslaved Blacks. Further, it is no secret that Knoxville's founder, James White, was accompanied by slaves when he established a fort in the territory in 1786. Another earlier Knoxvillian, William Blount, governor of the Territory South of the River Ohio, found that "Negroes are the most valuable property in this country" (Masterson 1954, as cited by Coxe 1998:20). They were so valuable that he owned 27 slaves. Documentation of the Black population during the frontier years, which ended in 1815 when the city was incorporated, is scarce. However, census data suggests that in 1801, 37% of Knoxville's population consisted of enslaved Blacks. Although this 1801 census documented no free Blacks in Knoxville, it noted that there were nineteen "other free persons except Indians" in Knox County (Faulkner 2000:159). In 1820, the *Knoxville Register* record indicated that 30 percent of Knoxville's population was Black and that, in Knox County's population of 13,034 people, 1,825 were enslaved Blacks and 83 free Blacks (Rothrock 1946). Whereas in the county, most slaveowners had one to two slaves, in Knoxville, the average slaveholdings ranged from 4 to 7 (Coxe 1998). Most of the Blacks in the city limits likely served as a family or group of families and labored in the homes of whites as cooks, maids, coachmen, gardeners, yardmen, etc.

Even before the city was incorporated, there were ordinances regulating Blacks. In 1802, an ordinance made it illegal for Blacks to assemble in streets, uninhabited houses, or even kitchens outside of designated work hours (Coxe 1998). The punishment for assembling, getting drunk in the streets, or rioting was ten lashes, or a fine of fifty cents for slaveholders who intervened. By 1817, just two years after being incorporated, the city passed another ordinance further regulating Blacks. This ordinance forbade enslaved Blacks from living in Knoxville unless they were in service to white inhabitants; also, slaves of non-residents could not be hired

out in Knoxville (Rothrock 1946). Regulations like these and others suggest that despite the nature of labor in the city, slavery was the same inhumane system of violence and control in Knoxville as it was in other places.

Blacks in Knoxville Post-Civil War

In the immediate weeks and months following the Civil War, there were remnants of violence and hostility in the city, highlighting the major social, political, and economic changes the war had brought about. The wounds of the war were not quite healed, but soon the economic growth of Knoxville became the topic of much debate as native Knoxvillians and newcomers struggled over the trajectory of the city. Despite some resistance from Knoxville's elite, industrialism ushered in a newness in Knoxville, the same way it did throughout the region. By the 1880s, Knoxville was making a name for itself throughout the region and was promising to become a "national city" (Stanfield 1985). Wheeler (2005) notes that, apart from Atlanta, no other southern city had improved as rapidly as Knoxville. Prior to the war, with only four mills and a few other small enterprises, there was very little industrial activity in Knoxville. But with the development of the railroad system, the city saw great industrial growth. Knoxville became a major commercial hub in the region, not only bringing manufactured goods from the Northeast and the Midwest to the region but also shipping locally produced agricultural and extractive resources throughout the country. By 1885, Knoxville was one of the South's major wholesale centers, exceeded only by New Orleans, Atlanta, and Nashville. Large shipments of groceries, dried goods, footwear, hardware, marble, and coal were leaving Knoxville regularly for places throughout the region. Within ten years, Knoxville had moved from fourth in the South to third.

The success the city experienced as a commercial hub was primarily facilitated by the railroads, but Knoxville's industrial growth was also largely reliant on the major manufacturing

boom that occurred in the 1880s. Within a seven-year period, there were almost 100 new factories built throughout the city. Taking their lead from the Knoxville Iron Company, started by Hiram Chamberlain in 1867, these manufacturers relied on poor white migrants and African Americans. They attracted thousands of people from both groups to Knoxville. In fact, Knoxville was attractive to industrialists because it offered access to these groups who were seen as less likely to unionize and more accepting of low wages (Stanfield 1985). By the end of the century, there was a nine-fold population increase in the city. In 1860, Knoxville's population was 3,704; by 1880, it was 9,693; and by 1900, there were 32, 637 people in Knoxville. The vast majority of Knoxville's new residents came from the rural hinterlands of East Tennessee. Most were white, but there was a dramatic rise in the city's African American population as well.

In 1860, Blacks, including enslaved people and freedmen, represented 752 people, or 20.3 percent of Knoxville's population. When the city came under Union occupation in 1863, Blacks started flooding Knoxville in search of freedom. By the end of the war, more and more Blacks were moving to Knoxville. The industrial expansion was certainly a magnet for Blacks who sought the many new jobs that it created. In addition to the Knoxville Iron Company, many Blacks found employment in the Knoxville Car Wheel Company and Burr and Terry's Saw Mill (Wheeler 2005). By 1880, Knoxville's Black population had grown to 3,149, or 32.5 percent of the population. At over a third of the city's population, they were definitely not an insignificant faction in city matters. Furthermore, most of the Blacks that moved to the city during this time were not transient workers; they came as permanent settlers ready to claim a space for themselves in the city. As the number of Blacks in the city grew, a small Black business and professional class began to develop, and soon Blacks began establishing their own institutions. Post-Civil War Knoxville saw Black churches, fraternal orders, self-improvement societies,

newspapers, fire companies, and schools, including what would become Knoxville College. During this period, Blacks also began taking up public offices. By the 1880s, there were Black police officers, city aldermen, county commissioners, and sometimes jurors. Between 1871 and 1890, nine African Americans were elected to city council, and several others served on the county court.

Knoxville in the later 1800s seemed a gem for Blacks in Appalachia and the South generally. Not only were there many opportunities for jobs and the creation of a Black middle class, but also Blacks had established institutions and were exercising political power in a manner that meant they had to be taken seriously. To this day, Knoxville boasts of this time, highlighting the presence of Black police officers and city aldermen as if to suggest that the relationship between Blacks and whites in the city has always been stellar. Such depictions leave one wondering, however, with such great race relations in the 1800s, how Blacks have become so marginalized in the contemporary era. What is often left out of this narrative of Knoxville, though, is the leveraging power Blacks had due to their proportion of the city population at the time and the major white backlash that followed Blacks' political assertiveness after the Reconstruction period.

Many of the advances Blacks were able to gain during Reconstruction, especially political victories, were a result of their leveraging their political power as such a large portion of city voters. At a third of the voting population, Blacks could not be taken for granted, and political success for any party required Blacks' support. Furthermore, although the Republican party was strongest in East Tennessee, the white population in Knoxville was largely fragmented coming out of the Civil War, so it was in the interest of white political leaders to align themselves and their parties with Blacks. Aware of this, the African American community was

willing to lend its support in return for nominations to office and attention to the social, economic, and political needs and grievances of the Black community. The Republican party, also known as Lincoln's party and the party of emancipation, was the party that Blacks supported initially. Compared to Black populations in Nashville and Memphis, the Black population in Knoxville seemed non-threatening, making it easier for Republicans to grant them opportunities for political offices. Republicans did not make these concessions willingly or comfortably, however; in reality, they resented having to depend on Blacks for their success. Over time, the Republican party shifted its direction, choosing to align with the business class and putting the social, economic, and political needs of Blacks to the margins. Realizing this shift and feeling like they were being overlooked except for during elections, Black leaders—particularly William Yardley—began encouraging Black voters to show their disappointment at the polls (Wheeler 2005). Refusing to support Republicans blindly, in the 1870s and 1880s, Blacks began forming committees to interview the Democrat and Republican candidates for local offices. In 1876, Yardley even ran for governor, independent of the Republican party, to challenge the assumption of Black loyalty to the party. By the 1890s, in light of the political awareness and challenges from Blacks, leaders of both parties began to quietly gerrymander Knoxville's Blacks into political impotence (Wheeler 2005). Through a technique called cracking, they ensured that after 1912, Blacks never again served as alderman or city council—until 1969.

The late 1800s was a period in which Blacks were collectively attempting to make their mark on the city by being involved in local decision-making processes. This felt like a challenge to the white power structure, which was becoming increasingly hostile to Black politicians and highly visible office holders (Lamon 1981). New electoral laws and municipal redistricting was the strategy they used to put a halt on Black progress and a cap on the Reconstruction Era.

Compounded by statewide Jim Crow laws being established as early as 1881, race relations in Knoxville became increasingly more rigid, creating a post-emancipation racial caste system and reaffirming the whiteness of Knoxville. Under Jim Crow, Blacks in Knoxville were allowed to progress within the confines of their own communities so long as it did not interfere with the white power structure and the city's public image. In other words, Blacks could maintain their own autonomous institutions and service each other in businesses; they could thrive in these areas as long as they did not ruffle any feathers or cause any agitation when it came to issues of law and racial etiquette. By the end of the nineteenth century, Blacks were no longer in route to full participation in first-class citizenship, and more importantly, Black collective and real political action in this city was stifled for generations to come. Speaking of the situation for Blacks throughout the state but quite applicable to Black Knoxvilleans, Lamon (1981) sums up what had taken place in the late 1800s: "Emancipation opened many opportunities for Black Tennesseans, but the former slaves "lacked the power to insure the permanence of their gains." As with antebellum free Negroes, they remained dependent and vulnerable" (53).

By the turn of the twentieth century, things did not look optimistic: Knoxville's Black population, disenfranchised, politically powerless, and having lost much of its collective voice, had little to no influence in local affairs. Whites dominated political and economic life, and with the exception of some tokenism and a few social privileges, Black lives in Knoxville were shaped by racism and discrimination cloaked in white paternalism. Throughout the twentieth century, depending on the political and economic climate of the times, whites expressed their control over Black lives whenever it suited them to do so. Interestingly, however, it was not only wealthy whites who were able to structure Black lives; poor whites also had the power to shape Black experiences.

Wheeler (2005) notes that while the number of Blacks in Knoxville's population had seen a four-fold increase between 1860 and 1880, the influx of poor whites during this period and beyond was even greater. Between 1880 and 1940, in absolute terms the Black population continued to increase, but their proportion of the city population decreased dramatically due to the massive in-migration of whites (Stanfield 1985). Whereas the city's Black population was over 30 percent in the 1880, it had dropped by 1890 to 22.5 percent and even further in the twentieth century, averaging around 15 percent but being as low as 7 percent (Lamon 1977). Knoxville had become an Appalachian urban enclave for the thousands of whites who were moving there from the hills and coves of Appalachia. This influx of whites had particular outcomes on the racial dynamics for the city as many poor whites could not be easily absorbed into the political and economic valves of the city: "Poor white migrants were unable to compete with native whites for skilled industrial labor and were locked out of Black-dominated unskilled nonindustrial sector, especially domestic-service related employment" (Stanfield 1985:138).

Additionally, Stanfield (1985) shares that whereas Blacks were minor political players during Reconstruction, poor whites were largely excluded from the political sphere. Such factors made for racial tension and a shadow of violence constantly looming, especially over the Black community. Lamon (1977) notes that these tensions often translated into further restrictions, repression, and racial violence for Blacks. Such was the case of the 1893 protest by whites against the exclusive employment of Blacks on street paving crews and, in 1913, of a white mob's attempted lynching of a Black man accused of killing a police officer.

Racial hostility and violence especially intensified during and after World War I when war fear, combined with hard economic times in urban environments, led to the buildup of anger and frustration in cities throughout the nation. In the state of Tennessee alone, there were six

reported lynchings during this time. In addition, whites used “discriminatory enforcement of vagrancy laws and general harassment of Black citizens in an effort to meet unskilled labor needs” (Lamon 1977:77). In light of the racial violence in the state during this period, Blacks in all major metropolitan areas in Tennessee formed local branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Knoxville was the last of the cities to do so, but within days of establishing the organization, at a surprise to the rest of the state, the race riots of the Red Summer made their way to Knoxville, the metropolitan area with the smallest and most non-threatening Black population in the state. In August 1919, a mob of working-class whites violently ransacked the Knox County jail in search of a Black man who, despite overwhelming evidence of his innocence, was accused of killing a white woman. After storming the jail, the mob descended onto a Black community where, despite fear, Blacks were determined to fight back. After two days of chaos, the National Guard was sent in, but many reports suggested that they joined with the white mob terrorizing Black Knoxvilleans. The riot ultimately resulted in many deaths of both whites and Blacks, and over 1,500 Blacks left the city. Two years later in 1921, the KKK, which had previously been denounced in Knoxville, was established with a strong white working-class backing.

Wealthier whites, including white politicians and business people, were embarrassed by the race riots and dismissed it as working-class activity, but the truth is that wealthier whites were just as, if not more, harmful to Blacks in Knoxville. As those that created and interpreted the law, they had much more power to structure Black lives. While lynchings and mob attacks were indeed usually done by working-class whites, wealthier whites had the power to enact legal discrimination and abuse, which more frequently and often more severely impacted Black lives. As the twentieth century progressed, state legislature passed laws that tried to put Blacks into a

permanent state of inferiority. Local white leaders in Knoxville were confident that as a unit, they gave “people a fair opportunity to succeed in the race of life” (Lamon 1981:243), but rather than using their power to attend to the “comparatively modest demands” of Knoxville’s Black community, they ignored or rejected them while mostly upholding discriminatory segregation laws (Lamon 1981:243). Lamon (1977) highlights that “[e]ven the most sympathetic white southerners rarely looked upon Blacks as equals. They supported segregation, and also wanted to control any major racial reform” (215). Those in Knoxville were no different:

Schools, hospitals, restaurants, theaters, and public transportation remained firmly segregated: city-owned Chilhowee Park was closed to African Americans except for one day each year; the municipal golf course did not allow Black golfers; the University of Tennessee resisted racial integration. (Wheeler 2005:92)

City leaders and the white elite went out of their way to ensure these traditions were maintained. In addition, whenever the rapid changes of the twentieth century brought on pressure for whites, Blacks would feel the brunt of the circumstances. For example, when the entire city struggled economically through the Great Depression, the effects on the Black community were much more devastating. Events like the Depression and the World Wars proved that for whites in power, Blacks were a disposable population, a population that they could shift and change depending on the needs of the larger white community. Whenever it was in the favor of whites, they would alter Blacks’ lives for their own benefit; white survival often came at the expense of Black degradation. Even outside of such major events, in the areas of employment, housing, education, health, and other major areas of community well-being, the Black community generally suffered. In the following section, employment, housing, and education will be discussed to illustrate the extent to which inequality and discrimination have shaped Black experiences in Knoxville.

Employment Woes

Throughout the era of segregation, Knoxville's Black community struggled with employment. Issues of income inequality, the availability of jobs, and the quality of those jobs have been major areas of concern for the Black community throughout the twentieth century (Brooks & Banner 1976). While it was employment and opportunities for better wages that brought so many Blacks to Knoxville in the late nineteenth century, by the early decades of the twentieth century, manufacturing had begun to decline. The railroad system made cheaper products—manufactured elsewhere—more accessible to Knoxvilleans, and as a result, there were increasingly fewer manufacturing jobs. Employment for Blacks in this period became very insecure and a source of subjugation for decades to come. Even though when compared to the rest of the state, Knoxville and East Tennessee were generally considered to have great employment opportunities for Blacks, African Americans in Knoxville were relegated to low-paying menial jobs, most in domestic servitude and marginal industrial occupations (Standfield 1985). During the 1920s, over 90 percent of Black working women and a third of Black working men were employed as domestics or servants. Additionally, Blacks were met with hostility when they tried to unionize, and Black businesses were not strong enough to employ large workforces.

The onset of the Great Depression made the 1930s an especially difficult time for Knoxvilleans. Unemployment in the city moved from 2,284 in 1930 to 7,534 in 1937. Among the Black community, however, the effects of the Depression were compounded by racial discrimination. By 1930, there were three times more Black families where the heads of households were not gainfully employed than those that were. Whereas white workers had a chance at limited employment, Blacks were pulled off of payrolls in alarming numbers. This was the case even in industries that had been traditionally dominated by Blacks. Employers did not

hesitate to replace Black workers with whites. Wheeler (2005) highlights industries in which Black workers were replaced by whites. He points out that in 1924 the city's asphalt and paving workers were all Black, but by 1934, there were only 4 or 5 of these workers left. The telephone company, which he stated had previously hired Black workers even at the foreman level, had no Black workers by 1934. Baking and cooking were also industries that had relied primarily on Black workers, but Wheeler (2005) notes that they had become all white industries by 1934. Even the railroad companies had stopped hiring Blacks. The situation was so bad that even New Deal jobs, which were intended to bring depression relief to all Americans, discriminated against Black job-seekers and had almost no impact on Black Knoxvilleans. Lamon (1981) writes of Black employment with the New Deal's Tennessee Valley Authority, which was operated in East Tennessee and employed a great deal of white Knoxvilleans:

Officials promised that hiring would be non-discriminatory. When Black leaders visited the Norris area at the end of 1933, however, they discovered only two Black TVA employees from the entire twelve-county area. This disclosure encouraged the hiring of a significant number of Black labors, but an NAACP investigation made the following year revealed that no Black workers at the dam or village site ranked as high as foreman. Furthermore, their concentration in the menial jobs gave them "less than 1 percent of the total payroll." TVA also excluded Blacks from living in the model village it was building for the permanent staff at Norris. (91)

As a result of such harsh realities, 1930s Knoxville witnessed a huge Black out-migration.

Between 1930 and 1940, about 1,000 Blacks left Knoxville (Wheeler 2005).

Whereas the defining factor of the 1930s was the Depression, the 1940s was defined by World War II. During the war years, the economic status of many Blacks improved; however, the war did not change negative and paternalist attitudes towards Blacks, and discrimination in employment from pre-war years was similar in the post-war years. In 1940, only 13 percent of Black employed men worked in manufacturing, mainly in transportation, trade, and personal services (Howard 1992). During the war, among other industries, Black men and women found

jobs at Oak Ridge, the East Tennessee secret atomic city and the Alcoa aluminum plant, which was expanding to meet the demands of the war. Many Blacks also enlisted in the armed forces. For Black employed women, prior to the war, domestic work was the primary source of work. War industries, however, provided an abundance of opportunities for all Knoxvilleians, including women and African Americans; and as the war progressed, Black women went into war industries where they were offered incomes 3 times more than domestic work. Many Knoxville housewives complained that they had lost their Black maids to the war industries (Shelton 2017). But by the end of the war, so many African Americans were laid off from war-time employment that, in 1950, Black men represented only 5 percent of the Knoxville's male industrial workers and Black women only 1 percent.

In spite of national and local advances made during the Civil Rights movement, discrimination in employment continued throughout the remaining decades of the twentieth century, taking on different forms—some more overt than others. In 1967, Kerns conducted a study of the Black community to assess the need for a local chapter of the National Urban League (Brooks and Banner 1976). This study found that employment and related economic issues were a major concern for Blacks as many were still concentrated in unskilled, low-paying jobs. Blacks were making about 50 percent the income of whites (Brooks and Banner 1976). During that same year, Lamon (1981) reports that of the 168 Black TVA workers from the Knoxville area, none were categorized above a Grade 8, where the better paying jobs began. Black TVA workers could be found in jobs like maintenance workers, elevator operators, or clerical helpers. Lamon (1981) suggests that part of the issues was that educational deficiencies in the Black community kept Blacks out of skilled jobs. The Kerns study points out, however,

that for many Black college graduates, underemployment was common. They were forced to either leave Knoxville or work as unskilled workers.

From income inequality and the availability to jobs to the quality of jobs available, issues around employment have for generations been a source of grievances for Blacks in Knoxville. The city has had a long history of job discrimination, and study after study of Knoxville's Black community has revealed that Blacks feel that little has changed over the years in regards to employers' racial biases. Prior to school desegregation, even the education system worked to produce a duality in employment in Knoxville. Bedelle (2012) indicates that as vocational programs were introduced into Knoxville's schools, they were developed for traditional Black occupations and white occupations, whereby the Black high school would offer courses in brick masonry and tailoring and the white high school would offer television and advanced electronics. Racial discrimination continued to be an issue for Knoxville Blacks; even after federal equal opportunity guidelines were passed, Knoxville often did not adhere to them. Additionally, there was a history of labor union hostility to Blacks in Knoxville.

Black businesses may have seemed a solution at times, but the Black community did not have the infrastructure for these businesses to offer real alternatives to the community's employment situation. In 1926, 114 Black-owned businesses employed 269 people; by 1973, even though they were hiring about double that amount, Black businesses represented an even smaller segment of the Knoxville's business community: there were only 84 of them (Brooks and Banner 1976). Brooks and Banner (1976) highlight agencies, such as the Urban League and the Knoxville Opportunity Industrialization Committee as well as some large employers, as having developed training programs and other programs with emphasis on hiring Blacks. Combined

with federal programs and guidelines, these initiatives have improved the employment situation for Blacks in some areas, but studies suggest that there is still much more to be done.

Housing Woes

Often poor and limited, housing for Blacks in Knoxville has long been a problem. Throughout the twentieth century, residential segregation, poor living conditions, public housing, urban renewal, and discriminatory realtor practices have characterized the Blacks' housing experience.

In the years following the Civil War when manufacturing jobs were attracting Blacks and poor whites to the city in droves, it was not uncommon for employers and their workers to live in the same neighborhood, near factories. Mechanicsville, credited today as the oldest African American neighborhood in the city, is one such neighborhood. However, by the end of the 1800s, with Blacks and so many poor whites moving into the city, wealthier whites began abandoning the city and separating themselves. As wealthier whites established suburban neighborhoods on the fringes of the city, residential segregation by economic class, and later race, became a fixture in Knoxville. Poor whites and Blacks were left to inhabit the coal-filled, grimy, sooty inner city, where by the turn of the century, manufacturing had begun to decline (Wheeler 2005). For decades to come, whites continued to leave the city as they became more economically stable. Simultaneously, Blacks were moving from rural areas or from outlying wards into center city wards. Between 1920 and 1930, the Black population increased in the first nine wards of the inner city; Blacks made up more than half of the population in some of these wards. But as Blacks filtered into these wards, the property values slipped. After WWII, the city became even more fragmented into enclaves of class and race. By the 1940s, according to Wheeler (2005), the population of whites in the city only grew by 10.6 percent while the Black

population grew by almost 20 percent. On the other hand, the white population outside the city in Knox County grew by 45.1 percent; most of this population consisted of young and middle-class whites coming from the city. Between 1943 and 1956, fifty-six new subdivisions were built on the edge of Knoxville's city limits. At the same time, most of the homes in the inner city had been built prior to 1914. Due to the movement of so many whites to the suburbs, the downtown commercial area also declined.

In city wards with high Black populations, unemployment and poverty were more widespread. Accordingly, dire housing conditions existed in these spaces. Drawing from the Daves 1926 study, Banner and Brooks (1976) show that Black housing was generally in a dilapidated state. Sixty percent of the homes were without electricity, 34 percent had no sewers, and most were overcrowded. The roads in Black neighborhoods were unpaved, and many homes were in disrepair and lacking running water and/or indoor plumbing (Naifeh 2009). One way that the city officials dealt with large-scale poverty, especially of African Americans, was through housing projects. In 1938, as part of Depression relief, the city received federal funds to build two public housing projects, one for whites and one for Blacks. College Homes Housing projects was built in Mechanicsville for Blacks. The housing project consisted of 320 units and began accepting residents in 1940. By 1941, another housing project Austin Homes was also built for Blacks. Public housing, managed by the city, remained almost totally segregated, with Blacks being directed to certain projects and whites to others. Especially in the Black housing projects, services such as garbage collection, police protection, lighting, and maintenance were often inadequate. Furthermore, even with these units, by the end of the 1940s, housing in Black community remained far below city average in condition, many still lacking indoor toilets and baths and the overcrowding situations continuing.

Many Black neighborhoods were deemed slums by the city, and as white capital flight grew, the city became more desperate to regain its tax base. This led to Knoxville's embarking on a number of urban renewal projects, which were referred to as slum clearance and targeted Black neighborhoods. Between 1950s and 1970s, these projects transformed hundreds of acres of Black neighborhoods and the nerve center of Black commerce into concrete highways, apartment buildings, and public facilities, including the Civic Coliseum.

The first of Knoxville's urban renewal projects, The Riverfront-Willow Street Project, took place from 1954 to 1967. This project especially affected "the Bottom," the area that ran along Vine and Central Avenues that contained most of Knoxville's African American businesses at the time (Victoria 2015). Located in this area was the popular Gem Theatre, one of only two African American theaters in downtown Knoxville during the Jim Crow era (Victoria 2015). Whereas the Bottom was the business center, the second project, the Mountain View Project, which took place from 1964 to 1974, destroyed a predominantly residential area. It was in this area that the Civic Coliseum was built. According to Victoria (2015), this area had national distinction as in 1960, it was rated the fourth poorest in the nation. She goes on to note "creating national ratings was a powerful tool for proponents of urban renewal" (Victoria 2015:24) who completely disregarded the social and community value of this community to Knoxville's Black residents. The third urban renewal project, the Morningside Project, which was halted due to community protest, was initially conceived as part of the Mountain View General Neighborhood Renewal Plan.

As project after project created a tidal wave in Knoxville's Black community, often families, businesses, and institutions were forced to relocate not just once but multiple times. This compounded the problems in public housing, which became even more overcrowded and

concentrated spaces of poverty. New housing projects were built in East Knoxville, and in addition to previously existing projects, they became home to thousands of Blacks displaced by the loss of residential units in center city. Housing projects as a solution to Black poverty did more harm to Black Knoxvilleans. Many of the Blacks who were forced into public housing were of limited resources, and prior to displacement, they owned their homes—even though they may not have been in the best conditions. Losing their homes meant that they could not pass on property to future generations to assist with upward mobility. In addition, as jobs followed whites to the suburbs, limited access to employment made it such that Blacks remained dependent on the state, which reverberated in a cycle of Black powerlessness.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a comprehensive overview of Black life in Appalachia, since settlement by non-Indians, with a specific focus on Knoxville. In this overview, I have highlighted major historic moments and transformations in an attempt to provide an understanding of the context within which a Black Lives Matter movement could develop in a space that most might not expect. Not only have I challenged the racial exceptionalism of the region that might suggest such a movement to be irrelevant there, but I have also highlighted a very long, difficult history of Blacks in an urban center, not unlike that of one elsewhere. Furthermore, this chapter provides the background and historical analysis on which the following three empirical chapters will rely for a more contemporary analysis of a Chocolate City Way Up in Appalachia.

Chapter 4: “Slums? How long we been living in the slums? This is a neighborhood.”

Okay. I can remember my grandmother – Like I said, we had multi-stocks of housing in the area. Just about everybody back then had a front porch. There was one house that used to be a hotel but that a family was living in at the time. They lived downstairs, and they had upstairs rented to people. So we was sitting on that front porch, great old big front porch, you know, and just talking like we always did. And so a couple of people on the porch said, “Well, I’ll be glad to live at – I’m glad we gonna have to move out of these slums. I’m glad to leave out of the slums.”

And so my grandma, who I think had maybe a 3rd or 4th grade education, all these people had master’s or at least bachelor’s and probably PhDs, but for sure had master’s degrees, so when the person made that statement, my grandma said, “Slums? How long we been living in the slums? This is a neighborhood, and this always has been a neighborhood. When did we start living in the slums?” So the person said, “You’re right, Miss Valma. I just listen to the words that people have been saying about our community, and I have started repeating those words.” Because the word “ghetto” was not a word that we came up with. It was forced upon us. You living in the ghetto, and that kind of thing.

So that was my first recollection of there being discussion. I had heard my grandma say about moving or something about moving, but I didn’t understand what the move was all about because I was maybe 10, 12, 15, whatever it was. I wasn’t like knowledgeable about the politics and the economics and all the rest of the community and that kind of thing. But that’s the first thing I heard about it. My grandparents then moved from where we were living in the house to Austin Homes, so that’s when all the community was knocked down as far east, no far west, and then the only thing that was remaining of housing was Austin Homes. So we moved into Court A in Austin Homes.

(Umoja)

4.0 Introduction

Within the last five years, Knoxville has appeared on a number of lists of desirable places to live in America, including *Forbes* and *Livability*. The city seems to be competing aggressively with cities of similar sizes to achieve model status. As is the case in many Appalachian cities, Knoxville, tucked away in the mountains of East Tennessee, is experiencing a rebirth. No longer just a gateway to the Smoky Mountains, Knoxville, a former railway hub of the Southeast, is currently being reframed as a scruffy but “sophisticated urban center with authentic texture” (Urban Land Institute 2015). The once ugly brick structures that remained the industrial period are now being gutted and given facelifts to house lofts, condos, restaurants, and event venues. A rustic masterpiece with waterfront villas and rolling scenes of colors that change with the seasons, the city hopes to attract investors, developers, young couples, retirees, and tourists to live and work with a view of the mountains in their backyards. There is a budding creative energy centered on live music, but that is quickly being filled with makers of all kinds. A sense of quality-of-life seems within reach for a much lesser price than larger cities. The “revitalization of Downtown” has ushered in not just little shops and outdoor cafes but also breweries at every turn. Progressives, bike riders, and festival-goers all are being targeted as revitalization project after project makes its way from downtown throughout neighborhoods in center city.

On the surface, the revitalization and rebranding of Knoxville is a great thing for the city, carrying a small-town feel but still a modern urban center and much to do and enjoy, attracting capital to the city. It seems like a win for everyone. Yet not all Knoxvillians are as hopeful of these changes or feel secured in their place in the city on the brink of change. There is a population of Knoxvillians for whom these types of changes have historically come at a cost: African Americans. For as long as Knoxville has been Knoxville, African Americans have lived

there. Moreover, while the city has historically prided itself in peaceful race relations between Blacks and whites, its history suggests parallel but unequal realities for Black and white Knoxvilleians. As a result, Blacks and whites develop different place perceptions or senses of place associated with Knoxville.

To understand sense of place, it is important to understand place as a concept. According to Cresswell (2004), place is “space invested with meaning in the context of power” (12). In other words, place is a collection of interwoven and ongoing stories forged out of the power dynamics that reflect pre-existing social hierarchies. Sense of place is an element of place that is produced from the emotions related to how people intersect and experience those stories. It is defined as

the feelings evoked among people as a result of the experiences and memories they associate with a place and the symbolism they attach to that place... [It] is the result of a shared pool of meanings, which carries over into people’s attitudes and feelings about themselves and their localities. (Knox and Marston, 2007:33; as cited by Shamai 2017:1349)

Power is central to the development of a sense of place. Because different social groups are positioned differently in place hierarchies, these groups may experience a place differently. Research tends to highlight the more positive experiences with sense of place, but people often have negative and ambivalent feelings or experiences with a place (McAndrew 1998). For many African Americans in particular, historically their sense of place has been shaped by and in spite of stories of struggle against racism.

In a society organized by race and racism, spatial control and confinement have been a profound part of the Black American experience. From slavery and beyond, different practices of spatialized violence have “targeted Black bodies and profited from erasing a Black sense of place” (McKittrick 2011: 948). Through the plantation system, for example, Black people

provided labor but operated in a constant state of “without”: without land, without home, without ownership—even of self (McKittrick 2011). The legacies of this system reflect and are produced in patterns of geographies of violence, domination, and annihilation that change in form from generation to generation (Hanafi 2018). Ghettoization, urban renewal, environmental racism, and incarceration are just a few examples of the cycles of spatial violence that have restricted or prevented favorable feelings towards place among African Americans. While these processes may differ in some ways from location to location, they have shaped Black people’s relationship to place in cities across America. Knoxville is no exception. While white Knoxvillians, largely the benefactors of the city’s development and other initiatives, might experience a positive sense of place there, as reflected in the city’s desirability reputation, Black people’s sense of place in Knoxville has been shaped by negative experiences. As a result, many Blacks Knoxvillians view the current development as unintended for them or the newest phase of what seems like ongoing efforts to “disappear them.”

In this chapter I draw on interview data from a subsection of my participants, including native and non-native Knoxvillians, to argue that a disjuncture exists in Black people’s sense of place in Knoxville. I recognize that participants’ sense of place might be impacted by their length of residency in Knoxville, current neighborhood, previous residences, ideas about what “home” is, place of work, and social location. Nevertheless, I contend that structural practices reflecting an imbalance of power and imbued with race and racism have created a “shared pool of meanings” (Knox and Marston 2007:33; as cited by Shamaï 2017:1349) and perspectives that highlight a negative sense of place among Blacks in Knoxville. I identify feelings of exclusion or not-belonging and feelings of loss as strong emotions related to Black people’s experience with place in Knoxville. In the chapter, I explore these feelings through the concept of being out of

place, referring to feelings of not-belonging, and the concept of loss of place, referring to feelings of displacement. The first half of the chapter focuses on how everyday racialized experiences in the white-dominated context of Knoxville can lead to a sense of being out of place among Blacks, so much so that many choose to leave. I focus on how an almost invisible presence of Blacks, a lack of consideration for Black social and cultural interests, and limited opportunities for Black mobility and economic power inform my participants' perceptions of Knoxville as a place that is not for them. The second half of the chapter deals specifically with the treatment of Black places. I unpack how the racialized experiences of displacement—through urban renewal, school bussing, and other practices from generation to generation—have produced a sense of loss of place among my participants.

Black People Out of Place

As a function of the power dynamics embedded in the construction of place, places and their associated meanings are implicated in processes of exclusion (Creswell 1996). While certain practices, identities, and objects have been constructed as normative of a place, those that fall outside of these norms are essentially “out of place.” Being out of place is therefore about not belonging. Having acknowledged race as fundamental to the construction of place, I draw on Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama's (2018) understanding of belonging as an embodiment and a lived experience influenced by racial and racist practices. Accordingly, I explore how a Black sense of being out of place is produced through everyday negative experiences, in this case racialized experiences that result in a perpetual sense of not belonging in white-dominated Knoxville. I identify three themes in participants' responses that reflect a sense of feeling out of place. They include an almost invisible presence of Blacks, a lack of consideration for Black social and cultural interests, and limited opportunities for Black mobility and economic power.

Almost Invisible Presence of Blacks

As was outlined in the previous chapter, the Black presence in Knoxville extends back to the city's frontier years. Furthermore, prior to large-scale annexation projects that began in the early 20th century, African Americans had a stronghold in the city, occupying several of the center city wards. Nevertheless, the nature of Black people's belonging to Knoxville and the region generally is contested and complex. Portrayals of Knoxville—as well as social, political, economic, and cultural regulations and institutional arrangements there—have historically and contemporarily situated Black people outside of what it means to be Knoxvillean. This positioning materializes in ways ranging from the exclusion of Blacks from local media campaigns to restrictions on or incentives for using government housing vouchers in particular spaces. Black people are not oblivious to their exclusion and/or confinement and the perceptions that such practices generate. Instead, these exclusions are imprinted in the Black sense of place shaping how Blacks feel not only about Knoxville but also about themselves in relation to Knoxville, their sense of belonging.

Even as Black people live here, some for their entire lives, Knoxville and Appalachia generally are not places my participants associate with Blackness or a Black presence. This disassociation is probably because being Black in Knoxville is a constant reminder that one's identity is in conflict with the normalized construction of the city. Black people are aware of their Blackness, not necessarily because of unfriendliness or blatant racism—those do exist—but mainly because in Knoxville, they stand out in most spaces as a different, as “Outsiders r.” As a testament to the success of Knoxville white construction, participants know that of the major cities in Tennessee, Knoxville has the smallest Black population. Furthermore, over the course of my study, I met several Black people who disclosed that prior to the job or school opportunity

that brought them there, they had never heard of Knoxville. Native Knoxvilleians are accustomed to people's strange reactions once they express that they are originally from Knoxville. Unless they live in Black neighborhoods, people—natives and non-natives alike—are often surprised to learn that the population of Blacks in Knoxville is not smaller than it actually is. Residential segregation definitely does not help in this situation. With a great portion of the Black population contained in the ever-decreasing boundaries of a few neighborhoods, there is a general sense that Black people are allowed to live and work in Knoxville as long as they do not pollute or disrupt the native culture. Beyond those areas, their numbers do not exceed a certain threshold, and the unpolluted whiteness of Knoxville remains very apparent. It is not unusual for Black people in Knoxville to find themselves the only Black person in a room, and depending on their place of residence, they can go through an entire day not seeing other Black people. It is no surprise, therefore, that within this context, Black people's ties and feelings of belonging to this place are questioned. The following quotes capture my participants' experiences with, awareness of, and sentiments related to the almost invisible presence of Blacks that shapes their feelings of being out of place in Knoxville:

He didn't realize there were Black people in Knoxville when he first came. (Yolanda)

I remember being the only Black child in the place. (Bree)

But moving to Knoxville it was just like – it's a lot of white people. (Brandi)

When I first moved here, I moved to West Knoxville, so I didn't see any Blacks on this side of town. I didn't see any of my people until probably about a couple of weeks after I moved here. Because where I work it's just all white. (Trina)

We were like, as far as we knew, the only Black family up until a couple of years ago. We saw someone Black kind of moved around the bend we were like, oh it's a Black person (laugh)... (Adria)

Everywhere but KC, everywhere but being at KC, you go to the damn grocery store. We used to call the one Walmart, “the Hillbilly Walmart.” You go there and no matter what time of day, it was highly likely, you’d be the only Black person there... it was just bluegrass or country, it was just white people ... it’s always gonna be a bunch of white people, 99 percent of the time. (Jay)

Everybody leaves. When people come, cool Blacks come... everybody leaves... Everybody leaves because they just like, it's too many white people here. (Diane)

Because it’s just overwhelmingly southern, old, money, white. It’s just how I think of Knoxville. (Simone)

For natives and non-natives alike, especially those living outside of Black neighborhoods, their sense of place is shaped, at the most basic level, by being constantly and glaringly reminded that they are not members of the dominant group. The experience of being the only Black person in the room or being in overwhelmingly white-dominated spaces gives the false impression that the Black presence in Knoxville is insignificant. This supposed insignificance has implications for Black bodies related to criminalization, marginalization, and other experiences of racialization. As a result, navigating Knoxville as a Black person—whether at the grocery store, at a restaurant, at school, or at work—can require very calculated actions. Ultimately, this reality lends to Blacks’ developing negative feelings associated with their city of residence.

Forty-two-year-old barber and native Knoxvillean Leroy grapples with the consequences of the perceived insignificance of Blacks in Knoxville. Black people’s belonging, or rather not belonging, is central to how he understands Knoxville generally. One of the first things he mentioned when I asked him to tell me about himself was that he works hard to be a role model in his community because, as he described it, Knoxville is “a city that is really not for us.” Because the Black population in the city is so small, he feels that there is an understanding that the city does not have to cater to Blacks:

You know, at the end of the day, the small demographic per capita of Black people in Knoxville is minute to none. If you look at the number of people that live in this city and being around them, we get the misconception that it's a lot of us here when it's really not and we get frustrated with things, such as the injustices and how there's not a lot of diversity and they don't care about us. But the first thing you gotta do when living in Knoxville as a Black man or woman is realize that you are in a college town. The University of Tennessee is the heart and soul of this city and if it doesn't affect that in a positive way or financial way, you really irrelevant and that's it. And it's funny how people in this city are so frustrated and shocked and in awe of the treatment of how they perceive the Black individual in this city when they under a misconception. It's really a matter of just taking the time to just step back and look at where you are and understand where you are, not because you know a lot of Black people in a city that doesn't have a lot of Black people that doesn't meant there is a lot of Black people, so they don't have any reason to cater to us.

The power dynamic embedded in place construction comes through in Leroy's comment. He seems to understand that social-spatial processes do not happen evenly—hence, the distinction he makes between “us” and “them,” indicating the underlying social hierarchy. It is clear in his comment that whites have the power to decide what is relevant and deserving of city resources, which for him, at the center is the University of Tennessee. On the other hand, Blacks are insignificant in number and, at the receiving end of the racial processes, are mistreated. Leroy's feeling about Knoxville comes through very strongly, and according to him, other Black Knoxvilleians have similar negative feelings associated with the city.

For many native Knoxvilleians, it is in leaving Knoxville for other cities that they realize the extent to which the Black presence in Knoxville comes close to being invisible and that this invisibility affects them. For others, the realization happens through interactions with Blacks who are transplants in Knoxville. Native Knoxvilleian Jamie went to college two hours away in Chattanooga, TN, and recalled not only a complete difference in the Black presence there but also a hyper-awareness of being among very few Blacks upon her return to Knoxville. She explained:

I remember when I relocated to Chattanooga and their riverfront and their downtown area it was just the place you wanted to go. And as a Black person it was a place you feel comfortable going. Like you would go to a restaurant and there would be other Black people there. And ah in Knoxville, I would usually always count the other people of color in a restaurant and that gets tiring. My pre-college self probably didn't pay attention to that. When I came back to Knoxville and then as I had exposure to all my friends who were here for graduate school they always pointed it out. And so then I became hyper aware. You know what! "We are the only Black people at Walmart." "We're the only Black people here..."

Jamie is suggesting that she felt a kind of comfort in Chattanooga, particularly in public spaces, that was absent/missing in Knoxville due to the lack of a Black presence here. Additionally, she speaks of the stress of being the only Black person at a restaurant or at Walmart, stating that it is "tiring" to always be reminded of her racial outsider status. Jamie returned to Knoxville after college for family reasons but within months of our interview, she had relocated to Memphis, TN, which, of the major cities in Tennessee, has the largest Black population. This move was no surprise to me; during our interview, Jamie described one of the characteristics of the Black experience as being transient. She stated,

You come here and go to work and you quickly try to figure out where your exit strategy is going to be... I got married immediately and my mom was here... I know without that this place would have been very, very hard.

The sense of feeling out of place is so strong that leaving becomes the solution for many Blacks, further maintaining small numbers of Blacks in the population. But the almost invisible status makes Knoxville a "very, very hard" place for Blacks, so much so that even with her support system here, Jamie still desired to leave.

Despite all the development taking place in the city, the desire to leave Knoxville for places where the Black presence is stronger is not uncommon. It is definitely something that Adria thinks about frequently. She was born and raised in Knoxville but grew up in a predominantly white suburb in North Knoxville. Not only was her family "the" Black family in

her neighborhood for most of her life, but also she went to mostly white schools, including the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. As a recent graduate contemplating establishing herself as an adult, Adria is contemplating leaving Knoxville. Among the things she has identified as important in her choice of cities is a stronger Black presence:

So the areas that I've been looking are like Nashville, Charlotte, Atlanta, like places where I know there's going to be more Black community and the thing is I don't even know, like I can tell you what I feel like white people things are, but I don't really know what Black people things are. I want to be around Black people and see what that is.

Adria feels that living in Knoxville has made her familiar with whiteness but not Blackness. She wants to know Blackness. Her sense of place in Knoxville reflects the idea that Blackness is so far outside of what Knoxville is that even though she is Black herself, she feels she must leave the city to find out “what Black people things are.”

Whereas Adria wants to leave to find Black people things, Simone, also a native Knoxvillean and graduate of the University of Tennessee, is simply excited about the possibility of being in a place where she is not one of three Blacks. Smiling from ear to ear, she told me, “I am actually about to make a move to New York, which is going to be great. I am excited to not be one of three Black people in the city anymore.”

Among Blacks for whom moving is not an option, trips to neighboring cities can be just as exciting. Jay told me that Nashville was the place of choice for him:

I enjoy Nashville and would go to Nashville because that felt closer to a release or closer to that idea like I can go somewhere and see all types of Black people. I can stop at the gas station and might spark up a conversation with a random person, Black person, about a random thing.

Blacks feel so out of place in Knoxville that it seems they are physically not in place. Jay feels he must travel to another place just to bump into a Black person at a gas station. He explained that it takes a “certain type of Black person to stay in Knoxville.” He believes that for most Blacks,

native or not, it takes something outside of their control to keep them here or to make them return. “Often it is family or a job,” he tells me. For him, it was having a child with a woman who was from Knoxville and not wanting to live apart from his daughter. He told me that many of his friends have left and that he looks forward to his daughter graduating high school so that he can leave.

This idea of a certain type of Black person staying alludes to a common perception that Black Knoxvilleans are passive or at least content with spatial processes that render them almost invisible. Otherwise, they would be like more radicalized Blacks and choose to leave Knoxville or disrupt the status quo. This way of understanding does not consider the social, political, and economic mechanisms that are at play in maintaining not just invisibility in numbers but also in decision-making and other expressions of power. All in all, the likelihood of Blacks challenging the power structure is limited by a number of structures, but being one of few Blacks in white-dominated spaces is definitely among the sources of disempowerment as it fosters racialized experiences that ensure that Blacks are preoccupied with feelings of being out of place. In the next section, I address one way in which Blacks’ economic power is limited in Knoxville and how that limitation is experienced as being out of place.

Limited Opportunities for Black Mobility and Economic Power

For many Blacks in Knoxville, their sense of place is also shaped by the feeling that there are limited opportunities for them to achieve upward mobility and/or economic power in this city. Even before I began my study, I observed this perception. There was an article in the *Knoxville News Sentinel* that ran in September of 2014 as part of an ongoing series called “Hope for Our City.” In the article titled “Hope for Our City: Why Are African American Professionals Leaving Knoxville?” African Americans, including the pastor of one of the oldest Black

churches in the city, discussed the flight of Black people, especially young people, in pursuit of career opportunities. According to the pastor, “They either can’t find jobs or they can’t move up.” Another *News Sentinel* article reporting on this same issue described Knoxville as “friendly but not welcoming” for Blacks, suggesting that “many African American professionals see Knoxville as a pass-through city because it’s too hard for them to get promoted here.” Reading these articles was one of the first things that sparked my curiosity for understanding Black people’s relationship to place in Knoxville. Once I began my study, it did not take much prompting for my participants to share similar sentiments as those mentioned in the articles. In the same way that it appears Blacks are allowed to live in Knoxville as long as they do not pollute its whiteness, my participants’ comments suggest that Blacks have access to jobs here as long as they are lower-level positions. Having limited mobility opportunities certainly sends the message that Blacks do not have full membership in the group. However, it also works as an informal process of keeping them out of the power structure, for which economic mobility serves as an avenue.

The following are the types of comments made by participants on how the lack of opportunities shapes their feelings of being out of place in Knoxville:

When my sons graduate from high school, I do want to leave here... Just the opportunity it's not here and I feel like I shouldn't have to dumb down my resume to be considered for a job you know... I don't have my master's yet but I'm working towards my master's... but then when it's oh look you're getting your master's and blah, blah, blah; it's like after that is like-- it's a bad thing.

I knew this one job, they sent me an email like 10 minutes after my interview because one supervisor, all she had was a bachelor's so I know that they weren't gonna hire me. You know like I knew this but I mean if I'm applying for a job wouldn't you rather have somebody over qualified than under qualified? (Tesha)

Based on her job-searching experience, Tesha feels not only that she is limited in her access to jobs but also that she must present herself to be less educated. She feels a general sense that

white employers do not want her to have more education than white employees. An equivalent education is okay, but as soon as she mentions she is working on a master's, it becomes a problem. This creates a feeling that, as an educated Black woman, she is out of place in Knoxville—i.e., it is not the place for her, it is not the place where she can thrive.

Similarly, Yolanda does not believe Knoxville to be the place where Blacks can achieve positions that allow them to thrive economically. In her experience, places like Atlanta are more suited for that. When she visited Atlanta as a teenager, seeing Blacks in positions like CEO, she was overwhelmed by possibilities she did not know existed for Black economic power. Furthermore, Yolanda grew up in East Knoxville and for her, leaving is not only a matter of achieving economic power, but it is also a matter of survival, especially for Black males.

I feel that like I wanted to go to Atlanta when I graduated high school because when we would go there when I was in college, oh my God, Black people doing this, Black people doing that. Oh my God. Like they're in management, they're in this. They're like CEOs. They are this blah, blah, blah. I never saw all this. It was like, the two Black people that was somewhere at the top, but not really at the top. I just didn't see that. So it was just like refreshing, just like, oh, you could do it. Like you just felt empowered and encouraged and felt like you had an opportunity and here, it's not a lot of African American people, you don't see a representative of yourself in those types of environments. So it is kind of discouraging.

So, um, it's more of survival, like to get out of Knoxville, especially for young Black boys like you get to college, get somewhere to get away because just like a hopeless dire situation... I mean, what do they have to look forward to? I don't know. I don't want to raise my child here. Like I want to go somewhere else for a better opportunity because it doesn't seem like there's much opportunity here. No jobs in East Knoxville for none of these boys. (Yolanda)

Yolanda is currently a stay-at-home mom but studied biology in college and worked at a lab prior to having children about two years ago. She has had many workplace challenges that she feels were related to her being African American, including people questioning her ability. Furthermore, when we first met, she had a massage business that she ran out of her home, which

she started after having a very hard time finding a job in the science field. Massaging provided a source of income in the interim. What made her experience so interesting is that Oak Ridge National Lab is just 30 minutes from Knoxville and a major employer of people in STEM fields. Yolanda said she applied to several jobs at the national lab but was never offered a position. Eventually, she was able to get a job in her field, but she still feels that to get to the next level, she must leave Knoxville.

As an older sister to brothers, Yolanda believes the opportunities are even less for African American boys and men in Knoxville. She feels a sense of hopelessness for Black youth in East Knoxville and encourages them to leave Knoxville by any means necessary. Ultimately, she said she is willing to leave her family and support system in Knoxville in order to give herself and her children access to more opportunities.

Like Yolanda, Lisa looks to more traditional Chocolate Cities, like Atlanta or DC, for models of how Black people might thrive professionally:

I feel like how you go to the other cities, bigger cities, like if you go to DC, you go to Atlanta, of course even going just to Nashville, who's to say it's not unusual to see a Black person in a professional white collar position a higher position versus here you almost like take a double look, double-take, like it's... You don't see it a lot here. I wish that could change. (Lisa)

Lisa works at a predominantly white healthcare facility and is frustrated that she does not see Black doctors or senior-level Black professionals. While representation is important in its own right, for so many Black people, not seeing Black professionals in managerial and other higher level positions is mostly an issue of limiting Black economic power and maintaining social hierarchy between whites—who belong—and Blacks—who do not. Simone's comment captures the essence of this point:

Where most of the money lies? Not with the Black people. My friend Brianna and I talk about this a lot. For some reason we have been allowed to permeate parts of the white

Knoxville that other Black people don't get to go. As an opera singer we get invited to go to fancy dinners, fund-raisers and one of three to four Black people in the room and all the people serving us are Black. We talked about this on the drive home how uncomfortable and how unfair that feels. So, the money is not trickling down. It's not moving over. It's shivering over us in positions working for other people. (Simone)

By systematically limiting Black Knoxvilleans' economic power, the power structure not only maintains white control of the city but also communicates to Blacks that Knoxville is not a place for them, especially if they desire upward mobility. As a result, feeling out of place, Blacks feel forced to leave Knoxville in order to access greater opportunities. Even when the few Blacks who figure out how to beat the system acquire advancements in their career and some amount of economic stability, the sense of being out of place is still present in other racialized experiences. In the next section, I focus on how the lack of social and cultural considerations for Blacks also leads to feelings of being out of place.

No Consideration for Black Social and Cultural Interests

During the summer of 2017, at least two of my participants asked me whether I would be attending the upcoming concert of African American R&B and soul singer Anthony Hamilton. As a fan of the singer, I was indeed looking forward to this event, but I later discovered that it was a common custom among Black Knoxvilleans to show up for Black performers and entertainers whenever possible, even if they were not major fans. It was explained to me that having cultural activities and events that Blacks felt represented them and their interests was so infrequent that people felt obligated to participate. This was both to ensure that these events would happen again and because it was unknown when another opportunity might present itself.

Being out of place in Knoxville is also a cultural experience. Places intended specifically for Black social and cultural interests are not valued in Knoxville. Black people might be in the city, but the cultural outlets for them are mainly elsewhere. Therefore, by being in Knoxville,

Black bodies are literally out of the places where their culture is valued. In Knoxville, the norm is that cultural activities and events are overwhelmingly designed to be palatable for a white audience. As Jay puts it, “living in Knoxville you get one of two things, either bluegrass or country.” If these flavors are not appealing to them, then African Americans are left feeling culturally marginalized and out of place. Even if they do enjoy country and bluegrass, Black Knoxvilleans have little say in planning and designing citywide cultural programs and often feel that programs are not planned with them in mind. The feeling that Blacks have little to no cultural outlets in the city severely impacts their relationship to place in Knoxville. The following quotes depict how my participants felt as though, culturally, they had no place in Knoxville.

There was, there was a desire I think for me to kind of find a space where I could –And I wasn't really sure at that point... still not really sure what goes on the end of that, but I always felt like if I were to stay here, the number of things that could go on the end of that were going to continue to shrink. That the opportunities for the cultural experiences were just limited. I mean, even now if I want to go out and just, you know, hanging out, my options are very, very limited depending on, you know, what day of the week or weekend it is, there's a good chance that the answer is nowhere. You know, where I'm going to feel like I fit. (Kim)

There's nothing to do for us. Like you know, we can't go hang out and listen to our music. (Diane)

I go to work, I go to the store, I go home, I go to work, I go to the store, I go home and that's kind of my life... wasn't no jazz scene, wasn't no R&B scene...so I went to work. (Jay)

Now that I'm 32, I'm in the grown and sexy stage to where I don't want to party with the young folk with the rowdy crowd. So for us there's not really a lot out there ... I mean there's not a lot of spaces like our friends, our crew as I call us ... I feel like there's nowhere for me to sit down and like give a business money. I just want a chill spot. I needed to hear some R&B, a little bit of rap, not too trashy little chill spot just, get a drink, get a good bite to eat. And that's about it. (Lisa)

There is no shortage of bars, breweries, activities, and event venues in Knoxville. As I mentioned earlier, within the last decade, city officials and developers have been working hard to make the city vibrant, especially for young professionals—people in their 20s and 30s. Yet many of my participants, including those who fit those demographics, talk of having “nothing to do” or “no place to go” in Knoxville. A part of feeling as though one belongs to a place is feeling that what one values is also what that place values. The absence of music such as rap, R&B, and jazz, which people usually associate with Blackness, is among the signs that communicate to my participants that they are not valued in popular socializing spaces. Further, it communicates generally that Blackness is not truly wanted in those places. So, even though they are not technically barred from social places, Blacks feel that these are not places for them. Even public spaces like the downtown area and Market Square—the popular place for eating, playing, and socializing—feel foreign to my participants. Especially during the summer months, there are numerous cultural activities and events occurring in Market Square. However, the choice of programs often does not reflect Black audiences, which is an issue that native Blacks discussed.

Lisa, who has lived in Knoxville her entire life, said this of Market Square:

It can be a melting pot down there. But no, that’s not entertainment to me. I feel like it’s weirdness that kind of happens down there. You have ... I don’t know white people with dreads and stuff and they’re just, that never has been something I like to do. (Lisa)

Similarly, Simone told me, “I have even heard the kids say they don’t feel like they belong downtown. You know like that’s not for us.”

The sense that there is nowhere for Blacks to go and nothing for them to do in Knoxville becomes even more pronounced in Black neighborhoods:

When he [my husband] first came here, he went to the fresh market for grocery, like all these places like down in the Bearden area because that’s the area that I lived in at the time because I live on Sutherland ... And so that was the area that I show him because that’s the area that I was living in at the time. But like coming over to East Knoxville

where my mom lives, he was just like, oh, this is where the Black people are. It was like, “ain't nothing to do over here. What are you doing? There's nothing to do. There's nowhere to go. There's nothing to do.” (Yolanda)

Well I noticed this with my daughter the other night, we were driving down Magnolia and it was dark. It was probably 9:30 on Friday night; it's dark, like it was literally nothing from just about here all the way to the Dollar Tree. It was dark. And the Dollar Tree was closed but the lights were still on and it's dark; there's nothing. There's literally nothing, nowhere to go, nothing to do. So you are literally forced to take your dollars and leave the community if you want to eat out you know like a restaurant, if you want to just have any kind of companionship or whatever like a bar or grill, you know family-oriented grill kinda place; there's none of that here. (Carl)

Both Yolanda's and Carl's comments indicate that the sense of loss in the Black neighborhood is more severe. There is a general feeling that there are not places that cater to Black interests in the city, but the expectation is that the Black neighborhood would be an exception. But as these participants point out, that expectation is flawed. Black neighborhoods in Knoxville have been shaped in more ways than one by loss. In the next section, I discuss how loss of place has been a defining characteristic of Black neighborhoods.

Loss of Place

Along with the power to define a place also comes the power to determine how different social groups experience that place. For example, when it comes to flows and movements in a place, while some groups are initiators, others are receivers (Massey 1993). In white-dominated societies, Blacks are the receivers, meaning that they are often denied the right to choose what place they want to occupy and how their places look (Hanafi 2018). Even when they are the majority in a place, white dominance restricts Black participation in processes of spatial control. Blacks are often excluded from the decision-making and management practices in their spaces and, consequently, are subjected to displacement (Hanafi 2018). It is within this context that I understand the Black sense of place shaped by loss of place or displacement in Knoxville.

Displacement is traditionally understood as the forced movement of people. However, for this chapter, I draw on Davidson's (2009) and Atkinson (2015) work on displacement that centers it on "the injustice of feeling supplanted and discarded" by changes to one's place (Atkinson 2015:376). Davidson (2009) argues that being supplanted can occur even while remaining in a place. Furthermore, he develops several ways that displacement can be experienced: direct displacement, indirect displacement, and neighborhood resource displacement ((Davidson 2008). In the next two sections, I focus on direct displacement, which involves being forced to leave one's place, and neighborhood resource displacement, which involves the removal of resources from the neighborhood.

Direct Displacement

Regardless of their neighborhood, economic background, or age, what seemed the most consistent in Black Knoxville's experience was some form of loss of place or feelings of displacement. Through a number of state-led programs and private development projects, Black people have been removed from and have witnessed the destruction of their homes, schools, neighborhoods, and other institutions. The most notable of these projects has been urban renewal, a post-World War II state-sponsored project designed to clear large areas of "blighted" land, or "slums," and replace them with modern development. Despite over six decades since the first wave of urban renewal's destruction, the effects of these programs are still felt today; Black Knoxville's who experienced them directly, including 80-year-old Zimbabwe, are still dealing with the trauma of having watched their homes and neighborhood be demolished.

Though probably not their first experience of displacement, African Americans in Knoxville were particularly impacted by urban renewal. Likening it to genocide, Zimbabwe describes urban renewal as the worst thing to happen to Blacks in Knoxville since slavery. Up

until this point, Black communities had developed sufficient capital and, though limited by Jim Crow, were thriving in their own spaces. According to Zimbabwe, Black folks in Knoxville had developed a culture: “It did not parallel everything white folks had, but it reflected it. We had institutions that reflected white culture.”

Urban renewal therefore ruptured years of economic, institution, and community building, and the social, psychological, and financial costs of the destruction were high. These programs came in three waves beginning in the 1950s and lasting through the 1970s. Along with homes and neighborhood institutions, they wiped out the economic nerve center of the Black community. With so many businesses destroyed, the loss to the entrepreneurial class was severe. Families were forced out of their homes and, in many cases, their jobs too. The community at large lost social and financial capital. In Zimbabwe’s neighborhood alone, over 500 structures were razed in what was estimated by the city to be about 100 acres of land (Knoxville News Sentinel August 17 1955: 8). To him, it felt like a land grab for white businessmen. According to the *News Sentinel*, by the time the demolition was over, the city was in possession of 97 percent of the land, ready to bid it off to developers (August 17 1955:8). But Zimbabwe and his neighbors lost more than their land and the physical structures that were their homes, churches, businesses, and schools; they also lost their memories, their family dinners, their communities, their childcare, their livelihoods, their stability, everything they had come to know their entire lives. They lost their sense of place and belonging.

Direct Displacement’s Impact on Future Generations

For people of Zimbabwe’s generation, the scars of displacement changed their perception of Knoxville forever. Loss of place became a permanent fixture in their understanding of what it meant to be Black in Knoxville. Because many of the institutions dismantled by urban renewal

never recovered, the impact of direct displacement reverberated for future generations. For instance, a housing crisis would remain in the Black community long after the urban renewal sites were cleared. So even though younger participants did not experience loss of place directly, their sense of place in Knoxville was still shaped by loss. They lived knowing that their grandparents were forced out of their homes and neighborhoods and that Black people in Knoxville used to thrive in a place that no longer existed. They knew that, except through stories and pictures, they would never experience that place. The following quotes depict younger participants' recollection of urban renewal:

My grandmother and great-grandmother were displaced due to the urban renewal in Knoxville. They had a house on Main Street where the Coliseum sits. They had a big, nice house there and that's how they ended up on Linden cause when the city decided to come through and redevelop downtown, that's where they ended up at... It was a lot of Black people down there [who] had houses and businesses and got scattered. (Bree)

They always live closer towards the downtown area, and it's different than what it used to be because they tell me that it was like big Victorian homes that everybody lived in. Then I guess around the late sixties, early seventies they built the housing projects all around... And so from what I understand, my family migrated from those big Victorian homes because it was more efficient for heating instead of using coal. It was electric heating. So that was how the population of my family moved into the housing project... But I hear stories of like this person had the parlor or like at that time people had their own little stores and stuff like that. Like the Black community had their own separate types of things here like mortuaries, hospitals. (Yolanda)

Yeah. So, on my mother's side of the family, they used to live in – oh, what was that neighborhood? It was like where the Colosseum is... Yeah. So, that area. So, they were pushed to what became, basically, the projects, and Austin Homes. You know, all that area was pushed there from – I'm not sure of the dates. I don't want to give you the wrong dates, but – (Tommy)

Bree, Yolanda, and Tommy, in their 30s and 40s, are about two generations away from direct displacement due to urban renewal. It was an experience of their grandparents' generation and knowing only bits and pieces of the story, they could not tell me about the immediate impact of urban renewal on their families. Nevertheless, they seemed to be contending with the impact of

these programs for future generations. They all indicated that future generations lost family homes, but, as Yolanda highlights, these were specifically “old Victorian homes” or “big nice house[s],” as Bree puts it. It is important to emphasize these houses in light of Knoxville’s current redevelopment. In a gentrifying Knoxville, my participants are witnessing a large amount of value being placed on old, big Victorian homes. In neighborhoods such as Old North Knoxville, Fourth and Gill, and Park Ridge, whites have created relatively affluent communities, the center piece of which are these old homes. Whereas homes of the same quality in Black neighborhoods were labeled as “slums” and bulldozed, these homes—built in the same era and therefore much older today—are being renovated, restored, and seen as “valuable.” In the backdrop of this redevelopment and locked out of full participation in intergenerational wealth-building, Blacks are still struggling with home ownership or securing affordable housing. Bree, in particular, lost her home to foreclosure during the recession and, in the midst of gentrification, has had difficulty finding a house she can afford with her housing voucher in the neighborhoods that have traditionally been Black neighborhoods.

According to these accounts, however, future generations did not lose just homes. They also lost the economic and social resources that living in and owning homes provided. Furthermore, future generations were placed in and forced to navigate “the projects,” or public housing, which are “state-owned and -designed housing developments for economically disadvantaged people” (hooks 1995:150). One thing Zimbabwe emphasized was that urban renewal relocation assistance from the government was never enough. He explained,

The city would put a value on people’s property and pay them an amount that they could not get a comparable property. As a result, if you owned your house and were out of debt then you had to go back into debt to get a new home. A lot of people who were renting and couldn’t afford to buy went into the housing projects.

A *News Sentinel* article from that time period confirms that two years after people were initially told they had to leave the first urban renewal site, Knoxville Housing Authorities reported that a third of those who had moved had gone into public housing. As was the case throughout the country, following urban renewal, the public housing program expanded to relocate displaced residents. In Knoxville, Walter P. Taylor Homes Housing Projects were built in 1967 in East Knoxville to house displaced residents, some of whom were forced to relocate two or three times. Many of those residents and some of their dependents would stay in public housing for the rest of their lives. Yolanda grew up in public housing. Her grandmother moved in after urban renewal, and the family stayed. Even after Yolanda's mother moved herself and her children into a single-family home, Yolanda's grandmother and other extended family remained in public housing.

Because of the stigma surrounding public housing, I had a sense that it was important for my participants to let it be known that their families did not originate there. Furthermore, it seems they were positioning the economic vulnerability and systematic violence their families experienced—signified by their living in public housing—as a direct consequence of urban renewal. But public housing altered Black people's experiences in other ways too. As hooks (1995) indicates, moving into public housing drastically altered Black people's relationship to place for future generations. It limited the level of creativity that homes and yards offered. The sameness of the public housing structures, she argues, informs “the ways poor folks are allowed to see themselves in relationship to space” (hooks 1995:150). Regardless of economic limitations, whether or not they owned or rented or if they lived in a shack or a Victorian mansion, Blacks could allow their needs and desires to articulate interior designs and exterior surroundings in their own homes. Standardized housing, on the other hand, “brought with it a

sense that to be poor meant that one was powerless, unable to intervene in or transform, in any way, one's relationship to space" (150).

Whether direct displacement under urban renewal affected them or their grandparents, my participants expressed a Black collective memory of losing place. It is no secret that for older participants like Zimbabwe, who almost wept when recollecting the experience of watching his elementary school close, direct displacement has caused them to have negative emotions associated with Knoxville. However, for younger participants like Bree, Yolanda, and Tommy, in some ways making claims to old Victorian homes or to a pre-public housing life is an expression of their resentment of how the city of Knoxville, through urban renewal, unrooted them and made them, for generations to come, a people "without" place.

Repeated Cycles of Direct Displacement: Serial Displacement

While not all participants had an urban renewal story, every generation had its own direct displacement story. Through larger projects—e.g., urban renewal, Hope VI (Housing Opportunity for People Everywhere), and gentrification— and smaller ones too, cycles of displacement or serial displacement (Fullilove and Wallace 2011) ripples through Black Knoxville reaping havoc from place to place. Zimbabwe made sure I understood that displacement was cyclical.

Zimbabwe has a way of telling a story several times to ensure I get it completely since he refuses to let me record our conversations. Sometimes, I return to him with follow-up questions and instead of just answering my questions, with clear, deliberate, and evenly paced speech, he spends all the time necessary to tell me the whole story all over again. So, one afternoon as I was preparing to leave after one of our many sessions, which had by then transformed from interviews to conversations and stories between a community elder and a young researcher, I

mentioned to Zimbabwe that I was beginning to think that urban renewal had destroyed four neighborhoods, not the three I had previously believed. This was probably the sixth time we had discussed urban renewal since I had met him. Zimbabwe let me finish my thoughts and then told me very carefully and patiently that urban renewal has never stopped. To this end, he briefly outlined some of the cycles of displacement that had affected Black neighborhoods in addition to urban renewal. Zimbabwe explained that what I was calling a fourth site of urban renewal was actually the displacement of people and destruction of a residential community in East Knoxville for the building of Walter P. Taylor Homes Housing Projects, which ironically was being built to house people displaced from the official urban renewal sites. He also explained that in the early 1960s, the intrusion of the Coca-Cola Company displaced people and destroyed parts of a Black neighborhood in Mechanicsville, including the 20-acre Leslie Street Park. This was the Blacks' only and largest neighborhood park in the city, and inside the park was the Edward Cothren swimming pool, also destroyed. In the late 1970s, he said that upgrades to Interstate 40 in preparation for the 1982 World's Fair took further sections of that same neighborhood in Mechanicsville. The construction of the James White Parkway, also in the 1970s, destroyed Black businesses and neighborhoods in East Knoxville near downtown. The late 1990s saw Hope VI's (Housing Opportunity for People Everywhere) destruction of College Homes Housing projects in Mechanicsville. Hope VI was a Clinton-era project that made federal funds available in a similar way that it did during the urban renewal era: by tearing down declining public housing in cities around the country. Once bulldozed, College Homes was replaced with mixed-income housing. Zimbabwe noted that, in addition to displacing Black residents, Hope VI also ushered in a wave of gentrification in the Mechanicsville community. He mentioned that in the 2000s parts of both Austin Homes and Walter P. Taylor Homes were razed and that, currently,

gentrification was threatening the Park City neighborhood in East Knoxville as well as what is left of Mechanicsville.

Overall, Zimbabwe warned me against talking about urban renewal as though it were something of the past or something that had ended. It was important for him that I understood that the displacement of Black people and the destruction of their communities and culture, regardless of what name it was being called—urban renewal, Hope VI, gentrification, etc.—was continuous. Fullilove and Wallace (2011) depart from a similar premise in claiming that serial displacement makes Blacks an internal refugee population. Understanding feelings of loss of place as produced by serial displacement explains why some participants seemed to be mourning place to the point of tears. This was certainly the case with Zimbabwe but also with Wendy. After learning of my research, 60-something-year-old Wendy, who had experienced multiple cycles of displacement, sent me a message wanting to share her story. In that message she admitted,

I didn't realize the emotional toll and grip it had on me until you posted and held that event... this issue of gentrification is PTSD for many of us. You scratched the surface of deep wombs we suffer and don't realize it... right now I am at home crying over my loss.

Repeated cycles of direct displacement left Wendy mourning place, but more importantly, it altered her understanding of her home.

It's like I woke up one day and realized what I'd lived through. It's like I woke up one day less than 10 years ago and realized that I've lived through three or four of those urban renewals. And I have nowhere to go home. My neighborhood is gone; my schools are gone. And I remember one time my son came home – he's in the Army or whatever – I remember one day my son came home, and we're driving around, seeing what we can see, and going to visit or whatever stuff, and I had nothing to show him. It was gone. And it's like I didn't belong there or never did or whatever.

With each cycle of direct displacement, additional structures of what once made up her home have been lost. Alienated and disoriented, Wendy feels her home has been completely erased and

is not sure she ever belonged to Mechanicsville. Given that home is tied so closely to identity (Sarup 1994), Wendy's disorientation at the loss of home is expected. It is also expected that not having a place in Knoxville to call home would lead to a weakened or complicated attachment to Knoxville. While Wendy has not completely denounced Knoxville, her story demonstrates how despite being native to Knoxville, the assumption that Blacks are at home here can be problematized by their lived experience. The bottom line is that cycles of displacement have created a fluidity of home for Black people in Knoxville, whereby it feels almost impossible for them to be rooted in place.

The precarity of home for Black Knoxvillians leaves some participants suspicious of current redevelopment efforts. Here is how Carl contextualizes Black people's fluidity and related suspicion:

Well when my mother was a kid you probably had Vine Street, right, that ran down through a - I forgot what they called it but it was a Black community over by where the Coliseum is now. Yeah that was the Black community. Just like I told you Burlington was from my generation, that was that from theirs, and then it got torn down. And then downtown, we had a Black section and they got destroyed probably two generations before that. And now you know the East Knoxville, this area here Magnolia Corridor, is in threat of being destroyed as a Black source center. So it's just a—it's a never-ending kind of evolution of where you call home and where you go to school, work, business they're trying to shut down. They think they're slick but I think they're trying to shut Vine down. They're trying to shut Holston down and again pushing, pushing, pushing. And that's just, that's been always the struggle for our community here in Knoxville... So that's why it's hard for me to sort of latch on to you know any one thing because it seems like you have to be ready to stay fluid...

Carl is definitely aware of the cyclical nature of the displacement that occurs in the Black community. He can highlight losses in Black neighborhoods from his generation as well as from his mother's generation and possibly his grandparents' too. At the time of our interview, the Magnolia Corridor project that he mentioned was being proposed as part of the development works currently sweeping center-city areas. Carl, who is skeptical of the city's development

agenda given previous displacing experiences, sees this project as a threat to his East Knoxville neighborhood. He lets it be known that he is not fooled by city officials, who he says “thinks they are slick.” Having repeatedly experienced “development” as displacement, he does not feel Blacks can “latch on” in Knoxville, suggesting that with their development projects, white city officials can uproot or un-home Blacks at any moment. This mistrust in the city’s development agenda is prevalent in the Black community. According to Knoxville’s Black Lives Matter organization (BLM Knox), whenever words like “outside investment,” “redevelopment,” “revitalization,” “face lift,” and “extension of downtown” are used by the city, the implication is that “No Blacks and poor people allowed”(Black Lives Matter Knox 2016).

Carl’s comment, like that of BLM Knox, reflects a perception among Blacks that displacing practices are deliberate and targeted. He and others speak of displacing practices in a manner that resembles the racial power imbalances. For these participants, displacement is more than loss of place or dislocation; it is a display of power by whites and an active effort to strip Black people of their humanity. Participants spoke of being pushed out and pushed around at the whims of whites in power and used words like “shuffle” and “cattle,” which are usually descriptors for animals, to describe the Black community’s experiences with direct displacement. Such descriptions were used especially when participants discussed direct displacement from Black schools, which Carl hints at in his mention of shutting down Vine and Holston Middle schools.

Bussing as Direct Displacement

Direct displacement from Black schools came in the form of bussing—a desegregation strategy enacted throughout the country following the Brown decision—which disproportionately transported Black children out of Black neighborhood schools into white

suburban schools. For participants in their 30s and 40s, bussing was one of their most memorable educational experiences, and often not for good reasons. Many participants experienced bussing as something that forced them from their schools and sent them into unfamiliar and, in many cases, unwelcoming environments. For some participants, bussing was introduced in elementary school, and for others, it was middle or high school; however, regardless of when they experienced it, bussing felt neither neutral nor just. Participants' recollection of bussing suggests that they felt disregarded or discarded by the practice. They described it as something that was done to or at the expense of Black children:

And if you asked me, so that area in particular was rezoned when I was in middle school and I still swear to this day, the only reason why they rezoned particularly right there, because it's not that far from there where they stopped and then it's Carter. Um, I feel like they purposely sent us to Gibbs because they needed like some more diversity because we're all Black right there. (Lisa)

I went to [inaudible], which was an all-Black school back in the day. And then I was the product of the rezoning. So I always say we were shipped out to all-white school. That was a horrible experience. (Adria)

If you shuffle the cards of the community and stick kids in this school, that school, that school, kind of deal them out to the various surrounding schools; I think you will lose the soul and the heart of what our community, the Black community in Knoxville is... (Carl)

Um, it is crazy how they do the zoning so they send you way up in the boondocks for elementary school in Rita. And they send you way in the boondocks in the other direction to go to Carter Middle. But then they split the line and so they have you for high school and you're going to Austin-East. (Bree)

I don't know, but I just assumed that they wanted to split the project up and because some kids had to go to Whittle Springs, some kids had to go to Bearden, and some kids had to go to Northwest. (Tessa)

They bussed us out, so I never had the privilege of going to Sarah Moore Greene, or Vine, or any of the schools that were actually in my neighborhood because they were encouraging that... So, that was just a wild time. We're talking, let's see, middle school – wow. (M.C. Mike)

Interestingly, like other desegregation practices, bussing was not a welcomed practice in Knoxville. The school system implemented bussing following the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) complaints to the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) about inequity in education between Black and white children. The practice was therefore reactionary and as a result not designed necessarily to make educational resources accessible to Black children but rather to avoid intrusion from the OCR. This possibly explains the haphazard and disregarding manner in which participants felt they were moved around. While the school system tried to maneuver federal laws with the least amount of impact to white citizens, Black children were pushed and pulled, "shipped" and "shuffle[d]" in any and every direction, almost arbitrarily. In addition to communicating indifference to the needs and interests of Black children, these practices also broke up their social ties and school traditions, including the intergenerational dynamics of attending schools like Vine Middle.

Across generations and through state-sponsored programs from urban renewal to desegregation-related bussing, loss of place was a consistent theme in my participants' narratives. Decade after decade, waves of racialized and direct displacing practices have highlighted the relatively little power that Blacks have by forcing them out of The places in which they have rooted themselves. However, while most obvious, it is not only through direct displacement or forced movement that Blacks experience loss of place in Knoxville. Neighborhood resource displacement was also a frequent theme in participant's narratives.

Neighborhood Resource Displacement

It became very clear that people do not have to be moved out of their place to experience a sense of loss of place or displacement. Neighborhood resources such as shops, services, and meeting places are a part of what makes a neighborhood familiar to residents; furthermore, they

are the places by which people come to define their neighborhood. When these places change or disappear—due to gentrification, disinvestment, or other processes—the orientation of the neighborhood changes (Davidson 2008). Often what results is an increase, among long-term residents, in the sense of “out of placeness” or feeling as though their place is no longer theirs. Participants’ emphasis on displacement through the loss of neighborhood resources was focused especially on businesses.

The general perception among participants was that East Knoxville and particularly Magnolia Avenue, the main thoroughfare and business district in the area, was not what it used to be. In a state of extreme desolation, the area was suffering the loss of its businesses.

The East side it’s just not flourishing like it used to be ... it’s just not flourishing like it used to. I mean it’s just dying out you know... I mean Magnolia was full of things even if it was just fast food, it was you know where you had Walgreens, it wasn’t as deserted as it is now. (Tesha)

I remember when they had actual stores. There was a dry cleaner, a Footlocker. What else used to be there? Lord, I don’t even remember, but it stayed packed with actual shoppers. And that was a strange thing to see, an actual shopping center basically in the middle of the hood. And it drove the Black people from all parts of the East side, especially out of Burlington. And then it drove the white people from the Chilhowee, Holston Hills area. (Bree)

There used to be a Checkers fast food store right there on... what is that? Advanced Auto Parts? There used to be a central park and the building’s still there, but it used to be a barbecue joint. Now that closed down. There used to be a Taco Bell... A sports bar they just put there, like, I’m excited about the sports bar. I haven’t been there yet, but I’m excited that something like that is there. There used to be a barbeque out there, there used to be a Krystal... There used to be more things... (Lisa)

With ease, participants could rattle off several places that are no longer on Magnolia and share fond memories of what these places used to be. For example, Bree remembers when people would line up at the Footlocker for hours before school to buy the latest pair of Jordan sneakers. But one of the most striking things about the participants’ discussion of loss of place was the

focus on fast food restaurants. In her quote above, Lisa alone lists at least five fast food establishments that used to be on Magnolia. Other participants had similar recollections, but Jamie's comment really underscores the extent to which the loss of these places impacted the community:

Magnolia makes me so sad right now. When we lost...I felt like moving KFC... Magnolia can't have a KFC anymore. It's like why can't we have a KFC. To me that was disappointing. And now if I'm going to my mother's and want to grab lunch on the way, it's Arby's. Arby's is your only choice. There's so much, so much development that has been lost there with the businesses that have moved out. Losing the Walgreens is just to the point where I'm just angry. And I don't know who to be angry with... I don't know but there is still a community there. There's nothing there further the part of Magnolia and when you get to Asheville Highway you have Kroger's, Walgreens, CVS, and [inaudible] place to eat. But the other part of Magnolia there is just nothing and because I don't know how you attract people to want to live in that part of area when there is nowhere for them to eat. There's a couple of banks but far more pawn shops and cash advance. That's not the Magnolia when my family... (Jamie)

Like Lisa, Bree, Tesha, and several others, Jamie has strong feelings about the loss of place that has occurred over the years on Magnolia, but she laments the loss of the KFC in particular. It seems very strange that the KFC would have such an effect on Jamie, who at the time of our interview was a PhD candidate at the University of Tennessee and was likely aware that fast food is unhealthy and disproportionately contributes to health problems in the Black community. Nevertheless, she is disappointed that her community is so starved of places that they cannot even have unhealthy food places. The mourning of fast food restaurants in the Black community is an indication of the level of divestment and just how dire the situation in East Knoxville is. This is of course beside the fact that the part of East Knoxville where the KFC used to be is now a food desert and has been for the last decade. Not only are there no grocery stores on that side of Magnolia, where the population is predominantly African American and low income, but many of the food businesses have also departed from the area. Given these circumstances, the loss of

any place where people can find food is felt deeply. Hence, Walgreens was another notable loss among participants.

As is evident in Jamie's comment, the loss of the Walgreens pharmacy was taken as a major hit by people who live in or have ties to East Knoxville. I remember the day I learned of its closing. I was at the Beck Cultural Exchange Center, the local African American museum. A community member called to inquire about something else and, while talking to the museum attendant, mentioned that she had heard "through the grape vine" that Walgreens on Magnolia was going out of business. The attendant, a native Knoxville woman in her 60s, proceeded to announce the news. It was a pretty big deal for community members. Many felt concerned or, like Jamie, angry. People were worried that Walgreens' closing would further exacerbate the problem of access to groceries and medicine, which a neighborhood grocery store would have remedied. Tesha sums up her concerns as follows:

If you need something, you can't just go to Walgreens because there is no Walgreens. You literally-- you need a car to get to where you want to go. And even in the area where the Dollar Tree, it used to be like the Walgreens, the KFC, and then down the street it used to be stuff. Like you can't just go there, I'm sure the Dollar Tree has stuff that you can but I mean for medicine; what if you need medicines... So you don't have the access that you used to have.

Despite being a pharmacy and not a grocery store, Walgreens was a major resource for community members in a food desert or otherwise neighborhood lacking in so much. It made both medicine and some amount of food accessible. In some ways, Walgreens represented the last piece of life in a dying neighborhood.

The loss of fast food restaurants, Walgreens, and other business places in East Knoxville or Black places in Knoxville generally is not seen as isolated incidents. Often, participants interpret them as the removal or lack of development in Black neighborhoods. In the words of Jamie, "so much development has been lost" in East Knoxville. Similarly, Tommy indicates,

“Magnolia is so close to downtown Knoxville, but nothing is being put into Magnolia.... Everything is going downtown.” The sentiments of these comments is that Black Knoxvillians take this divestment and lack of development in their community very personally. For instance, when Jamie exclaims, “there is still a community there,” it is expressed as a reminder that even though development seems to be abandoning the Black community, people live there and they matter. Similarly, Lisa feels excited that a sports bar might be coming to the area because it reaffirms that the people of East Knoxville are worthy of the investment. After all, the businesses are not only important for the economic value they bring to the neighborhood. They are also important for the social life of the neighborhood as they are the meeting places for the people in the neighborhood. Additionally, they have emotional and psychological value because community members interpret the perceived worth and value of the community as well as of themselves based on the level of public and private investment in the community.

Participants also do not believe the divestment of their neighborhoods or loss of Black businesses in general to be coincidental. Participants like Cynthia, who is not native to Knoxville but has lived there for a significant amount of time, have come to understand these losses as systematic and unjust. When I asked Cynthia where the communal spaces are for Blacks in Knoxville, her response was, “That they ain’t shut down?” Cynthia said she could not name any autonomous Black spaces and proceeded to explain that she feels “they” are constantly regulating and shutting down Black spaces. I asked who the “they” were, and this is what she said:

It seems like the city. Because there are things that go on at Cotton Eyed Joe’s. There are things that go on down at the clubs and the bars down in the Old City and those people. I would hope that they’re getting cited, but I don’t know. But as far as closing down, they will close a Black club in a minute to where I can’t name any Black club that I went to previously when I first – in the ten years that I’ve been in Knoxville that’s still open.

There was a club out off of Kingston Pike that was – I forget the name of it. And it's been renamed... but that was a Black club. I went there twice and then it got shut down. I have no idea why it got shut down. And I'm sure it's usually violence because that's what they cite, violence, but I'm like, "That kinda happens everywhere where you get people drinking." But they'll shut us down before I – what I've witnessed is Black clubs to be shut down faster than white clubs.

Cynthia has directly identified the city (governing bodies), as those who engage in practices that spatially confine Blacks and disproportionately close and regulate Black places. So much of the city's displacing practices are framed as necessary for safety, development, progress, and otherwise the greater good of the city. However, because Blacks have such a marginalized status in the city, what is intended for the greater good either does not benefit them or further compounds the challenges they already face. For example, when the city tears down public housing and displaces its residents, it is not necessarily addressing issues of poverty, unemployment, and under-resourced schools that are major issues in these communities; rather, the city is just moving these populations and their needs out of the view of more valued populations. As one participant indicates, if you live in parts of West Knoxville, you might not know that parts of East Knoxville even exist and therefore might never feel compelled to seek social change:

I mean because when you come to the East side or when you come to certain parts but then you go to Turkey Creek; they're totally different You wouldn't even think that to go to Turkey Creek you wouldn't even believe that a part of Knoxville, that the East side of Knoxville it even exists. So it's like... it's just that out of sight out of mind you know what I mean. Like we only have to do stuff when the issue arises. We don't have to try to help and as a whole city anatomy like there's a whole thing but that's not anybody's goal. (Tesha)

Furthermore, city initiatives that are for the greater good are often systematic efforts to transfer valuable real estate from Black communities to white communities. This is exactly how Ms.

Gloria saw Hope VI: “Hope six was a mask, a literal mask that really in my opinion took back areas that the city wanted anyway, property, okay?”

Through direct displacement or neighborhood resource displacement, never-ending cycles of government-sanctioned racialized practices have reinforced the designation of African Americans as a people “without” place. This constant attack on Black place compounds the already marginalized status that Blacks occupy in Knoxville. As a result, a Black sense of place in Knoxville is shaped by the hurt, anger, and resentment surrounding repeated experiences of loss of place or displacement. Given this context, it is not unfounded that Black Knoxvillians, who often no longer see the landmarks that make their place familiar or the places that are associated with their memories, should perceive the current redevelopment in Knoxville as the newest iteration of what Zimbabwe or Wendy Blankly calls urban renewal.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I address the historical, structural, racial, and cultural practices that have shaped a Black sense of place in Knoxville, Tennessee, an urban center Way Up South in Appalachia. The structural workings of racism in Knoxville are a constant reminder that, unless “in place” in the confines of Black neighborhoods, Blackness is out of place in Knoxville; and more fundamentally, given that black neighborhoods can be destroyed and changed at the will of whites, Black Knoxvillians are essentially placeless. I am keen on racism and racist practices that structure Black lives not because they are the sole defining features of Black sense of place, but rather I demonstrate, as McKittrick (2011) has argued, that racial violence and racist practices have “produce[d] a condition of being Black in the Americas that is predicated on struggle;” (949) and being Black in Appalachia (Knoxville) does not negate this experience of struggle. Still, I illuminate Black geographic agency by situating my participants, Black Knoxvillians, in a

counter position to *Forbes*, *Livability*, and white people generally, as people who can define Knoxville (Appalachia).

Chapter 5: “I didn’t feel like I’m in the wrong place or out of place”

I think one of the first things I went to was the Lonsdale homecoming – I think that’s what it was. It was cool. It was interesting. I was out and I was, like, alright, I’m just going to buy some stuff and get some food, see what’s happening. So, then, my son went, and he played with the kids and stuff. And so, it was kind of nice to just be in a brown and black space like that. So, I enjoyed it. I thought it was pretty cool.

And so, I met some people and chitchatted with folks. So, it was nice. It was nice. I think my barber actually told us about it. He was mentioning it – I think we had gotten a haircut that day. I don’t know. Being at the homecoming kind of reminded me of being at home in Chicago. Like being at a block party or something like that. So, it felt like home. You know what I’m saying? It was like a comforting type of space.

It reminded me of when I was a kid and we would be at the park district, or at the park for, like, a barbecue or something like that. All the folks out with their old music – listening to the old music – and talking and all that. And the kids running around and playing. And kids having snowballs – and I remember snowballs and the candy lady, and stuff like that. It was comforting; you know what I’m saying? Like, alright, this is home! This is the people.

And there were police there, which was a little annoying. But they were like – at least they were nice and talking to folks and engaging with people. They weren’t there on some authoritative-type stuff.

So, that was cool. But yeah, it was nice to just walk around and talk to different businesses, and stuff like that, to see what people were doing, and the different booths to see what folks were cooking, and bought food. It was cool. It was cool. You know, just seeing people out, making their way, being creative enough to make some money. I can appreciate that.

I can appreciate just the creativity, at the time, the gumption, I guess, to make something and then be able to sell it. Or put forth – I can remember even talking to a group that was doing mentoring, and I remember trying to sign up to mentor with them, actually, and talking to people and stuff like that. I think my son got a face painting. You know, the people were just really nice and welcoming. So that was the thing. I didn’t feel like I’m in the wrong place or out of place.

(Keisha)

5.0 Introduction

It was a big community. Like if you got in trouble at school and by the time you made it home, three people got on your tail, you know you're in trouble, you know, so you have all these other extra moms in the community. And then there was a rec center that we had in the community. And you know, in the summer time we would go to the rec center. After school we'd go to the rec center. And the lady that ran the rec center, her name was Miss Doohickey. That's what we'd call her. I can't think of her name right now at the moment, but she ran the rec center, and she lived in Morningside. She lived up the street from the rec center, and we eventually moved over there in that neighborhood.

These are the words of Clair, a native Knoxvillean, sharing her childhood experiences growing up in Austin Homes Housing Project, a public housing development in the Tennessee city. Housing projects, or public housing, are usually imagined as scary places riddled with crime, drugs, trash, and dysfunctional people. They are not seen as the kinds of places suitable for raise children. But for Clair's family, this was the place they called home. And Clair, as a young child living within these boundaries, did not know she was living in the projects. She did not know anything about being low-income. All she knew is that she lived in a large community, surrounded by family. Clair lived with her mother and siblings, but her grandmother, great-aunt, and other extended family also lived in Austin Homes. When blood relatives were not enough, she had a whole compound of "mothers," "cousins," "aunties," and "uncles." She walked to school with other kids in the neighborhood and never remembers feeling unsafe; it could be the innocence or obliviousness of childhood, but Clair spoke of no imminent danger or despair. It seems that she was more concerned with getting in trouble with all of her neighborhood moms than she was with crime and violence. Even after leaving the projects, she would return to visit family still living there. The projects were a special place for Clair; within those walls, in the safety and love of her community, Clair would experience a freedom she would not find in many other places in Knoxville.

Similar to perceptions of the projects, Black spaces in Knoxville are usually associated with danger. With no reference to structural injustices in housing, employment, and education, narratives of crime engulf Black neighborhoods as the quintessential ghettos they are believed to be. Perceptions of Black spaces in Knoxville highlight the inextricable link between race, place, and crime in the minds of the American public. Americans, and more specifically white Americans, hold beliefs that link Blacks to social images including crime, violence, disorder, welfare, and undesirability as neighbors (Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). These stereotypical images of Black people—which are overwhelmingly supported by the media’s portrayal, particularly the news media—produce harmful consequences in everyday experiences of Black people, especially when they interact with law enforcement. Statistics show that, compared to whites, Black people are disproportionately stopped, questioned, and arrested even though whites are more likely to commit violent crimes (Chapple et al. 2017). Nevertheless, public images of Black Americans stigmatize not only their bodies but also the places in which Black people are concentrated. Consequently, fear becomes the implicit reaction of whites to Black people; and Black neighborhoods—despite the fact that the vast majority of their residents are never involved in serious crimes—are portrayed as and believed to be places to be feared and avoided.

The popular stigmatization of Black neighborhoods that deems them unsafe places is driven by constructions of fear and safety uninformed by Black experiences. Yet journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) describes fear as one of the dominant emotions of the Black experience. The history of racism and white supremacy in this country has ensured that Black lives in America are constantly marked by the threat of violence. In the form of a letter to his teenage son, Coates (2015) writes:

And I am afraid. I feel the fear most acutely whenever you leave me. But I was afraid long before you, and in this I was unoriginal. When I was your age the only people I knew were Black, and all of them were powerfully, adamantly, dangerously afraid. (14)

For Black Americans, the fear is deep-seated, and an enormous amount of mental space is consumed with keeping their bodies and those of their children and other loved ones safe.

Everything—from the way Black people dress and the way they walk and talk to the neighborhoods they traverse and how they act at school and work—can be a threat to their safety and must therefore be considered in their never-ending quest to be safe. Coates (2015) is sure to underscore that the violence of racism that threatens Black bodies is not escaped by age, class, or gender; it is an equal opportunity threat that damages not only bodies but also minds and souls. This, however, is not the kind of harm that popular safety measures are intended to alleviate, and Black people are not the ones whose fear is prioritized when a place is designated as unsafe.

White people are tucked away in pristine neighborhoods worlds apart from Black neighborhoods, where—Coates (2015) points out—they feel a kind of safety that Black people will never feel. Nevertheless, white dominance has meant that white people get to define what safety is and what places are considered safe. The white-dominated construction of safety, which in this chapter I refer to as carceral safety, is distorted and one-dimensional. Coined by McDowell (2016), carceral safety is “the use of state-organized banishment, mass criminalization, and law enforcement as the only legitimate forms of protection from and solution to harm and violence in the United States” (p. 4). Under this construction, it is mainly through crime that harm is done, and safety requires the absence of crime and people who commit crime. The logic of this conceptualization is rooted in white supremacy. While certain groups, mainly whites, are to be protected from crime, other groups, mainly Blacks, are deemed the doers of crime. Since the idea of the Black criminal is so largely regarded, places where

Black people reside are unsafe places where crime happens. This conceptualization of safety relies on (and works hand in hand with) white fear. Feelings of fear are especially powerful and, when produced “through the specter of the criminal,” are often used to remap public space—hence, the mapping of Black spaces as unsafe places (Jackson and Meiners, 2011:274).

If Coates’ (2015) argument is accurate and fear is indeed a premier marker of the Black experience, then Black voices should be at the center of the construction of safety. In this chapter, I prioritize Black fear in alternative constructions of safety. Black safety, as I call it, is constructed to reflect Black experiences and shift from safety as criminalization, incarceration, and policing. Instead, it recognizes the injustices that harm Black people in a racist society, keeping them in a perpetual state of fear even when they do not recognize it themselves. It affirms the humanity of Black people that physical and emotional violence erode. Most importantly, it is the understanding that Black people want to live fuller, self-determined lives independent of that fear. Black safety is predicated on safety as freedom—but not just political and civil freedoms but also freedoms so basic they are often taken for granted: freedom from a life of fear, true freedom. Ultimately, the chapter aims to contribute to the reimagining of Black spatial imageries centering Black experiences; however, it does so through advancing Black safety as an alternative to carceral safety, whereby the safety of Black neighborhoods is realized not in the context of policing Black bodies but in the freedoms they provide for Black people. After discussing the distorted nature of carceral safety and how it reproduces white fear of Black neighborhoods, I demonstrate not only that Black Knoxvilleans have counternarratives but also that those narratives provide the context for understanding Black safety as freedom. Finally, I develop five themes through which Black safety manifests in Knoxville’s Black neighborhood:

freedom from the white gaze and police harassment, freedom to be Black, freedom to build community, freedom to be validated, and freedom to live without white violence.

It's Unsafe: Carceral Safety in East Knoxville

Like many newcomers before me, in anticipation of my move to Knoxville, TN, I searched online for a place to live several months in advance. My searches brought me to a number of forums and other sites where people, who I assumed were in my shoes previously, were inquiring about the best places to live in Knoxville. Reading the responses to these inquiries, I was surprised by the overwhelming number that included some version of “not the East side.” Furthermore, during one of my preliminary visits to the city, I asked people I met at the university about places to live, and their answers were similar: living on the East side was unsafe. Of course, when I did finally end up on the East side, by chance, it did not take me very long to realize why the East side was “the East side”: East Knoxville, or the East side as it is often called, is where the Black folks live.

When Kay accepted a position at the University of Tennessee, she got friendly emails from some of her future co-workers with suggestions of places to live:

They basically said like, oh, most people like opt to stay in like West Knoxville or North Knox because it's just a lot safer than like some of the other parts. And it's funny because most people will not say – when they like give a qualifier like unsafe or like not a great place to live – they rarely will name East Knoxville in that. So, it's usually they'll say East Knoxville later on so that you know what to reference it back to, but they rarely say it together – almost like, no, they probably shouldn't do that, but I'm going to still say it anyway –

Kay's experience differs a little from mine; the white-neighborhood-advice-givers made specific suggestions of places she should consider living without direct mention of East Knoxville. They told her “other places are unsafe,” but according to her, they would follow up later in the conversation to clarify the exact place that is unsafe: East Knoxville.

East Knoxville is not the only place where Blacks are concentrated in Knoxville, but because it has the largest concentration of Blacks in the city, East Knoxville holds the designation as the Black side of town. Accordingly, the area is shaped by a crime narrative and is deemed citywide as an unsafe place. For newcomers like Kay and me, the stigma of East Knoxville preceded our actual arrival to Knoxville, and unless we dared to venture to the area, we were of the impression that it was an unsafe place.

Safety is a concept so taken for granted that its use is seldom questioned. Nevertheless, neither neutral nor objective, safety is constructed and shaped by particular actors and in particular contexts. Having begun to critique and re-conceptualize safety, literature in the fields of radical feminism, critical race, and abolitionist studies points out that our collective understanding of safety is distorted by the carceral landscape of America, as well as the logic of white supremacy upon which it was built. McDowell's (2016) concept of carceral safety is one theorization of safety that shows the limitations and one-dimensional nature of the distorted construction of safety. In this section, I will highlight how criminalization and racism shape who and what are seen as safe and, in doing so, show how carceral safety has constructed East Knoxville as an unsafe place.

With criminalization being a central component of carceral safety, it is only through the prism of crime that harm is understood. Harm is the result of people engaging in illegal acts or acts that are defined as "crimes" because of their violent nature. According to this construction of safety, East Knoxville is presumed unsafe because the people there commit violent crimes. Safety in this context is simply about the presence or absence of violent acts of crime. It is the type of acts that one participant, Brittany, is referring to when she shares, "I've heard them say... don't go in the East side, East side, you know, they shoot people and stuff like that." Brittany is a

native Knoxville who grew up on the outskirts of town but has ties to East Knoxville. Though she does not use the word “unsafe,” she knows that the negative perception of East Knoxville is one of unsafety, brought on by criminalized activities. Brittany tells us that “they shoot people” on the East side. Her comment shows that violent crime is what is expected from the people of East Knoxville, and this of course works to instill white fear.

This emphasis on criminalization and violence allows us to see how safety is used to justify the maintenance and extension of the criminal justice system. Illegal or criminal activities must be sanctioned, controlled, and prevented. McDowell (2016) tells us that carceral safety relies on the state to manage risk and identify and remove the threat. In the same way that this construction of safety has become common sense, so too has the idea that policing and incarceration are the solution to fear and unsafety (Jackson and Meiners 2011). The United States has the highest incarceration rates among developed countries, and this punitive system is constantly expanding, especially with Black, Latino, and poor people. According to Jackson and Meiners (2011), this massive expansion of prisons and policing, which has taken place over the last 30 years despite the decline in crime, has been consented to and often demanded by public sentiment. Looking at East Knoxville, we see how this plays out in a day to day context. Recently, the mayor of Knoxville made a Facebook post indicating that public works would soon begin on the major thoroughfare, Magnolia Ave, in East Knoxville. Via the comment section of the post, white Knoxvilleans overwhelmingly opposed the city’s decision to do this work in East Knoxville. They instead requested that the city invest in policing this neighborhood because it is unsafe. Comments such as the following were made:

Facebook comment 1: That area is not even safe to be in. That money should have went to more police.

Facebook comment 2: WHY would you spend that kinda money on a street that is NOT SAFE to walk ALONE down the sidewalk in broad daylight middle of the day! WOW, WHY wouldn't you spend extra money & attack the crime in that area first & much more importantly!

Despite evidence that suggests that policing and the over-surveillance of an area do not make it safer, the public—especially the white public—believes in the police's ability to keep them safe (Camp and Heatherton 2016). These white commenters see the government's investment in infrastructural improvements as unimportant and a waste of the money that should be spent on policing the area. Their request for policing highlights racial differences in police-community relationships, as well as some of the racial biases rooted in this construction of safety. After all, it is not possible to physically “attack crime,” which is what the second commenter is requesting; it is clear in this instance that “crime” is code for “Black bodies,” which have been criminalized. The police do not attack crime; they attack people.

Carceral safety, as McDowell (2016) defines it, hinges on the logic of white supremacy and anti-Blackness. American society is hierarchically organized by race, a key variable in determining who deserves safety and protection and from whom they must be kept safe or protected. As the dominant racial group, it is white protection and safety that white people are generally concerned about in their appeals for public safety. Historically, people of color, especially Black people, have been identified as the doers of crime and therefore the ones from whom whites must be protected or be kept in order to remain safe. The common place assumption that Blacks have a monopoly on criminality (Davis 2003) often justifies their being manipulated, exploited, and abused by the criminal justice system. Paul Gilroy (2008) directly links the public perception of Black criminality to the growth in the repressive nature of the criminal justice system. He writes that “potent imagery of youthful Black criminals stalking derelict inner-city streets where the law-abiding are afraid to walk after sunset has been

fundamental to the popularisation of increasingly repressive criminal justice” (Gilroy 2008:113). Gilroy (2008) is accurate in his understanding of how Black bodies are constructed as a threat to whites and—as the previous Facebook comment indicates—his metaphor of the Black criminal on the city streets is consistent with actual public perceptions of East Knoxville.

The white person who commented on East Knoxville’s not being safe to walk alone in broad daylight positions himself as the law-abiding person to which Gilroy (2008) is referring. This person’s colorblind language does not identify the walkers as white, but we know from Gilroy’s depiction of this scenario that, since they occupy the opposite position to the Black criminal, law-abiding walkers must be coded language for “white.”

Within a colorblind society, both coded language and stereotypes are used in the construction of Blacks as criminals. Another comment on the mayor’s Facebook post shows how stereotypes are employed in this way:

Facebook comment 3: Why? The drug addicts will steal the equipment and whatever they can get their hands on to sell for drugs and the hoodlums will wreck it all which will be a waste of your cost. Not worth it at all.

This comment, which ultimately serves as a warning to the white-dominated local government, relies on the use of stereotypes to identify Black people as unsafe. Fraught with systematic inaccuracies, stereotypes can be very powerful tools. Studies have suggested that people are more likely to notice and remember information that is consistent with stereotypes than information that is not; thus, contradictory information is often disregarded (Quillian and Pager 2001). So even though the recent opioid epidemic has brought national attention to the drug use of whites, especially Appalachian whites, the Reagan era’s “War on Drugs” has made Black people the stereotypical drug addicts in America. Furthermore, the term “epidemic” versus “war on drugs” even suggests different perceptions of the bodies of the user. “Epidemic” suggests that

someone is sick and needs to be cared for. It evokes sympathy. “War” suggests criminal, killing, and death. Yet in both cases, the subjects are engaged in the same illegal activity: the use of drugs.

It seems plausible to suggest that any mention of drug addicts would invoke, in the public’s mind, Black bodies. Similarly, hoodlum is a stereotype for Black people, especially young Black males. These stereotypes, widespread and widely associated with Black people, allow the commenter to make anti-Black statements without mentioning race. Since stereotypes influence judgement and distort perceptions, it makes sense that stereotypes about the Black criminal are likely to drive perceptions of predominantly Black neighborhoods as places of pervasive criminality and violence (Quillian and Pager 2001), thus unsafe places stained by white fear.

Black Safety as Freedom

The general perception of East Knoxville held by whites in Knoxville depicts a place where people must duck bullets and protect their possessions from stealing, drug-addicted hoodlums as they walk along the sidewalks in broad daylight. It is an unsafe place that decent people should avoid and fear. But for African Americans in Knoxville—whether they are natives or migrants and whether or not they live in East Knoxville—the neighborhoods of East Knoxville (and the other Black neighborhoods) represent a special place, a place that might otherwise be described as safe for Black people. Interview data suggest that Black Knoxvillians are not unaware of the empty commercial buildings, the struggling schools, the general state of political and economic despair that characterizes the area, or even the violence that results from generations of racial and structural violence and the fear it creates. In spite of their awareness, my respondents’ narratives of East Knoxville did not reflect white constructions of the place but

instead reproduced a new construction of Black places centered on Black experiences. The counternarratives of my respondents went beyond attempts to dismantle negative perceptions of East Knoxville; they provided context for transformative understandings of what it means to be safe, specifically for Black people. In this section, I use the counter hegemonic narratives of my respondents to engage an alternative construction of safety, Black safety as freedom.

For Black people, safety is not simply about the absence of crime. Based on my respondents' experiences, the threat of harm and feeling of fear that consume them are linked to racial violence resulting from different manifestations of social, political, and economic systems of oppression. It became evident that safety, which could be pursued through multiple paths, was essentially about freedom from those oppressive systems. However, freedom is not a new pursuit for Black Americans, which is obvious in my respondent's narratives. The fear that is so deeply rooted in Blacks is the result of over 400 years of oppression spanning slavery in the United States to now. Accordingly, the quest for freedom for Blacks is a project that has too extended over 400 years. The legal abolition of slavery did not grant Blacks true freedom, neither did the thirteenth, fourteenth, or fifteenth amendments and neither did the Civil Rights movements. Instead, emancipation, and each subsequent point of transition in the style of racial subjection, has resulted in—at best—temporary freedoms, which have worked to conceal what Cunningham (2017) calls the “non-arrival” of Black freedom. Blacks are no longer in shackles and can vote in elections, but white supremacy and racism still metamorphose and shape their lives in unimaginable ways. Black safety, therefore, is a framing that recognizes Black peoples' need for freedom not just from chattel slavery and disenfranchisement but also to experience the most fundamental aspects of humanity: freedom to self-determination, freedom from perpetual fear, freedom to love and be with and in a community that values and promotes their humanity rather

than the criminalization of their bodies. In pursuit of this type of freedom, Black safety denounces mass incarceration and the policing of Black bodies. Furthermore, it radically necessitates the destruction and disappearance of whiteness, white supremacy, and the institutions upon which they stand.

Because American society has a stronghold in these systems that cause Blacks to live in fear, Black safety recognizes that it is nearly impossible in the current iteration of American society for Black people to experience true freedom. However, it acknowledges approximations of true freedom found in Black places and spaces. In what follows, I show how even though they do not always use the words “fear” or “unsafe” in their descriptions of experiences that indicated perceived harm, my respondents expressed feelings of being physically or emotionally at risk when they were in proximity to whites or in white places and spaces. These are environments that either reminded them of or manifested racial violence. Black spaces or places, on the other hand, through five different but interconnected expressions of freedom approximated true freedom by providing empowerment, insulation, or protection from the oppression of racial violence.

For the purpose of this chapter, Black safety then refers to those expressions of freedom: freedom from the white gaze and police harassment, freedom to be Black, freedom to build community, freedom to be validated, and freedom to live without white violence.

Freedom to Be Outside the White Gaze: The Gaze Is Real

When respondents began to discuss what made them feel unsafe in the context of neighborhoods and why they felt safe in East Knoxville, I realized that the common theme in their counternarratives was the white gaze; safety for my respondents was associated with the freedom to live or be outside of it. The white gaze, which has been the topic of many writers,

from Du Bois to Fanon to Toni Morrison, is a concept used to refer to how Black people are trapped as the racialized other in the imagination of whites. George Yancy (2016) explains it as a daily manifestation of white epistemic power and control over the social order. The white gaze casts the Black body as “an entity that is to be feared, disciplined, and relegated to those marginalized, imprisoned, and segregated spaces that restrict Black bodies from ‘disturbing’ the tranquility of white life, white comfort, white embodiment, and white being” (Yancy, 2016, p. xxx). This raced “seeing” of Black people weighs heavily on Black people physically and emotionally as it slowly evades their humanity.

The physical weight of the gaze is white violence against Black bodies. Whether unleashed by an individual, a group, or the police, white violence on Black bodies in American cities has a long history. Black people have been “lynched, castrated, raped, branded, mutilated, whipped, socially sequestered, profiled, harassed, policed, disproportionately arrested and incarcerated” (Yancy, 2016, p. xxxi). It is no wonder that Black people feel safe *outside* the white gaze and unsafe in places where they might be *within* it.

The white gaze can be so strong that it can shape how Black people define themselves. Cynthia, a Black woman in her thirties, is an example of this. Particularly through how white people receive her, Cynthia has come to understand her physical appearance as being jarring. She shared that being in Market Square, a popular hangout in the heart of the city, makes her uncomfortable because there are usually a lot of white people there. When I asked her why it was uncomfortable, she explained that being around white people gives her anxiety:

I have a social anxiety with that anyway because I am so big. I am 5’10”. I am actually 285 now down from 300 at the turn of the year. But I’m big. Even when losing this weight, I have broad set shoulders. I’ve got a big-ass head. I am jarring for a lot of people in general. Black, white. But white people are very fearful of me. When they see me, I am physically intimidating to white people. And I get that. I get that everywhere. I can feel it. It just runs all over some people. And especially white men. So, it’s just like they see me,

and they have this fear – or I don’t know. Sometimes it’s like this overwhelming adoration. I’ve walked into places and I’ve had gay white guys praise me as a goddess. And I’m like, “If you don’t leave me alone right now – what is this about? This is not okay.” And then also the fear is not okay. Just let me exist.

Cynthia moves around with the belief that her appearance compels people in certain ways. She has accepted this about herself as a part of how she defines herself: her height, weight, and build may make her “a big girl,” but she also defines herself as “jarring” as though she does something to people by simply being seen. She either makes them fearful or adorning, which are both problematic and not in line with her desire to just exist. Cynthia continues, pointing out how the white gaze has paradoxically made her both hyper visible as a big, jarring woman and invisible, despite her size:

And it’s not just the presence of it, it’s actual interactions that have happened. Being called “Big bitch,” just walking in a store or wherever or people acting like they don’t see me. Have you ever just walked in a crowd of white people and do you realize you’re the only one moving? Yeah. And I stopped doing that. So, they’ll walk into me. I’m like, “I am too big to not be seen. I know that you see me, but you just expect me to move out the way or whatever and I don’t.” And then that kinda causes issues as well. But I’m like, “You legit walked into me. You legit walked into me.”

Cynthia’s Blackness renders her both hyper visible and invisible. Negative stereotypes of Black people and the fear of Black bodies make her hyper visible. But she is also invisible to white people because they choose not to see her. In some ways, this invisibility is a power play that suggests that a Black body is not equal to a white body and therefore does not have to be seen, at least not in a way that acknowledges its humanity.

A part of the psychological burden of the white gaze is anticipating it. In order to protect themselves from the gaze, Black people have become skilled at knowing where and when it is likely to impact them. Because whiteness manifests differently depending on geographic spaces, Black people are more fearful in some white spaces than in others. In Knoxville, one of the

major geographic distinctions that shapes Black fear and the extent of the white gaze is city vs. county or urban vs. rural.

Due to historical accounts of racial violence that occurred in rural areas, especially in the South, Black people generally believe whites in rural spaces to be more racist. The assumption is that whites in these areas do not live simply in segregated neighborhoods but more accurately in almost complete isolation from communities of color; they are able to maintain blatantly racist beliefs, upon which their isolation allows them to feel emboldened to act. Although very visible throughout the city, the Confederate flag, a symbol of racial violence for Blacks, seems to be more prevalent in rural areas in the county. And bell hooks (2009) reminds us that the Confederate flag, which many whites in Appalachia claim as a symbol of heritage, “still awakens fear in the minds and imaginations [especially] of elder Black folks for whom it signaled the support of a white racist assault on Blackness” (hooks, 2009, p. 10).

Cynthia currently lives in Powell, TN, which is an unincorporated community just north of Knoxville, in Knox county. For her, the visibility of the confederate flag in her very white neighborhood is associated with white violence. When I asked her how living out there is, she responded,

It’s whiter than Knoxville. A lot of confederate flags. They’re just in bloom out there. And even before we had any incidents at school I was doing daycare at one of the local daycares around there. And I had one little girl tell me that her daddy was gonna shoot me. She didn’t know me. I was actually substituting in her classroom and she was like, “My daddy gonna shoot you.” And I’m like, “Why? What did I do?” And was like, “Because he don’t like people that look like you.” And I was like, “See? This is that shit I can’t.”

Cynthia’s experience in Powell underscores its being an unsafe place for Black bodies. Not only is the prevalence of the Confederate flag something she lives with daily but she has encounters in which she is being told, by a child nonetheless, that someone will shoot her because of her racial

identity. Furthermore, that this child knows her dad doesn't like Black people and that he would shoot them means that this information has explicitly been shared with her. For a Black person, this further reinforces the belief that racism runs rampant and unchecked in rural spaces.

When concerning the white gaze in the county, Jay has similar sentiments as Cynthia. He explained that coming into spaces where the white gaze is expected makes him generally uncomfortable. However, he identifies the "county" as a specific space where he might feel afraid:

Yeah, if I made the wrong turn and was out in the country roads; that's probably more so where I felt like, "Okay, this is out of my element." And you can do a lot of wrong turns and end up on the country road in Knoxville than other cities I've been in. So, that was probably the most times I felt out of my element or afraid or in danger... I felt like when I saw people, a lot of Black folk, I felt like worst case scenario we can have a conversation and I'm going to get where I'm going so I would stop and ask people directions and where is this and what's that.

There are rural Black communities in East Tennessee, but they are usually very small and very few, so when Jay says that fear kicks in when a wrong turn lands him on a country road, he is most likely referring to rural white spaces. In other words, rural white spaces are places where the white gaze is assumed to be stronger and more physically powerful; therefore, these are places that Black people perceive to be unsafe. As Jay points out, it does not take much to end up in places that seem rural in Knoxville. The mountainous terrain and narrow roads give the illusion of rural places even when within city borders. However, Jay notes that, in an otherwise anxious situation of being lost, the sight of other Blacks is welcomed. If lost in a Black neighborhood, he feels confident he can start up a conversation with a Black person and end up where he needs to be. This is something that East Knoxville offers, something that makes it a safe place for Jay and other Blacks in Knoxville.

While there is a particular expectation that accompanies the possibility of being “seen” by whites in rural or county areas, Tommy’s explanation of East Knoxville suggests that the neighborhood provides a level of safety for Blacks that even white communities in the suburbs might not offer.

In East Knoxville. Say I'm driving around in this area that we're in now. It's all Black. They see a Black person just kind of wandering around, they think nothing about it. Say I'm looking for your house you live in Hardin Valley; they don't really know you. You maybe just moved here, and I'm riding around Hardin Valley, maybe in an older model car because maybe I can't afford – There's a good chance that I might – I don't have that comfort there because for whatever reason, and a lot places people are innately afraid of Black people – especially men.

So, I don't have that comfort level of, “Okay. Do I have my license? Do I have my insurance? Did I put my signal on?” And, I came from an area where I have to make this officer feel comfortable if I am stopped. You know, you think of things like that. I do. I come from an area that I think of things like that. When I'm in East Knoxville, I don't think somebody is afraid of me. It's almost like, “Oh, he belongs here. He looks like everybody else who's running around here.” So, that does give you a comfort of not having that fear of somebody judging you because you're a different hue than they are.

Hardin Valley is a predominantly white suburban neighborhood in West Knoxville. For Tommy, this neighborhood is the perfect example of a place where the white gaze reminds him that he is out of place, and it therefore makes him feel unsafe. If for a minute he takes his race for granted, the white gaze in a neighborhood like Hardin Valley reminds him of his Blackness. Tommy knows that as a Black man, “in a lot of places,” his body is automatically a threat to white people; they are “innately afraid” of him—not because of any particular action of his own doing but because of his dark skin.

Tommy is especially anxious or fearful of encounters with the police in the white neighborhood. One of the things that makes the white gaze so dangerous to Black bodies is its manifestation in police harassment. Freedom to live without police harassment is an experience of safety that can stand alone in the construction of Black safety. However, since the police are

an extension of the white state, it seems fitting to discuss it within the context of freedom of being outside the white gaze. Tommy knows that when he ventures beyond the boundaries of the Black community, particularly when he is in white neighborhoods, police harassment is likely, so he must be prepared for arbitrary stops. Whereas Black communities are over-policed as a form of repression and control of the Black body—which itself is criminality (Yancy, 2016)—in white neighborhoods, the police are there to protect residents and remind Blacks that they *are* indeed out of place. Middle-class and even prominent African Americans are stopped by police when assumed to be out of place in white neighborhoods. Additionally, driving while Black is a restricting situation where, according to Harris (1999), “Blacks know that police and white residents feel that there are areas in which Blacks ‘do not belong’” (p. 19). When Blacks drive through these areas—often all-white suburban communities or upscale commercial areas—they may be watched and stopped because they are “out of place” (Harris, 1999, p. 19). The threat of being indiscriminately stopped and harassed by the police makes white neighborhoods like Hardin Valley—which the dominant narratives ironically deem safe—unsafe for Tommy and other Blacks. Instead, he feels most comfortable and at ease in East Knoxville, a place categorized as unsafe and in need of heavier policing.

What is interesting and differentiates Black perceptions of safety from the white perceptions of it is the likelihood of experiencing harm in “unsafe” places. Through their access to power, whites are able to control any vulnerability they might have. Jackson and Meiners (2011) explain that racial, economic, and other privileges allow whites to buy land; move to inaccessible locations; and ensure their rights to privacy, to resist police surveillance, to hire private security, and to engage other surveillance structures. Further, white dominance and privilege mean that whites are far less likely to leave their neighborhoods and other

predominantly white places; therefore, they do not frequent places like East Knoxville, which they have declared unsafe. In contrast, not only must Black people travel daily outside of their neighborhoods for resources ranging from better resourced schools to grocery stores and hospitals, but they also lack the privilege of mapping white spaces as unsafe within the general public's mind. Sue (2003) points out that at the institutional, societal, and individual levels, whites have the power to define reality. Thus, despite experiencing overwhelming physical and emotional fear and unsafety in white spaces, Blacks do so almost silently. Even when the evidence is stacked high, they are never believed, often discredited, and never receive allowances to accommodate their safety needs.

Unfortunately, there is a strong likelihood that Black people's fear of white places is realized in the form of racial violence against them. We know from the murder of Trayvon Martin—the African American child who was killed by a white man for simply walking in a neighborhood in which he was perceived to not belong—and numerous cases of highly publicized and unjustifiable killings of unarmed Black people by white individuals and the police that Black people's fear of white neighborhoods is not unfounded. Furthermore, much research has supported the reality that any contact with the police, even when reporting crimes, can be of great risk to Black people (Jackson and Meiners 2011). Black people are more likely to be searched, detained, arrested, or lose their children to the state (Jackson and Meiners 2011). Tommy is conscious of these things as he navigates white neighborhoods; he knows that an encounter with the police can be fatal; so, when driving through Hardin Valley, he knows that it is imperative to not give the police any reason to stop him. What a white person might take for granted, like forgetting to signal a turn, is what he knows can literally cost him his life.

Meanwhile, in over-policed East Knoxville, although he might be stopped, it would not be because he is an out-of-place Black person.

The gaze is not just reserved for adult Black bodies. Black children are also at risk of harm, a concern for Keisha, who is the mother of an 8-year-old boy. Keisha, a scientist, moved to Knoxville for a job over 12 years ago. She frequents East Knoxville for community engagements but said she chose to live in a West Knoxville suburb to be closer to work. When asked about her son's safety, she shared her constant concern:

Yes, definitely. Especially with having a Black son. Absolutely. Because by a certain point, they stop looking at your child as a kid, and they look at him as a scary Black man, and so yes, I have concerns about that. I have to be conscious of that, when he's not going to be this cute little boy anymore, and he's going to be the scary Black man. Even though he might be 10. And he's tall, so they always think he's older than what he is. So, yeah, I do have concerns.

Keisha is tall, and her son likewise. Yet, even without his height being a factor, research suggests that Black children, particularly Black boys, as young as age 10 are robbed of the perception of childhood innocence that their white peers are afforded (Goff et al. 2014). Goff et al. (2014) point out that as Black children are viewed as older than what they are, they are also more vulnerable to harsh, adult-like treatment. Keisha has already begun to experience her son being viewed as older, and she is afraid that this will only worsen and that before long her cute, little baby will be viewed, by whites, as someone to be feared, a “scary” person—a perception which can, as witnessed in the case of Trayvon Martin, end fatally. Having developed a relationship with Keisha and her son, I have noticed the weight of her concern. At times, I have seen her reprimand him for mischievous behavior, behavior that most children regardless of race might exhibit. Out of concern and fear for his safety, she unintentionally reinforces the beliefs that he does not have the liberty to be a child. She tells him that he is Black and therefore cannot do some of the things other children, who are not Black, might be able to get away with. This is a tremendous weight for Keisha to carry as a

mother and, unfortunately, she feels she must pass it down to her child. But this is not the only weight of the white gaze that Keisha carries while living in her predominantly white neighborhood:

You don't have to like... So, when I lived in my house So, when I lived in my house, I was always like, "I've got to make sure my grass is cut, or my trees are trimmed," and all the stuff like that. I've got to keep up with the way this community looks. I felt pressure, and I didn't want to be the only Black family on the block with a wretched-looking house. You know what I'm saying? I wanted my house to look way better than them. So, it was like a competition. Instead of just like, "You know, my trees aren't cut today. That's okay. I can cut them tomorrow." You know, like it isn't a big deal.

Not to say that just because you are in a Black space you've got to live in some wretchedness. I'm not saying that. But, I'm just saying that it's not the added pressure of being the only Black family there. It's okay. We're all Black. We all want our neighborhood to look nice. Let's pull together and make sure that we have each other's back.

Contrary to distorted perceptions, safety is not just about the risk of physical harm. Safety is also about our psychological and emotional well-being. Respondents like Keisha make this clear in their explanation of what makes East Knoxville a safe place. In a Black neighborhood, she is able to avoid the psychological weight of the white gaze, which keeps her in a constant state of pressure for things as simple as cutting her grass. Because she has to constantly prove her worth and belonging to this white neighborhood, for Keisha it is important that her house is not perceived as the "Black house on the block." Such a perception comes with a long history of presumed undesirable qualities; somehow, she represented not just herself but the entire Black race.

So whereas at home people expect to be able to relax, free from the gaze that they have had to navigate all day—especially if they work in majority white environments and their children go to majority white schools— Keisha does not feel as though she has this freedom. She cannot forget to cut her grass or trim her tree. In order to disprove stereotypes, she must constantly be on her best behavior, a tiresome and stressful lifestyle.

Freedom to Be Black: Let Your Hair Down

In addition to offering freedom from the white gaze, respondents pointed out that Black neighborhoods, like East Knoxville, offered them the freedom to be Black. Under the white gaze, Blackness is overdetermined from without, so the ability to self-define and be Black, however one chooses, is an expression of their humanity, which they find liberating. It is as Keisha said: “Having safe havens, I guess, or safe spaces, safe communities like that where we – a Black part of the city – might be necessary... a safe space to be totally yourself.” A Black side of town represents a safe place to Keisha and other Blacks because in these places they are free to be their authentic selves, their Black selves. They no longer feel the pressure to hide or minimize their Blackness to be accepted or to access full citizenship. Rather than trying to be non-threatening, inconspicuous, or non-disruptive when among other Black people, they can just be. For survival in white-dominated spaces, Black people have learned to code-switch or behave, dress, and speak in a way that downplays their Blackness. These survival skills are intended to keep them safe in white environments, from violence, discrimination, and other harms. Black spaces, however, allow them to live without having to give away their souls (Halls, 1997). Here is how Kay expresses it:

And I just feel like I can like – ... you know, let down my hair and just like be me and like not to have to worry about like putting on a front or like speaking ghetto or whatever – like I can really just be myself.

If I want to drink Kool-Aid, I can drink – you know what I mean? Like I can just do what I need to do to be me and that be okay. I think that’s the biggest piece. It’s like not just me being me. I think I can show up and be me in places because I feel okay doing that, but that other people find value in that or people appreciate that about me.

But even just in that, like if I think about how a large majority of the population would define quote being Black –I don’t really fall into that definition. But I’m still accepted because it’s like, oh, you’re Black enough –like you’re good. It’s fine... Like can I play Spades? No, but I can trash talk like I play Spades and I still get down with you. You know what I mean? Like it’s just – it’s just okay. I – I don’t know
Kay’s dialect is consistent with Standard American English rather than African American

vernacular. So it surprised me that she was concerned that she would be perceived as speaking “ghetto.” This suggested to me that linguistic profiling was a stressor for her. Many African Americans feel it is necessary to code-switch to avoid such profiling and survive white spaces, especially professional spaces but, increasingly, neighborhood spaces as well. Code-switching refers to the act of adjusting the way one speaks (or behaves) to conform to the way someone else communicates. For Black folks, this is largely about conforming to the way whites communicate. Historically, code switching has been a defense against linguistic discrimination. Code-switching provide access often denied to Black people (Purnell, Idsardi, and Baugh, 1999), for within mainstream white society and in white spaces, there are consequences for opting to be yourself, to be unapologetically Black. Thus, at a time when Black people can be killed for simply being themselves, code-switching can be considered a form of self-protection. It is likely that given this concern, Kay code-switches when in white environments. But while in Black spaces, she feels safe being as Black as she wants, even if that means stereotypically partaking in a little Kool-Aid.

What makes this so liberating for Kay, though, is the value other Black people find in her being her true Black self. Kay said that although she does not fit the mold of what is stereotypically considered Black, she is still accepted among other Black people. Her Blackness, whatever it is, is valued. She has cultural capital that she can leverage in those stereotypical Black things even if she cannot completely participate. Hence, she can “trash talk” even if she cannot play spades, the “Blackest” of card games.

When I talked with Brittany, the native Knoxville who lived on the outskirts of town, it was very obvious that she did not feel safe just being herself in a predominantly white environment. Brittany worked at a predominantly white healthcare facility, and she struggled with being her Black self and not wanting to stand out at work. She learned to code-switch to fit in. But unlike Kay, it was not sounding “ghetto” that mostly concerned her; she explained that her husband who grew up in East Knoxville, and his family, often joked that she talked “white.” Brittany was more concerned that she would be perceived as being angry, having an attitude, and being a troublemaker.

Kay: It can be difficult. I don't want to stand out. I equate it to a job because that's where I stay most of my time is at the job and I'm going to be spending it out by more white people than anything else. I try my best to fit in the best I can, but I have to, I want to keep my Blackness at the same time, but then I'll have to, you know, switch it up a little bit and still be proper for the white folk. Like I don't want, you can't talk to them any type of way. It's like a fine line that you want to walk just to give the... I don't know, because it's a little bit about perception. You don't want to look like you're doing bad and I just want to be able to fit in and not cause any issues. I don't want to cause the ripple. I want to just sit and I need to do what I gotta do is make my money, provide for my family, keep my nose out of business and trouble and that's what I try to do this trying to stay out of trouble.

Interviewer: Do you feel like there's a general expectation that you will get in trouble or that you will be causing trouble or something like that?

Kay: I feel like sometimes that can be the perception. I try not to give that perception, but I'm hoping people don't look at me or any other Black person, but you know, that's what they do. Sometimes they automatically just judge and just assume that because of your skin tone that you'll give mouth, you'll have an attitude or you'll somehow cause some sort of trouble.

At the intersection of race and gender, Black women are often stereotyped as angry or having attitudes, so even when they have legitimate reasons to be angry, the fear of how they might be perceived by whites silences many Black women. For women like Brittany who need their income to provide for their family, the last thing they want to do is cause any ripples. Therefore,

every day is a balancing act to ensure not only that she fits in but also that she shows no signs of having an attitude or making any trouble.

Race and gender also intersect to create unsafe environments for Black women when regarding their hair. On a very basic level, being free to be Black concerns the freedom to “let your hair down,” literally and figuratively. Black girls and women have long been subjected to scrutiny, especially of their hair. Dominant constructions of beauty, based on Eurocentric ideals, have deemed Black women’s hair in its natural form as unattractive, unkempt, and unprofessional. As a result, to be more compatible with imposed beauty standards, Black women have endured incredible amounts of social pressure and physical pain to alter their appearances (Morrison, 2016). Choosing to proudly wear their natural hair as an expression of their Blackness can result in racial and gendered discrimination for Black women and girls (Patton, 2006); nevertheless, Black women have and continue to negotiate and resist these violent structures and create avenues to love and celebrate Black hair. Living in Black neighborhoods allows them to do so safely without ridicule and scrutiny.

In her Black neighborhood, one of the reasons Corinne feels safe letting her daughter go outside to play is that she can play with other Black girls and not feel self-conscious about her hair, a central expression of her Blackness.

I like that my daughter comes outside. And there are other little girls with afro puffs and twists and braids. And nobody’s like, “Oh, my God. Is that your hair? Or where’d you buy that? What is this? Can I touch it?” I’ll chase the little boys and girls running around that look like them. I love that.

In the Black neighborhood, among other Black girls, Corrine’s daughter has control over her body, her hair, and the way it is presented to the world. Her afro does not bring unwanted attention, no one questions her choice to wear braids or ask demeaning questions about her twists, and most importantly no one wants to touch her hair out of ignorance or curiosity. Within

the boundaries of her community, she has a safe place to wear her natural hair. Keisha can also relate to that sense of safety. She explains:

Even though in white spaces you get accepted and they look at you as friends, there's still something about being around Black folks, about being around your own, that you can literally let your hair down.

When you and I went to Michelle's, and you were braiding my hair at Michelle's house. There's no way in the world I would have been at a white person's house and ask you to braid my hair. Take my wig off and put it on a chair and then get my hair braided in their living room. No way.

So, that's the comfort of being in a Black space is that you can literally take your hair off and put it on a chair and be okay. And people are probably cracking jokes, but it's alright because they are probably like, "Shoot, can I get my hair braided next?" No matter how accepted you are, or how much you know you're in. It's still not another Black person.

Whereas Kay felt safe metaphorically letting her hair down, Keisha literally took her wig off in the home of her Black friend in the company of other Black women. Letting your hair down is a physical expression of letting your guard down. People will let their guard down only when they feel safe or protected to do so; otherwise, they would be leaving themselves open to harm, physical or other. Keisha explains that even when Black people feel comfortable in the presence of whites—around their white friends—they cannot completely relax and let their guard down. They still feel the need to protect themselves either from physical harm or emotional harm. It might be a lot of pressure, but judging from Keisha's comment, it seems safer to maintain some amount of distance. As Kejhonti Neloms (2018), a writer of popular online blog *RaceBaitR*, reminds, even white people who might make Black people feel like humans sometimes can say something, almost automatically, that reveals the ugly head of white supremacy, which never relents. While white transgressors can say it and forget it, often the Black person is left thinking about the hurt and betrayal for hours or even days to come. It is easier, Neloms (2018) points out, for Black people to believe that all white people will fail them all the time; even if they are

pleasantly surprised by the opposite, it is the best way for them to protect against being consistently shaken by these types of situations. Based on her comment, it would seem Keisha operates from a similar place of ensuring that she “never gets caught slipping” by being too trusting of even her white friends.

The Freedom to Build Relationships: I Belong Somewhere

Knoxville, like the rest of Appalachia, is not a place that people associate with Blackness or the presence of Black people. In addition, Black people have experienced a history of displacement that has complicated their sense of belonging within the city generally. This is compounded by the stress of living in a city that is overwhelmingly dominated by its majority white population. Because the Black community is so small, one does not have to travel very far to be outside of its boundaries and, consequently, experience the emotional unsafety of being the only Black person in a room. Within these contexts, it is hard for Black people to feel like they have a place of heritage in Knoxville. Therefore, relationships and belonging matter greatly at the neighborhood level. Whereas within mainstream white constructions of safety, a neighborhood is considered safe if it has low crime rates, Jackson and Meiners (2011) alternatively suggest that Black people define safe neighborhoods by the presence of neighborhood relationships, communication between neighbors, conflict-resolution processes, and sufficient resources. In Black neighborhoods like those in Knoxville, there might be limited resources, but there is plenty of kinship and familiarity; and relationships are a strong source of safety. Black neighborhoods offer my respondents the freedom to build relationships, to develop a sense of community, and ultimately to cultivate a feeling of belonging.

Jazz is a native Knoxvillean whose parents were both from West Africa. Her home life might have been culturally different from her neighbors, but she holds fond memories of

growing up in an East Knoxville neighborhood. It is the sense of community and the relationships she had in the community that made this a safe and special place for her. However, this sense of community did not exist in the same way when she lived in West Knoxville:

I do love that side of the town though because I feel like there's still a sense of community and people are actually outside and it reminds of my neighborhood growing up. When I was a kid like, we had free reign. We could bike around. You can knock on your neighbor's door. You can go play with your friends. If they are about to have dinner you can sit down with them and then run back home. It's just like I remember living in the west side and no one's ever outside. If you are walking down the street, people are shamed because you don't have a car and not because you don't want to walk down the street. And it's just like I really love East side because the people are out on their porches and they wave at you when you drive by.

In neighborhoods that are considered safe, like those in West Knoxville, Jazz finds that people are not out interacting with each other. She did not experience the same sense of community there as she experienced in East Knoxville, where she felt like she had an open invitation to her neighbors' dinner table. In these "safe" white neighborhoods, loitering laws and others intended to maintain safety not only target Black people but also create a stigma around socializing on the block. Jazz said that there are feelings of shame associated with walking in her West Knoxville neighborhood. On the other hand, walking around is the feature that makes East Knoxville a place she loves.

Walking in and around a neighborhood can lead to more unplanned interactions with neighbors, which can in turn help develop relationships (Wood, Frank, and Giles-Corti 2010). Relationships are not taken for granted in Black Knoxville. Shortly after moving to Knoxville, Kay began to understand the importance of the kinship she developed in her Black neighborhood.

So, for me, even though I'm not from Knoxville, I feel like I still like benefit almost in that like family feeling of like you belong – you have a space – you belong. Like we accept you here. You can be yourself. And like, if you don't get that anywhere else in your life or like when – like I work at the university – so like, there are so many times

when I definitely don't feel like I belong, but I know that like when I go home, my neighbor, Miss Debra, is going to say hey to me. You know, she gave me a birthday present – like I'm a part. I belong somewhere.

Appalachia is known generally to the rest of the country as a place where familial ties are strong; within Black Appalachia, however, it is apparent that historically small populations have made kinship ties even stronger. It does not take long after moving to Knoxville for a Black person to realize just how close Black people in Knoxville are. You realize very early on that if they live in or associate with the Black community, people know each other. Safety is constructed in these kinships. They provide acceptance, a sense of belonging, love, and appreciation. It is as Kay explains: no matter what her day is like working in the whiteness of the University, when she gets home, Ms. Debra is going to say “hey.” Although she is not in her home city with her biological family, she feels a part of a family in Knoxville, somebody knows it is her birthday, and she belongs somewhere.

For Tommy, who was born and raised in East Knoxville, it is pretty simple: he is not fearful of whom he considers “his people”—meaning other Black people and the people who live in his neighborhood. He feels safe in Black neighborhoods because, as a native of Knoxville, he belongs to these neighborhoods and his kinships can help him navigate even the most hostile encounters.

I'm not fearful of what I consider my people, or people who look like me. So, I think that's a comment of itself... And, I still know people. So, “You probably went to school with my mother; my father.” Now, it could be my grandparents.

So, you run into that. And, as I said before, because I was an athlete, “Oh, yeah. I played football and ran track.” Those things even spread out further, so it may be somebody I didn't even know, but they knew me because of sports. “Oh. He was this, or that.” “Oh, that was,” “Oh, okay.” They may not even know me, but there are things that just allow me to feel comfortable. When you ask me where was Krogers, I can tell you. So, it gets people who may – didn't know me, or may have forgotten that he's from this neighborhood.

He's not some guy who's just walking around here feeling too comfortable. And, I still have family here. So, when I go visit, I'm not just, "Oh, that's my cousin." We may be close, "Oh, that's my brother." "Oh. Okay. I didn't know he had another brother." Exactly. You know, so that gives you a comfort when you can go deep, or it's somebody you meet, and then your grandmother comes up, and they know me. Something like that just gives you that ease. You go, "Oh, okay." And, then it means something. Now, even if that's the toughest guy in the neighborhood, he's like, "Oh, no. That's my mom and my grandmother's friend. Leave him alone." It's always been that type of thing for me. Because, as I say, that's not my lane. I stay out of that lane, and people typically respect that. I respect you. I may tell you that's not the best path to be on, but I'm not going to beat you over the head. I'm like listen.

Tommy feels sure that if someone is a native Knoxville, especially from East Knoxville, where he grew up, there is a great chance that he either knows them and/or their kin or is known by them and/or their kin. Even after moving away for several years and currently being in and out of the city, he is never just a random guy in this neighborhood, and he has his relationships to prove it. These relationships are a form of protection from physical as well as emotional harm. He belongs here and is a part of what makes it special.

Freedom to Be Validated: Healthy Paranoia

Another source of safety that Black neighborhoods offer is validation. Traversing predominantly white spaces, where they feel out of place, many Black people find that their experiences are discredited and marginalized. As a result, they are fearful of speaking up about encounters of racism, especially microaggressions. Because microaggressions are particularly ambiguous, Black people are constantly trying to figure out whether the transgressor was intentional and whether they should respond. However, because whites hold the power to define the situation in nonracial terms (Sue, Capodilupo and Holder 2008), it is likely that instead of believing them, white people try to explain the encounter as "just this" or "just that," leaving Black people to question themselves. This constant attack of the Black worldview in predominantly white spaces/places makes the freedom to be validated an important component

of Black safety that Black neighborhoods, like East Knoxville, can offer. Tommy illustrated this phenomenon:

It's kind of – I spoke to her recently – one of my mother's – my mother has passed, but one of her best friends was one of the first Black females in UT's nursing program.

... But, at that time, when you left UT, you would want to go somewhere where you had some type of comfort. There was enough stress in the campus environment that you would come to east side, or wherever there was a concentration. So, that number would give you a comfort where you could kind of let your guard down, and relax, and recharge for – for lack of a better word – the fight that you had to go through the next day. And, I think that was the same thing in the community.

They may work in places that were hostile, or just very stressing. When I say, “strength in numbers,” people look like you, you just want to relax. And, if we all have a similar experience, I'm not going to tell you, “You just made that up.” I might tell you you went about it the wrong way, and we may have conversations on how to better handle it. Strength in numbers. I think you just get in your comfort zone. It feels like family, where you see people who may be going through the same things you do. Whether you just want to unwind, or relax, they know that there are probably going to be people with similar experiences that you had that day on the job, or just the struggle. I think you want to be around people who have similar experiences to you.

The East side was a refuge for the friend of Tommy's mother. She was a student at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville at a time when there were even fewer Black people on campus than they are now. It is not hard to imagine the level of isolation, discrimination, and scrutiny under the white gaze that she might have experienced. Tommy used “fight” and “hostile” to explain what her experience might have been like. According to him, in coming to the Black side of town, not only was she able to let her guard down, build relationships, and relax, but also among other Black people her experiences were validated. After a week of “fighting,” Black family members, friends, neighbors, and colleagues could empower her. Having had similar experiences to the friend, they could reassure her that she was indeed sane; they could also redefine her feeling of hypersensitivity as healthy paranoia and allow her to place blame and fault on the white aggressor rather than on herself (Sue et al. 2008). In addition to

empowering her, they also shielded her. Because they knew her experience, they could give advice on how to handle future situations. They gave her strategies to protect herself when hostility arises.

Sometimes, the validation that someone needs might be even simpler than this. It might be all in a facial expression or gesture. Keisha calls it the “unspokenness”: “It’s the comfortableness and the familiarity of being around people that look like you and that you don’t have to explain.... It’s that unspokenness between you and other Black people.” In the right situation, those little things can give a Black person an empowering feeling, a validating feeling, a safe feeling.

Freedom from White Violence: Strength in Numbers

The final freedom that respondents expressed in their counternarratives that contributed to my understanding of Black safety is one that Black folks have pursued for hundreds of years. It puzzled historian William Wheeler (2005), when in the decade immediately following the race riots of 1919 in Knoxville—during which a white mob descended on Black neighborhoods, killing and terrorizing black people—that Black people flocked to the inner wards of the city. Between 1920 and 1930, Wheeler (2005) explained that the first ward of the city saw a 247 percent increase in the Black population, and four of the other eight center city wards increased by more than 32 percent. Wards 3 and 4 were over 50 percent Black. The historian wondered, “Why did so many blacks move into Knoxville so soon after the racial redoubles of 1919?” (Wheeler, 2005, p. 46). In the aftermath of destruction of Black lives and property, Black Knoxvilleans sought the safety and comfort of their own people. Today, even though Black people can live anywhere they want in the city, the Black neighborhoods provide Black

Knoxvillians with a sense of freedom from white violence. Simply put, there is “strength in numbers,” as Tommy explained:

...they still have those 50s, 60s mentalities that, when I say, “strength in numbers,” people would tend not to bother you outside of your group. But, white folks wouldn't bother you if it's five or six of you, but if they see you by yourself, they feel a little bit more empowered to maybe say what's on their mind, or just harass you, or do what you want. But, so, if you're at a party, and there are 20 of you guys, two or three people – you know, with good sense –aren't going to come bother somebody who's in groups.

Tommy understands, just as his ancestors did, that white people might think twice about physically attacking a large community of Black people; so at the very basic level, living in a Black community is a form of insulation and protection from white violence.

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, I use the concept of Black safety to offer a reimagining of Black spaces in Knoxville specifically Black neighborhoods. My intention in doing so is not to romanticize Black neighborhoods or ignore how violence and fear manifest in them, neither is it to simplify Blackness and its complexities. Rather, in this chapter I highlight Black voices in the construction of Black places. Black Knoxvillians are invisible in the mainstream construction of Knoxville (Appalachia), but they live in Knoxville (Appalachia), and they have strong ties to their neighborhoods; therefore, it is their narratives of these neighborhoods that need to be dominant.

Chapter 6: “The old heads or folks with warrants would stand in the alley and watch the games for free”

Chestnut Park now renamed Paul Hogue Park will always be known as Chestnut Park and the park on the Eastside. Before they tore down the basketball court and the one way that divided the park from the houses facing it, it was a place to meet up in the summer to see and be seen for teens and young adults. A place to buy and use drugs. Fight and get shot. Chestnut park definitely has some bodies on its ground. Gang members from the Westside would come through and shoot the eastside gang members and girls from Austin-East would meet at the park to fight off of school grounds.

The park was revamped and cleaned up not quite 10 years ago, but it is still one of the main meeting places to fight and to buy drugs. Just let someone know you want to meet them “at Chestnut” and anybody from Knoxville will automatically know what you mean (Laugh).

On a positive note: If you mention the alley by A-E, most people will correlate this with the alley on the hill between the football field and the houses on Elmwood and Claude Walker Park, which we called Cotton Field. The whole Black population in Knoxville, Alcoa, Oak Ridge, etc. would pack the stadium for the football games especially against Fulton, Brainer, and Howard.

There was a sense of togetherness and community at the football games, and everybody came out in their best. Usually, the old heads or folks with warrants would stand in the alley and watch the games for free. Unfortunately, about 20-25 years ago, they planted trees along the fence line and they’ve grown up to the point where you can’t see the games unless you peek through a few of the branches. In its heyday, the stadium, the track, and the alley would be jam packed with Black faces.

(Bree)

6.0 Introduction

Then going on the East side, I mean, it was bleak. I notice it immediately. The main strip, Magnolia, was full of empty commercial buildings. And the most things were the things that was open was the corner stores and the barber shops and the salons, and a few other businesses here and there... People had music bumping. People had cars with rims on it. There's a hair salon, corner stores, people outside the corner stores standing out kind of at the corner store. It looked like just about any other hood that I could think of so you could stop at the barbershop and you knew all us fellows going to the barbershop to get all the information you need. So, that's how my daddy met Gam because he knew to go to the barbershop. He didn't need a haircut. My daddy bald-headed. But he knew to go in there because then he going to be able to meet people and find out who is who and what is what. (Jay)

So, I think Black parts of town all have the same look because, honestly, like where I live now looks like my neighborhood back home... And it's – I really, really hate that these are the identifiers... There's either like abandoned buildings of some like where businesses still – like still operate, but most times, they don't. There's a barbershop – sometimes more than one – but one that everybody's like, “go here.” Some kind of like soul food restaurant And then, I don't know – like you just feel it. It's not a bad feeling. It's like a familiar feeling.... I kind of just know when I'm like in the area. I don't know. It's real hard to explain... I mean a large part of the area reminds me of home. (Kay)

As indicated in the above two comments, abandoned buildings and scanty businesses are the signifiers and remnants of cycles of destruction and divestment, which when combined with discourses of crime and criminalization severely damage Black neighborhoods. Still, Black people cling to these places in a way they do not other Knoxville neighborhoods or the city itself. Even as local, state, and federal governments enact policies that destabilize their places, Black people are constantly making homes and communities in Black neighborhoods. In this context, Black neighborhoods function as what Hunter and Robinson (2018) call the village. Through its comprehensive exploration of Black communities, Hunter and Robinson's *Chocolate Cities* framework offers the concept of the village as the most fundamental unit or the nucleolus of a chocolate city. It is a Black place where, in response to and in spite of structural oppression, Black people survive and thrive. A village can be a small town, a neighborhood, or the Black side of the tracks; it can be rural, urban, or suburban. It is neither about size nor location but

rather a lifestyle: a village is a Black-life world where freedom and Blackness intertwine. It is where Black people live and love and play; worship and fight, play loud music, sit on the front porch, and have a barbeque in the park; and otherwise occupy space to build community and obscure the white gaze.

One of the most important aspects of Hunter and Robinson's (2018) construction of the village is the idea of Black place-making. Traditions in Black geography and urban sociology have shown that despite being rendered unequipped to imagine place and enact their vision of the world, Black people have long been place-makers, shaping cities and the world. Often, the village is a conduit and result of those shaping processes. The village is simultaneously "a metaphor and evidence for the enduring practice of place-making for marginalized and oppressed citizens" (Hunter and Robinson 2018:59). Place-making as an idea draws from multiple disciplines; however, at its core are conscious and unconscious choices to collaboratively shape our places in order to maximize shared value (Project for Public Spaces 2014). Additionally, it is an ever-occurring social production of both place and identity (Allen, Lawhon and Pierce 2018). As everyone experiences and interacts with the world, building the social and material resources necessary to shape it, everyone participates in place-making.

While it is not unique to Blacks or other marginalized groups, Black place-making in villages across the map forges value out of what others have undervalued. In the words of George Lipsitz (2007), "Blacks are routinely relegated to school district attendance zones with the least resources and to areas where poverty, pollution, and aggressive policing truncate opportunities and life chances." In these places, according to Lipsitz (2007), "physical isolation from public transportation, entry-level jobs, sources of fresh and nutritious food, healthcare, shopping venues, and stable housing produces transience, disinvestment, joblessness, family

dissolution, crime, substance abuse, disease, and violence.” But what Hunter and Robinson (2018) so clearly demonstrate is that while these realities shape Black people, their sense of place, and their sense of self, the realities do not wholly define them. Black people not only have geographic sensibilities that help to navigate these conditions but also daily engage in practices that resist oppression, build community, affirm their humanity, challenge popular depictions of them, and redefine their value and that of their places.

Place-making as everyday practices can occur at different sites. In Knoxville’s Black community, I have identified within the village or at the neighborhood level four major sites of place-making: the house, street, church, and school. Even though my participants were forthcoming in their discussion of all of these sites, in this chapter I will focus specifically on school. According to Peshkin (1978: 161 As cited by Lyson 2002: 1), “[t]he capacity to maintain a school is a continuing indicator of a community’s well-being” (161). Thus, I will draw on interview data from a subsample of my participants to illustrate how place-making works and looks in practice via an emphasis on schools. These narratives illuminate how Black schools are integral to the social experience of Black people, which according to Hunter et al. (2016), is “rooted in physical and virtual spaces that are remade into Black places through claims and practices of endurance” (3). After an introduction of the school as a site of place-making, the chapter will then provide specific examples of how schools are involved in Black place-making in Knoxville: the celebration of schools, the definition of community identity through the social and physical boundaries of schools, the use of the history and collective memories of schools to claim space, and the role of schools as a catalyst of place-based community organizing.

Schools As a Site of Place-Making

I met Carl for our first official interview in his office. Up until this point, most of our interactions had been in community-organizing spaces. Carl is a 40-something-year-old single dad and native Knoxville from a large and widely known family. He grew up in East Knoxville, but when his mother started working in radio, they moved around to a few other cities. Carl did, however, attend elementary school—for a few years—and high school in Knoxville. After a stint in the Marines and college in New York City, he returned to Knoxville for good. By that time, he had become a father. In addition to wanting his daughter to grow up in the place he considered home, he felt that he owed something to his community; thus, moving back to Knoxville was not only a personal act but also a political one for him. He wanted to be an active part of bringing change to Black communities in Knoxville. Therefore, coming back to the city, he intentionally chose to live in East Knoxville. The house in which he and his daughter live is one of his childhood homes. In addition to his parenting and professional responsibilities, Carl is involved in a plethora of community-organizing initiatives. He is always attending some form of community meeting, from Black Lives Matter-Knoxville and school push-out advisory committee to community school steering committee and PARC (Police Advisory and Review Committee).

It was therefore interesting to meet Carl in a space that was not a community meeting and to hear him share things about his personal life. I knew of his daughter and had seen her around, but we had never discussed his parenting decisions. Given the struggling nature of the Black schools and Carl's awareness of such as a community activist, I was especially curious about which schools he had selected for his daughter. Because Carl is well connected and respected in the community, he probably could have sent his daughter to any school. So, when considering

high schools, he selected Austin-East High School, the same school he had attended for his freshman and sophomore years before leaving Knoxville for the second time. When I asked Carl why Austin-East, he responded:

I have a real corny reason why I sent her there to be honest with you. But I originally wanted her to go to L&N Stem, I thought that would give her the stronger educational foundation. But then we went to the open house at Austin-East for the eighth grader, rising eighth graders and their parents. And they played this song that they used to play... played it since forever, "I'm so glad," I don't know if you've heard it. If you go to any Austin-East function they say, "I'm so glad I went to AE, —or go to —I don't know which one - AE I'm so..." it goes on and on and it's just the style - like man. I was sitting there, they're playing it, the band was playing and looking around, all these beautiful Black faces, some of the people I went to high school with there with their children or grandchildren in some instances. And it just was just like man she goin' Austin-East and it was stupid, it was not stupid, but it was just like she needs... you know she needs this—they need her just as much as she needs this experience.

It was clear that this was a conflicting decision for Carl. He wanted to send his daughter to a school where he believes she would have a strong educational foundation, and for him the initial choice was not Austin-East; it was the relatively recently built and state-ranking L&N STEM Academy. Though it is located just a few short miles from Austin-East, L&N's students come from all over Knoxville as it is not a neighborhood school but an open enrollment school. Austin-East High (AE as it is locally called), on the other hand, according to test scores and other state markers of success, is not a top-performing school. Not too long ago, it was on the state's priority schools list, meaning it was among the lowest performing schools in Tennessee. While Carl was aware of the status of Black schools and wanted his daughter to go to L&N, he still attended the Austin-East open house and, through a combination of nostalgia and hope, decided to send her there. Furthermore, while attending this event, Carl was reminded of just how important it is for his child to experience "beautiful black faces." In a city where the Black population is relatively small and largely invisible in popular perception, it is important for his little Black girl to see other Black faces and to see them as beautiful. The development of her

racial identity, her Blackness, is something he sees being solidified in school; at L&N STEM, she would probably receive a great education but would be a racial minority. As someone who understands the struggle his community is facing, Carl knows that his daughter needs to be at her Black neighborhood school and that her Black neighborhood school needs his daughter's intelligence and resources.

Along with Vine Middle School, Greene Magnet Academy, and Sarah Moore Greene Elementary School, Austin-East High School is located in and draws students from East Knoxville. Currently due to the concentration of Blacks in the neighborhoods of East Knoxville, these are considered the Black schools (Maynard Elementary is also a Black school but is located in Mechanicsville). In the census tracts where Austin-East High and Vine Middle are located, the Black population is 76.8 and 64.3 percent respectively, but the schools' populations are approximately 80 percent Black. In just about every other school in the district, Black children are a minority, and in most of them, they are a very small minority. But these schools are not Black schools simply because they are municipal buildings located in Black neighborhoods or because they have a majority Black student population; rather, these schools have historically been Black schools, and their histories are tied to the Black community's history. Austin-East High, for example, is not just a Black high school; its predecessor, Austin High School, was the first public high school built for Black children in Knoxville. Similarly, Sarah Moore Greene Elementary was named after a long-time teacher and the first Black school board representative in Knoxville. Additionally, changes in the Black schools historically have corresponded with changes in the community. Factors such as increases in the Black population, displacement caused by urban renewal, and the end of Jim Crow discrimination are all, in some way, reflected in the Black schools. Furthermore, given the size, distribution, and marginalized status of

Knoxville's Black population, schools that are located in Black neighborhoods are much more than simple places of learning; they are social and cultural institutions and major sites of place-making for Black Knoxvilleans.

Schools were among the first institutions to be established by Black Knoxvilleans post-emancipation. Coming out of the Reconstruction era and beyond, Blacks made major gains in community- and institution-building. However, over the course of the 20th century, waves of urban renewal, divestment, unemployment, and other forms of political and economic marginalization destabilized Black neighborhoods and stripped them of most of their institutions. As a result, the neighborhoods of East Knoxville are experiencing stark poverty, where unemployment rate in some areas is as much as 25.8 percent and the median household income in some areas is as low as \$16, 386. In low-income neighborhoods such as these, Black schools often remain the last surviving institutions. Currently, Black schools and churches are in many ways the last bits of community autonomy that Black Knoxvilleans experience. The schools, however, are far fewer than the churches, and as an institution, they are more widely utilized by the community as a whole. Thus, in the absence of other institutions, schools continue to intersect with the community in complex, multidimensional ways (Good 2016). They serve as vehicles through which people orient themselves to their community.

For example, in attending the Austin-East open house, the real decision-maker for Carl was “the song.” Experiencing “the song” grounded him; it was a representation of why, even though L&N was an outstanding school, he was there at the open house for Austin-East. It reminded him that his schooling experience was also a community-bonding and community-defining experience. To outsiders, “the song” may seem insignificant but to Carl and other Blacks, “the song”—like the school itself—was an asset people had in common; it bridged

generations and gave them something to know and belong to that was exclusively theirs. No matter what the test scores were or how many fast food places had left the neighborhood, to know and belong to Austin-East, East Knoxville, and Black Knoxville in general is to know “the song.” Thus, at the center of community of life, schools are tightly intertwined in the politics of the production of place. Whereas to the wider district, these schools are valued in terms of academic performance and building utilization and quality, for Knoxville’s Black population, these schools are tied up in the community’s joy, its creation of identity through physical and social boundaries, its claim to space and place, and its expression of power.

Place-Making: Celebration of Schools

East Knoxville is in such a state of despair and disrepair that it might seem impossible to find something to celebrate in this community. Yet it is exactly with a celebratory expression that people share their experiences at the Black schools in the community. Despite all of its challenges, Austin-East is particularly a source of joy for this community, made apparent on multiple occasions throughout my study. During Black History Month 2018, the Beck Cultural Exchange Center, the local African American museum, hosted an event that brought together former students of Austin-East High School for a panel discussion. Not only the panelists but also most of the audience were graduates of the school who were in their 50s, 60s, 70s, or older. Everyone knew each other or somebody who knew somebody else. As the evening continued, most people seemed to have forgotten the topic they were there to discuss; instead, what took place was a semi-reunion of all the Austin-East graduating classes represented in the room. The level of school spirit, excitement, and comradery that people displayed was very overwhelming and surprising given the amount of years that had passed since these people had attended high school. The oldest person there had attended high school in the late 1930s. Nevertheless, people

were vividly reminiscing about the school, the neighborhood, teachers, principals, and coaches. They shared their memories of attending school with each other, the graduates that had gone on to achieve success and fame, the brilliance of their teachers, and much more. They cheered on former classmates and debated about which class was better. Additionally, throughout the evening whenever certain people's names were mentioned, the entire room would burst into laughter. There were many "you had to have been there to get it" moments.

As I witnessed this celebration of a school that most of Knoxville would call a "failing school," I was reminded of Carl's joy at his recollection of "the song." This experience also highlighted how, in giving communities something to celebrate, the schools reaffirm the humanity of the people in this neighborhood, whose places—and, by default, lives—are often disregarded on account of lacking value. But even more than that, Black schools are community-defining.

Place-Making: Defining Community Identity through Physical and Social Boundaries

Schools in the Black community do much boundary work. They are vital to delineating the physical and social boundaries of the Black neighborhoods and, thus, the community's identity. Often, school zone lines and schools themselves are used as informal demarcation points and neighborhood parameters (Harding, 2010). People decide what and who are a part of their neighborhoods based on proximity to the neighborhood schools. Furthermore, schools are a major factor in people's decision to live in one neighborhood or another. For my participant Bree, who grew up in East Knoxville and attended Austin-East High, the school was significant not just in distinguishing the neighborhoods but also in maintaining the racial makeup of the community. In the following comment, she explains what she perceives are the boundaries of the neighborhood based on the school zone boundaries and racial boundaries:

And they said Austin-East was in such close proximity to Burlington, they didn't even send a school bus out there. It was really too far to walk. So, we would end up getting on the public bus to get to school unless we caught a ride or just felt good one day and wanted to walk. And I think it's another thing that kept it Black because nobody wanted to move over there. Nobody white wanted to move over there and have their children zoned for Austin-East. And there is no other high schools that are close by on the east side. The next closest one would be Carter which is way up Asheville Highway.

So, I think that's one of the things that kept the east side Black, not just Burlington, but the whole entire east side because the high school zone didn't switch until you got past the interstate entrance on Cherry Street. And that's when the zone finally switched over ... So, I think that's what kept the whole area Black is nobody white wants to send their kid to the Black high school.

Here, Bree explains her belonging to the neighborhood by pointing out that the Burlington area, where she lived, was within the school's boundaries. Moreover, she lived so close to the school that there was no school bus to her neighborhood; it was assumed that the children could easily walk to school. Additionally, based on how far the school zone goes in different directions, Bree can pinpoint the exact spots where she believes "the East side" ends. Even though an area might technically be east of downtown, the community might not necessarily consider it a part of East Knoxville or the East Side. These labels and the areas they identify are racialized; they are associated with the Black neighborhood. The specific points that Bree highlights as points where, according to her, the school zone changes are also the points where the racial makeup of the neighborhood changes. Furthermore, it is her understanding that it is the school that maintained the Blackness of East Knoxville. The desire to not have their children attend a Black school, she believes, is what kept white people at bay.

Neighborhood boundaries may change over time, but once they are set, the things, places, people, and activities that operate within those boundaries define the identity of the place. Schools, again, are a major player in this identity formation. As people travel to and from school—perhaps a mundane and thoughtless process— they are participating in community

building and place-making processes as they interact with each other and the surrounding spaces and places. For example, when schools dismiss in the afternoons and children flood the surrounding streets and local commercial districts, it increases their familiarity with their neighborhood and helps them to determine what is considered a part of that place. This process was perhaps most vividly illustrated in Bree's description of what she calls the afterschool parade:

So, most of the kids who were at Austin-East when school was out, we were out walking the neighborhood. You know, we were going to the McDonald's on Magnolia. Getting food, hanging out. Or, um, Bi-Low's which the city tore down, I think, last year.

Bi-Low. It's right on the corner of Harris and Martin Luther King. It was like a... It was a convenience store slash gas station, but it was also kind of like a neighborhood trap spot. You go there and get you some gas. Get you a white T-shirt, some diapers, some formula, weed, some crack, a gun... (big laughs)

A little bit of everything. You know, you might find a body out there, you know, just, whatever. Ain't no telling. You know, it be students down there. Um, and this was in '99, so, you know, the drug game is booming at this point. I mean, the streets are flooded with weed and cocaine and crack. So, all the guys, the older guys who were out of school, or maybe who had dropped out, we called it the afterschool parade. So they would be in their fancy cars with the rims and the paint and the music and they would just be riding by picking up their homeboys, trying to holla at the little young girls, or whatever. But, I was kind of shy, so I didn't never come out there looking. I was like, aww no, I don't want no parts of that stuff, so I stayed away. But, it was still interesting to watch.

It used to be a little spot right across the street called "Spooky's" and he was known for his chicken wings. He fried chicken wings. A lot of students would go over there after school and get chicken wings to eat or, uh, like I said, be scattered walking through the neighborhood. We'd find somebody's porch to sit on. Everybody go back to the projects, back to Walter P and you know, just be hanging out on a pretty day.

Burdick-Willz (2018) points out that residents' awareness of their neighborhoods goes beyond the straight-line distance between home and school. Instead, they are conscious of local street grids and other landmarks. In Bree's description, we learn the route from home to school not just in terms of the length of the walk or the streets she travels but also in terms of the businesses located on those streets and the different activities that attracted students to those streets. We learn of the things in the neighborhood that have multiple functions and of the people who

occupy the neighborhood spaces. We learn of the types of foods eaten in this neighborhood and of how public spaces are shared. We learn of the social problems that afflict the community and of the places where people felt safe. We learn about the types of actions that influence how the community perceived its value within the larger city and of how the street and the house (porch) are also major sites of place-making and community-building.

What becomes clear in the richness of Bree's description and underscores this analysis is that schools, in this case Austin-East High School, serve as major landmarks and anchors in Black Knoxville's spatial navigation of their neighborhood. The school is the place of departure as well as a tool for the students to traverse the geography of their space. Therefore, it is through going to school that they decide and come to know what the neighborhood consists of and how space is used by the people in the neighborhood.

The school's importance in establishing the physical boundary of the neighborhood is complemented by its function in establishing social boundaries, which also have strong implications for place identity. Burdick-Will (2018) notes, "When schools bring residents of the same neighborhood together, they are likely to promote a common understanding of place and community" (418). There are particular expectations for those who live within the boundaries of the neighborhood, and the schools help to set and maintain those expectations. One way in which this boundary making occurs is in the schools' intergenerational reach. The schools are a community space that bring together people across generations for various reasons. In addition, the schools are attended by members of the same family from generation to generation. One of the things Carl noted from his experience on the day of Austin-East's open house was that he saw people who attended school with him; also, they were with their kids and possibly

grandchildren. Similarly, Bree and forty something years-old native Mechanicsville resident, Darious, explained the generational reach of Austin-East in their families:

Um, and it's a lot of history in my family with Austin-East. My grandmother, she didn't graduate, um, high school cause she had my aunt when she was 15 and she dropped out, but she attended Austin. Um, and she always attended her class reunions and stayed in touch with her classmates. Um, my aunt was actually, um, a part of the first graduating class of Austin-East in '69 and my mother came out of AE in '74. And my uncle came out in '76 and so here I am the next generation. Um, yeah, most, most people that attend Austin East, it is a generational thing. (Bree)

I am a graduate of Austin-East. I went to Maynard Elementary, Beardsley Middle, and Rule High; all of them was in the same area. But I graduated from Austin-East High School. And the reason being, my mom and pops graduated from Austin-East so I always wanted to graduate from the same school. (Darious)

Whereas high school is just high school for most people, for many of Knoxville's Black population, high school is a part of one's family history. It is a tradition shared by family members from one generation to another. In the same way an heirloom might be passed down from generation to generation and thereby acquires significance to a family to the point where it becomes a family symbol, the generational nature of the schools makes them a symbol of Black families. It is expected that if a person is from a native Black family of Knoxville, they have affiliations to Black schools, but particularly Austin-East High School. Here is how Bree expresses it:

But everything is based on who you kin to here and who you know. So, if you tell somebody your full name, and they like, "Oh, you kin to so and so? Well, I don't know your people." Second question would be either what side of town you from or what high school did you go to. I think the biggest assumption is they think all Black people from Knoxville graduated from Austin-East and went to Austin-East which is usually true but not always. (Bree)

Bree highlights what she calls the "biggest assumption" among Blacks in Knoxville as the idea that "all Black people from Knoxville graduated from Austin East." Even though she is trying to show how ridiculous this assumption is, she still admits that it is "usually true." Further, she

points out that the schools are a major point of social connection. They are a go-to thing for strangers to find commonality and make connections. After all, much information about a person and their relationship to a place is communicated in the school they attended.

In addition to reinforcing the school's omnipresence among Blacks in Knoxville, Bree's statement about kinship in Knoxville also relates to the school's social boundary-making processes. There is a popular perception that the Black community in Knoxville is very close-knitted; many people know each other and frequently find themselves in the same circles.

It was always interesting to me that everybody seemed to be related and even if you're not related you are related somehow because somebody married somebody that came to such and such. (La kesha)

This perception is prevalent even among Blacks who migrate to the city for work or otherwise. It is believed that the close-knitted nature of the Black community is a consequence of its small size; while this conclusion is very likely, it is also likely that the schools play a role in maintaining this closeness. In addition to parents and other community members' frequent interactions with each other, within the schools' boundaries, historically the children in Black neighborhoods have grown up as a cohort. They move from kindergarten through high school graduation as a unit experiencing the things that gives them membership in the neighborhood and belonging to the community. Participant Tesha stresses this observation in the following statement:

My son which he had gone to the Black school his whole life. Kindergarten he went to - Green, all them they went to Vine and now he's at AE. So a lot of them have been together since they were-- [babies] yes.

But then you have someone that's coming in at 9th grade, you're gonna have to act out, you're gonna have to go a little over and beyond just to be- feel like for them to open the door to let you in and I feel like that's the same way with the Black community. I mean if I've known you all my life so I know you yeah if you get an attitude we'll get over it. But then you have this outsider coming trying to sit at the table y'all both going to- we both going to be like who is this.

Tesha's comment suggests that this cohort experience is at the root of why so many members of the native Black Knoxville community know each other and why it appears, especially to outsiders, to be insular. Moreover, in these cohorts, a common understanding of place and self is produced and reproduced from generation to generation, which is one reason why zone manipulation by the school district can be so detrimental and poorly received by Blacks. When the school board almost arbitrarily changes school zones and forces Black children out of the physical and social boundaries of their neighborhood schools, it interrupts and disrupts important community-building, identity-forming, and place-making processes. For example, my participant Megan was forced to attend predominantly white Carter High School after rezoning in the early 1990s. Megan explains her disappointment as follows:

I was going to be with my people but then I lost that when I went to Carter. Which I know what they were trying to do which was to integrate. But we lost... Not who we are. But that level of comfortability. We went from seeing a class of 10-15 to maybe two.

We have two cute Black dudes, and everybody had to fight over them until two more came in and the others left. I don't think I got to experience like that high school crush and not to say... But you know what I mean. It's just we didn't get to experience that.

Megan felt as though she lost something in going to Carter High. She grapples with the disruption in her development of her racial identity along with the loss of comfort of being among her cohort. Additionally, Megan is disappointed that she could not experience having a high school crush. This is an experience that most would not consider an important aspect of the high school experience, as it is not something that increases the school's values in terms of academics or state-recognized markers of success. However, for the members of the Black community, and for Black children specifically, this connection represents a vital part of the social experience of school. Research suggests that the experience of leaving their urban neighborhoods for white suburban schools can be especially difficult for Black girls socially.

Their being Black and from the city are often felt as social liabilities. A study by Ispa-Landa (2013) found that, due to their perceived aggressive nature and physical appearance, Black girls in predominantly white schools feel they are less likely to be the dating interest of boys at these schools. These findings suggest that experiences that remove Black children like Megan from their cohorts—in addition to impacting their self-worth—can also have consequences for their sense of self and sense of community. In her Black neighborhood school environment, Megan may or may not have felt attractive to the boys but would have been among and able to engage the boys of her cohort and would have possibly had a high school crush. These and other social experiences would have affirmed her racial identity and her belonging to a particular place.

The cohort experience and the generational nature of the schools create a closeness among Blacks in Knoxville that non-natives Blacks sometimes find difficult to “infiltrate.” Often in those situations, they find inlets to the native Black community through the schools. Transforming to fit the needs of the community, these schools—in addition to educating several generations of Black families in Knoxville—serve as venues for sports, theater, music, and other cultural and civic events. From Kwanzaa celebrations to city council candidate debates, the schools are used by the community as places of gathering and engagement. As community hubs, schools support the development of social ties, and according to Burdick-Will (2018), school-based social ties can create and reinforce neighborhood-based social ties. These ties make residents feel socially connected to the Black neighborhood, Black people, and Black Knoxville in general. Comments from Jay, who moved to Knoxville in his twenties and noted that Austin-East was the center of the Black community when he arrived, highlight how he got oriented to Black Knoxville through that school:

If you probably wanted to see any of the Black people who were known or unknown, you go to Austin-East football game you'll meet them. First time I saw Sam Anderson was at Austin-East football game. I saw his signs all around town.

He worked for the school board. He might have been running then or he might have just been re-running or something for a seat. But I would see his signs all around town, people would tell me about him but the first time I met him was at an Austin-East game. The first time I'm gonna say, everybody – they used to have a really good band so then you know go see the good bands, you go see Austin-East. Their football team was pretty decent. Even when we would have – well, we didn't have a football team but we would still be part of whatever the HBCU classics was, a tournament like games.

So, they would hold the game for KC at Austin-East. So, Denzel Washington's son was playing for whatever HBCU he went to. They came and played at Austin-East so of course, everybody was there at Austin-East that day. But if there's anybody you needed to know or wanted to meet, you probably could be at Austin-East for one of their events, and you'll see them. The African dance team was really good. It was really big so for Kwanzaa and for MLK, Martin Luther King Day, Black History Month, all that stuff happened at Austin-East high school.

Jay really underscores the community-building nature of the school and its tendency for providing the context for social connections. He emphasizes that the numerous community activities held at the school make it the place to meet and connect with “Black people known and unknown.” These meetings often lead to relationships and resources that result in people feeling more strongly connected to the social and physical boundaries of Black Knoxville. Attending a football game or Kwanzaa celebration might lead to networks of childcare, transportation, and other social resources. Similarly, having access to elected officials, community leaders, and other community members with social or material capital can foster the flow of information about employment and other local opportunities. Because of their identity defining boundary work and the social ties that result, the history and even the memories of schools can be used as tools of Black place-making.

Place-Making: Using History and Memories of Schools to Claiming Space

In the face of changes in Black communities brought on by urban renewal, gentrification, and other displacing mechanisms, the schools' history and the community's collective memories

of the schools can be leveraged to contest meaning, ownership, and use of place. In the wake of the Brown decision, this place-claiming function of Black schools truly materialized. After the 1954 Supreme court mandate ended legal segregation in public schools, some of the district's strategies for desegregation included shutting down Black schools, merging Black schools and white schools, and/or pairing them as junior high and senior high schools. The case of the 1968 merger of predominantly Black Austin High with predominantly white East High highlights how particularly the history of a school can be a strong tool in a community's efforts to claim space.

Following the merge of these two schools, the building that housed Austin High would be utilized otherwise, and the merged school would occupy the East High School facility. Furthermore, the district decided that the newly merged school would carry the name East High. The Black community strongly opposed this decision. After all, Austin High School, established in 1879, was the first public high school for Blacks in Knoxville. Prior to the building of this school, Black children were educated in various classrooms in church basements, lodge halls, and a few scattered one-room schoolhouses (<http://ww2.tnstate.edu/library/digital/austin.htm>).

Staffed with Black principals and teachers, the school not only centralized high school education for Black children in Knoxville but also gave the community something that belonged to them. Because it was the only Black high school in Knox County, Black children throughout Knoxville and the rest of Knox County traveled to East Knoxville to attend Austin High until the 1960s. Black children even traveled from other counties, such as adjoining Anderson County, to attend Austin High. The school was initially located on Central Street, but with population changes and the urban renewal displacement of Blacks from the center of the city, the school moved a few times, shifting further east; nevertheless, it had been a fixture in Black education in Knoxville and a marker of Black spaces. For Black Knoxvilleans, Austin High was more than

just the name of a school; it was *the* name associated with Black education in Knoxville. The history and significance of Austin High was wrapped up in its name, and in losing the Austin name, the community would have lost a piece of its history and identity. Community members, therefore, petitioned the school board to retain the name—hence, Austin-East High. Moreover, in the midst of urban renewal—the overwhelming loss of place that pushed Black people out of their downtown neighborhoods further east from the 1950s to 1970s—the name was an affirmation of *something* the community could hold on to and use to claim East Knoxville, parts of which were still considered white spaces, as a new Black space. Urban renewal had taken away homes, institutions, neighborhoods, and—combined with desegregation efforts—schools too. Thus, the school, even if only its name, was embedded in implications for contested claims to space. Keeping the name “Austin” was an act of resistance and hope for children and a community that had lost so much, including their school building and potentially their sense of belonging.

Whereas Austin and East were merged in 1968 as a desegregation strategy, in 1970, there was a notable pairing of a Black and white school. All-Black Beardsley Junior High, which initially ended at the 10th grade, was reorganized as a two-year junior high and paired with all-white Rule, a four-year senior high, to serve Black and white children in the Mechanicsville and Lonsdale neighborhoods. Within a few short years, Austin-East, Beardsley, and Rule all became majority-Black schools (Rule was considered a Black school by community members because of its location in Mechanicsville, but yearbook records suggest that it was more mixed with Black and white students than the other two schools). Furthermore, Austin and East Highs’ merger was such a horrible failure in desegregation, it was said to have been the “most pronounced example of ‘white flight’ that Knoxville experienced” (Bedelle 2012:75). White families either moved out

of the areas or used a transfer system to enroll their children in the nearest county school. By the 1990s, these schools and the other remaining Black schools in the county were all under threat of being shuttered. On several occasions, community members have had to protest potential plans to close Austin-East High and Vine Middle, so they are suspicious of any major changes to the schools. The attendance zones for these schools are constantly being redrawn, and the kids that should go to these schools are shifted around depending on local politics and the will of the majority-white school board.

Sadly, the fate of Beardsley Junior High, Rule High, and Cansler Elementary—another predominantly Black school that was also located in the Mechanicsville neighborhood—was not the same. These schools were among the Black schools in Knoxville that were closed following desegregation policies. However, unlike for other schools that were closed, the memory of these schools is alive in the Mechanicsville-Lonsdale neighborhoods:

Beardsley was one of the better middle schools. Actually, they used to play –Austin-East used to play high school games in Beardsley gym, it was one of the bigger gyms. Knoxville College used to play games in Beardsley gym. It wasn't like it was tore up or nothing. We had one of the newer and bigger gyms. (Darius)

There was Rule High School that's what we had – Cansler, Beardsley, and Rule – all within close proximity or reasonable distance centralized to that whole community, Lonsdale, College Homes, and Mechanicsville. And then of course they closed Rule. So, yeah, they just gradually squeezed the life out of the community.

Then they start saying there are not enough people in the community to support the school. And then they close the school and send you somewhere else. And then nobody's moving into the community because there are no schools. And then the remnants of the people that are left, that's what you get...some kids went to white schools or other schools, and then there were rumors about the Black schools not being as good or as equipped. As the attendance at the Black schools declined, of course, so did their resources. (Ms. Wendy)

They started out with Alumni picnics, it's called the Bob Polston alumni BBQ. He wasn't there when I was there but he was a football coach... A lot of guys really looked up to him, they still have the BBQs every year. I missed the first two because I didn't know about it... everything is free. I saw my counselor the year before last. The white parties

started two years ago. They do that right after, it be the same day of the picnic. They do it that night, they used to have a gala that took place every two years but they haven't had one in the past –Rule High we have a lot of pride in our school, it's some good memories, it really is, I mean it's a lot of good memories. Those were some of my best years... they have music, they say all the cheerleaders come up, then the football team and basketball, they acknowledge the teachers that's there, you have shirts and people reminiscing.
(Tina)

As one of the previous chapters demonstrated, among Black people in Knoxville, sense of place is shaped by so much loss of place; thus, for many, the shuttering of these schools is experienced as an effort to usher in the gentrification of this community. All three of these participants mention, in some way, how they believe the city closed their schools in order to dismantle the community and move Black people out of the inner-city. Darious makes it a point to mention the size and newness of the Beardsley gym to prove that it was not the condition of the schools that made the district close them. Rather, as Ms. Wendy suggests, it was a calculated effort on the part of the governing officials. Furthermore, the closing of these schools came around the time when plans of a reverse white flight or “back to the city” movement was gaining traction. Since then, Mechanicsville and parts of Lonsdale have changed drastically; particularly in Mechanicsville, Black people are no longer in the majority. Many of the homes in the area, especially the older homes, have been bought up and renovated by whites. For the members of this community who attended these Black schools, the schools evoke memories of what the neighborhood used to be. They go to reunions and share nostalgia associated with the school that connected to their identity as people from Mechanicsville and Lonsdale. Because school life and neighborhood life overlap in major ways, when reminiscing about the school, people simultaneously reminisce about what life was like in the neighborhood; they remember a time when they had a dominant and vibrant presence in the neighborhood. Their collective memories of the school and, by default, the neighborhood make them a permanent part of the place history.

Furthermore, even though Rule High was not historically a Black school, for the generation of Blacks who attended from the late 70s through its closing in the early 90s, the school's location in their neighborhood had become a part of their identifying with that neighborhood. For that generation, going to the school during that period was an important part of being a member of this community and was important to the relationship this generation of Blacks would develop with other Black places. For example, even though people constantly travel between the neighborhoods and have kinships on both sides, sports at Rule High helped Blacks in Mechanicsville and Lonsdale to distinguish the Black West side from the Black East side. In the past, after leaving Beardsley in the 10th grade, Blacks would graduate from Austin High. However, with desegregation, Blacks in Mechanicsville and Lonsdale could stay in their neighborhood and attend Rule High. This resulted in a major shift in Rule's athletics; it became dominated by Black athletes, and through that, Blacks in the area laid claim to the school. So, whereas East Knoxville had Austin-East athletics, Black people in Mechanicsville-Lonsdale had Rule athletics; since the whole community would rally around the sports teams, in many ways having it solidified the Black West side as a unit.

In addition to using the school's history and memory to claim space, Black Knoxvilleans have also socially and politically organized around school-related issues. Furthermore, schools have been a catalyst for a particularly place-based political organizing movement in Knoxville.

Place-Making: Schools As a Catalyst for Place-Based Community Organizing

Somewhere around 1969, a group of young people formed arguably the most transformative organizing body in the history of Black Knoxville. Consisting of the children of the first waves of urban renewal, the group developed around demands that a new school be built for Black children in East Knoxville. As Black people poured into the neighborhoods of East

Knoxville following the waves of urban renewal that destroyed their neighborhoods, the two Black elementary schools in the area, Green Elementary and East Port Elementary, could not accommodate them. Instead of building a new school, in 1960 the school district reopened the doors of Mountain View Elementary, a white elementary school that had closed the year before. According to 80-something-year-old Zimbabwe, who was one of the activists involved in the group, the school was closed because it was deemed unfit for children—i.e., white children. My search of local newspapers did not find any mention of exactly why the school was closed in 1959—though articles discussed a decrease in the school’s population, which was likely the result of the white flight that had been spurred by the influx of Blacks. I did, however, find articles that supported Zimbabwe’s claim that the school system was forced to shut down parts of the school following an inspection of the building in 1969, a decade after it was reopen. From these pieces of information, I concluded that the school was probably closed for a combination of reasons, including the old, hazardous facility and the enormous population decrease.

Prior to the work of this group of activists, grassroots political organizing efforts in Knoxville’s Black community had been relatively minimal, quiet, and—some would suggest—non-threatening in their demands for social and political change. Though problematic, there is a common perception that even the 1960 lunch counter sit-ins in Knoxville were minimal and that desegregation gains were paternalistic. As a matter of fact, since 1960 when Knoxville College students organized the lunch counter sit-ins to protest Jim Crow segregation and the Gross v. Board lawsuit was filed against the school system to enforce the 1954 Brown decision, there had been little to no known organized community activism in Knoxville. In addition, prior to 1969, there were no Black representatives on any of the city’s governing bodies, including city council and the school board. However, witnessing urban renewal’s violent destruction of their homes

and schools had made an imprint on certain individuals, and they grew up to be activists determined to break from tradition.

Particularly, the traumatic memory of the destruction of Heiskell Elementary School, which was located in The Bottom, the first urban renewal site, had scarred some of these organizers. The school was beloved by the community. Zimbabwe, who was in the fifth grade when urban renewal came to Heiskell, told me that if he had never attended another school in his life, he would have been okay because Heiskell Elementary had prepared him for life. In a very emotional expression during one of our interview sessions, Zimbabwe described the closing of this beloved school. We were sitting at the table in the kitchen of his office building one day when the topic arose. Nothing could have prepared me for the feeling I would get as I watched this man, whom I had grown to respect over the course of my research, practically sob over the loss of his elementary school. Through this story, I learned not only how traumatic urban renewal was but also the extent to which this experience of losing his school shaped the trajectory of his life and the work he would do in his community. Zimbabwe recalls that when the news of urban renewal broke, the teachers would say, “You know they would close Heiskell School down.” Fighting back tears, he exclaims, “That seemed like something biblical.” Then, after what seemed like the longest pause, he shakes his head and describes the tragedy:

It seemed like a curse. Heiskell School was an elementary school. There would no longer be first grade, last year of first grade, kids have to go to other schools and when that last class leaves that's the end of Heiskell. So for 6 years we watched the school die. It was like watching somebody sick in the hospice. It was like the doctor said this patient is so bad there is nothing we can do about it. We just take it to hospice and let it go. That was our whole neighborhood they talking about and like removing the life support. No longer first grade coming into the school. By that time, I was in fifth grade it took five to six years to close, from 5th to 10th grade I saw it die. All the teachers moved out except one teacher and the principal.

To witness the closure of a school can be difficult, but to watch it close and then bulldozed is devastating; it is likely that the root shock (2016) of this experience to the Black community, especially the children, would have been severe. Zimbabwe, who grew up to become a teacher, described the school as the life support of the neighborhood, which, once gone, was the ultimate symbol of the loss of the neighborhood. It is for this reason that he was particularly struck by what he perceived as the lack of protest by the adults of his community in the face of such grave destruction. So when he and other youths returned to Knoxville after college, military service, or elsewhere, they were outraged to find that the school boards' solution to overcrowded Black schools in the wake of urban renewal's displacement was to put Black children in a recently condemned school. The group of community activists quickly assembled and began garnering community support to challenge the school board and demand a new school building for Black children.

Oh, yeah, we're all adults now. We into adulthood now... Well, we can say no, that's not the right way to do it, we're gonna do it another way. The reason the kids going to school is because you're sending them there.

We started off there was about ten of us. Dewey and all his brothers and sisters.

Most of us had gone away for like three or four years and then come back. And we didn't see any movement at all and Knoxville had gone to sleep. You know, because, see, Knoxville had moved away from opening up lunch counters, theaters, and hospitals. So they were like oh, we get that, we integrated, right? ... I said man, what is going on here?... We start talking to folk and they start talking about what bad shape it was in. So why is nobody doing anything? Okay, okay. So let's close the school down. (Zimbabwe)

Up to this point, the issue of the Black children being forced to attend a school that was not good enough for white children had received very little consideration and no known organized resistance. Prior to the forming of Zimbabwe's groups, the only mention of community pushback that I found evidence of was an article in the *Knoxville New Sentinel*, "South Knoxville Elementary Addition Voted" (Feb. 14, 1961), written within a year of the school being reopened.

According to the article, a group of Black parents approached the school board requesting repairs and the hiring of additional teachers at Mountain View Elementary School. Their request was reached with a very unpromising response; the school superintendent told the Black parents that fulfilling their requests would require more money from the city council and that a lack of funds might result in teacher cuts at the school. Ironically, as the article goes on, it highlights that on the same night that the Black parents were met with such a disappointing response, the board had voted to add an additional building to both a white elementary and high school in South Knoxville. Despite such blatant disregard, it was not until 1969 that the mention of parents' demand for a new school or the school board's plans for a replacement school for the Black children at Mountain View began to surface. These 1969 mentions coordinate with the dates that Zimbabwe noted as the emergence of the community activist group. The group initiated collective action where there had otherwise been a lull in community-organizing activity.

We would give – when the kids would leave school we would give them propaganda. We put the information, cars, and things and churches and stuff. We would announce our meetings on public service announcements at WJBE. And we boycotted. We took signs, we told them we gonna boycott, we marched up there... told people to keep the kids home

Got down where you just couldn't ignore the number of kids that were not going to school, right? And we still couldn't get a commitment from the school board... Somewhere the decision was made unofficially that well, the school shouldn't be there to debate on anymore. So the school was firebombed. The school was firebombed one night. And it so happened, what they had started doing, they had started putting a janitor in that school at night, probably kind of suspecting something might happen to that school at night. So the janitor was able to call the fire department and stuff to put the blaze out, right? But that still startle – it really startled.

Then we ask, I think the name of that, but it was the department dealing with education, then the condition of the school. It was after the firebombing, right? And so they came in and inspected the school. So when they inspected the school they saw floor joists was down, they condemned the school. They condemned the school. Said it was unfit to house students.

And they condemned the third floor and closed it immediately. They said that – woo, woo. They closed the third floor. They said classes could not be held on the third floor. And at

the end of that school year the school –That’s right. So during that summer, they put in the budget the construction of a new school, Sarah Moore Greene School. And the kids were distributed, during the interim, to different elementary schools. (Zimbabwe)

In the face of what to them was an inadequate school facility and a history of destruction of Black schools, a very organized group of activists emerged in Black Knoxville, proving schools to be a catalyst of place-based community organizing. These young activists organized both themselves and their community. Using the community radio station to make announcements, distributing pamphlets at the schools, and holding community meetings at the Black churches, they were able to build community and galvanize the parents of children who had been attending the formerly closed school for almost a decade. But this work was not only community-building; it was also a grand display of Black people’s challenge to the power structure in Knoxville. Black people were refusing to accept the school that they had been placed in by the school board. They were willing to go to the state level to get inspections that would ensure that Black children would not be forced to attend an unfit school. In doing so, the group interrupted a historical narrative of the white people in power defining the types and location of Black places and ultimately the relationship Black people have with place. These protest efforts were also place-making in that they intertwined with Black people’s right to the city. Black protesters not only occupied public spaces, like the school and the streets, for their protests but also—in demanding that a new school be built for Black children and in seeking out the state’s intervention—contested the white local government’s authority over place and actively affirmed their rights as citizens to the space and resources of the city.

Sarah Moore Greene Elementary was the result of the group’s activism, but the schools’ catalytic place-making function extended long after that school was built. The group of activists, having achieved success, would go on to become a major force of place-based organizing. They

decided to establish themselves as the Committee for the Development of the Black Community, an umbrella body for community work that would be ongoing for over five decades. Under different subgroups including Advocates for Neighborhood Development and Knoxville Rescue and Restoration, they have organized around place-specific issues. Zimbabwe told me that at the tail-end of their work at the Mountain View Elementary School, they went right across the street and started protesting the Mountain View Urban Renewal project, the last phase of the official three urban renewal projects. Furthermore, he said “we were just going one right after the other, just like that, man. I mean, over and over, like a 15-year period.” Project after project, they were determined to claim, defend, and advocate for Black spaces and places in Knoxville. Some of the other projects they went on to tackle included the following:

1. They demanded that the city build the Malcolm and Martin Park in Mechanicsville.
2. They stopped the changing of the name of Preston Street in East Knoxville to Washington Avenue, which was being requested by whites, and demanded that the street, and the park located on it, be named for Harriet Tubman.
3. They organized the community to stop the building of the South Knox connector, which would run through East Knoxville to connect to Interstate 40.
4. They organized boycotts of grocery stores, challenged city ordinances that restricted building infilled housing, and protested and organized around numerous school-related projects such as the closing of Black schools, the dispersal of Black teachers, the establishment of the magnet program, and unequal resources in Black schools.

Regardless of the project, it was always place, not issues, that drove their action. Having realized very early that the local political system failed to recognize and represent their place-based interest, these activists employed collective action to effect social, political, and economic changes in Black neighborhoods.

Conclusion

For reasons ranging from budget limitations, building underutilization, and concerns about academic performance, school districts all over America are shuttering black school. While these closings are suggested to be the solution to district problems, seldom is it considered the functions these schools serve in the black communities and children that loose them. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, through an exploration of the place making functions of blacks schools in Chocolate City Way Up South in Appalachia, Black schools are vital to black neighborhood. Even in neighborhoods stripped of resources and opportunities, schools harness memories, hope, resistance, joy, possibilities and safety that black people draw on to create their own worlds in spite and despite their struggles against racism in America. They are a major tool of black geographic agency and in white dominated cities like Knoxville (Appalachia), they offer Black children and communities a sense of familiarity and belonging that most white and “so called” integrated schools do not.

Chapter 7: “We are woven into the fabric of what it is but it’s like no one talks about it”

It’s like a complicated thing. Just because on the surface I think it is definitely perceived as the stereotypical white immigrants moving, Irish, Scottish people coming down here finding the hills and hollers. But I think, I wish I knew more about exactly how Africans were plugged into the history of Appalachia. But I know that we were definitely important part, and I think a lot of southern culture is for a lack of a better word, appropriated African-American culture when you think about it. From the music to banjo and blues, all of that came from us. The food even came from us and so we are woven into the fabric of what it is, but it’s like no one talks about it. I grew up going to Highlander camp in the Highlander center, and I definitely think that place is like an anomaly. I don’t even understand how it’s been able to exist in New Port, Tennessee for this long. It’s like this heaven of love almost like built into the Appalachian Mountains.

(Simone)

7.0 Introduction

Prior to the 19th century, Appalachia, remotely located, was relatively unknown to most of America. At the turn of the century, however, after a horseback tour through the mountains, Berea College's President William Frost brought Appalachia into American's consciousness. Since then, usually coinciding with a widely publicized national event, Appalachia periodically finds its way back onto America's minds. Most recently, the event that brought it to the surface was the 2016 presidential election; in the midst of fear and uncertainty, Appalachia reemerged as a critical region for electoral politics. In media story after story, Americans learned of the political trends of the region, the opioid crisis devastating its people and the related lack of jobs, and the population decline affecting Appalachia. Within the context of these circumstances, Appalachia had become a stronghold for then-presidential candidate Donald Trump. Owing to Appalachia's reputation as one of the poorest regions in the United States, the traditional class-based depiction of the region was prioritized in the wake of the 2016 electoral season. Trump's appeal to Appalachians is suggested to be related to the economic hardships experienced by the region's people, largely understood to be poor whites. In return for votes, Trump promised to bring back coal jobs and remove immigrants. Worth noting, however, is that as Appalachia was emerging as "Trump Country," Trump was leading a very racist political campaign through his proposal for a border wall and other overt racist actions. Yet, the mainstream story of Appalachia refused a racial analysis and maintained a presentation of the region's population as poor and victimized whites, whose seeming support of Trump's border wall was likely driven by the vulnerability caused by joblessness.

But sociologist Karida Brown (2018) and others caution against a single narrative of Appalachia, noting the region's contradictions and multiple layers. Brown (2018) indicates that "there are many Appalachians.... When people want to start storytelling about Appalachia, I'm

wondering which Appalachia? And whose Appalachia?” (Mtn. Talk: Karida Brown & Black History in Eastern Kentucky Feb 26 2019). This dissertation offers a different story of Appalachia, a story that prioritizes a racial analysis and foregrounds Black people’s experiences. In this concluding chapter, I explore how a racial analysis can uncover parallel stories of Appalachia which, in the spirit of Black geographies, can help us to understand how place can have multiple meanings and how, from the margins, Blacks have always been involved in meaning-making and place-making work in the Chocolate Cities of Appalachia.

Frost and a Racial Conception

An Appalachian story that emphasizes race is one that not only highlights the long history of Blacks and other people of color in the region but also uncovers the central role that race has played in the construction of the region. Furthermore, place is important in such an analysis since—as the dissertation has iterated—race is produced in space; relations between race are relations between place (Lipsitz 2011); and consequently, Black matters are spatial matters (McKittrick 2006). To illustrate these points, I return to Frost’s (1976) initial conceptualization of Appalachia as a distinct place. Frost (1976), who named the region Appalachia, defined it as a geographically and culturally distinct place located in “the mountainous back yard of nine states” (70). Moreover, he and others used race as a primary determinant in their attempts to set Appalachia apart from other U.S. geographies. In addition to declaring it as “one of God’s grand divisions,” Frost (1976) found Appalachia’s culture to be very similar to Elizabethan England and colonial America (71). Due to this perceived difference between the mountains and the rest of America, he called the region’s inhabitants “Mountain whites” (Frost 1976:70). Moreover, his depictions described “Mountain people [as] not just white, but the right kind of white: Bearers of ‘Anglo-Saxon blood’” (Williams 2001:201). Along similar lines, another earlier account, by

Samuel Wilson in his 19014 *The Southern Mountaineers*, describes the region as having a “pure stock” (10). Referring specifically to Appalachian Tennessee, Wilson went on to underscore the region’s purity by noting that there were five counties where the entire population of Blacks in a county was between 11 and 79 people. Such an emphasis and terms like “pure stock” and “Mountain Whites”—which was, until 2002, the authorized subject heading used in library catalogs and databases around the country to refer to native inhabitants of the region—were racializing and boundary-making tools, which for decades to come would bind white identity to Appalachia and relegated Blacks and other racial groups to other places. As a result, Black people in Appalachia were almost invisible to the mainstream society, and Blackness existed on the margins while whiteness—normalized and neutralized—remains at the center of our understanding of Appalachia, all the while ignoring the white supremacist and racists histories of the region. Considering that Appalachia is a place characterized by poor health, economic, and educational conditions, this perpetual disregard of Black people and racism in the region, means that Black Appalachians have largely lived as a “neglected minority within a neglected minority” (Cabbell 1980:48).

For Blacks in Knoxville and other places in the region, the challenges of living in a poor region have always been compounded by racism and discrimination as these are places not only where Blacks are believed to not exist but also where the power structure is overwhelmingly white. The Black sense of place in such contexts is largely shaped by negative experiences; particularly in Knoxville, with relatively small population sizes and through overt and covert racial practices, Black Knoxvilleians have historically navigated experiences that produce a perpetual sense of being out of place and/or sense of loss of place. Because white domination is felt in most facets of life in Knoxville, Blacks are not only perceived as cultural outsiders but

also have largely been subjected to poor living and working conditions and poor economic and educational opportunities.

Additionally, the racial practices of urban renewal have profoundly impacted Black communities in Knoxville. Because the city has undertaken several cycles to remake its image and revive its downtown area, redevelopment efforts such as urban renewal have continued to alter Black spaces, displacing and disrupting Black lives. Among other acts, this disruption has involved the building and tearing down of various housing projects, destruction of Black businesses, hyperpolicing of Black neighborhoods, construction of highways through Black neighborhoods, forceful shut-downs of Black recreational and entertainment establishments, and removal of entire Black neighborhoods. Furthermore, apart from a few fast food restaurants, retail shops, and convenient stores, Knoxville's Black communities currently lack viable economic resources. Compared to whites, the unemployment rate for Blacks is higher, and incomes are lower. Neither the historically Black Knoxville College nor many of the public schools in Black neighborhoods—including Rule High, Beardsley Junior High, and Cansler Elementary—are in operation any longer. Other Black schools are among some of the lowest performing schools in the state of Tennessee and are constantly threatened with closures, while Black children are pushed and shifted, almost arbitrarily, at the will of the school board. Many of the businesses that once populated the streets of Black neighborhoods are closed. There are no major healthcare facilities or even grocery stores in parts of these communities, and crime and incarceration have also significantly impacted Black communities. As devastating as this reality has been, the absence of a racial analysis has kept Black people's experiences, their sense of place, mostly hidden in mainstream stories of Appalachia.

While highlighting the exclusion of Black people and Blackness from the construction of Appalachia and the consequence that this exclusion has had for Blacks historically, a racial analysis also uncovers the existence of parallel stories and counterclaims that African Americans have always made in Appalachia, as well as Blacks' creation of place in spite of structural inequality and their resistance to said structural inequality.

Parallel Story: *The Banjo Lesson*

While Frost, Wilson, and others were drawing the color line through the mountains spreading stories of "lily-white" Appalachia, African American artist Henry Ossawa Tanner was working on the highly reproduced painting *The Banjo Lesson*, which illustrates an older African American man teaching a young boy to play the banjo (Hay, 2003). Like Frost, Tanner produced this public representation of Appalachia after a visit to the region. The painting was the result of a series of sketches he made while in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. Tanner, struck by the conditions under which Black Appalachians were living, painted *The Banjo Lesson* to depict life in the mountain village of Highlands, North Carolina. Despite not being acknowledged as such, this piece is a part of the meaning-making apparatus of Appalachia. That Tanner was doing this work in the same time period that Appalachia was becoming a place in America's consciousness and that it was so widely distributed make this piece one of the earliest visible attempts by Blacks to contradict Appalachia's white construction and claim ownership of place in the mountains. Furthermore, this painting has other significance in terms of Black people's relationship to place in Appalachia. At the center of the painting is the banjo. In centering this instrument, which is popularly recognized as the musical symbol of Appalachia, Tanner not only emphasizes Black people's claim to the region as inhabitants but also deliberately interjects African American cultural contributions into popular understandings of

Appalachia; research suggests that the (Conway, 2003). The last feature that is conveyed in this parallel story of Appalachia is the complexity of a Black space in Appalachia. Whereas the impoverished existence of Black life in Appalachia is not lost in the painting—conveyed by the shabby surroundings and tattered clothes of the characters—Tanner draws the viewer to the banjo lesson that is occurring literally in the center of all that despair. A banjo lesson between different generations of Black people speaks to the points that Blacks are defined by negative experiences and that Black spaces can offer safe spaces for Black people to thrive. In the safety of the home, a major site of Black place-making, Black people’s humanity is affirmed in everyday practices like playing music and spending time with relatives or friends.

Parallel Story: Pissed Off about 400 Mulvaney Street and BLM Resistance

In a more contemporary period, a racial analysis points to a continuation of Black Appalachians’ participation in place- and meaning-making work in the region and production of a parallel Appalachian story. For example, during the 2016 electoral season, when America was getting stories of poor, vulnerable, white Appalachians clinging to Trump as their only hope for jobs, we saw a number of blog posts and other less popularized outpourings of Black Appalachians confronting Black invisibility in the region and accentuating Black Appalachian people and places. In Knoxville specifically, there were two such outbursts that are particularly noteworthy; both take us back to events or ideas previously discussed in the dissertation:

Those of us who lived on Mulvaney Street gave up a neighborhood and a street name for what became Summit Hill Drive. We placed a plaque there celebrating 400 Mulvaney St., the home of my grandparents. Directly up the hill was Mount Zion Baptist Church.

You can imagine my heartbreak when I recently visited Knoxville and went to pay tribute to Mr. and Mrs. Watson, my grandparents; Mr. and Mrs. White, our next-door neighbors; and across the street Reverend and Mrs. Abram, who raised chickens for their eggs; among others, only to be confronted with a square garbage collection bin almost blocking that plaque.

Those who come to what is now another street name can barely see that it was originally Mulvaney Street.

The Cal Johnson Park remains but the old Gem Theatre, the drugstore where we got our ice cream cones between Sunday school and church, as well as the home of Mrs. Black, are all gone.

Is it really too much to ask our hometown to acknowledge if not respect that which we built that is now gone to the ancestors?

Nikki Giovanni, Christianburg, VA

The first piece is a letter to the editor in an August 2016 print of the *Knoxville New Sentinel*, in which author Nikki Giovanni reminds city officials and all of Knoxville that before there was an abandoned plaque on Summit Hill Drive, there were Black people living at 400 Mulvaney Street and the surrounding addresses. In other words, she reminds them that Black people have a history of occupying space in Knoxville. Giovanni calls out the disregard and disrespect with which Black people are often met in Knoxville and leverages her memories of her former neighborhood to suggest that, although street names have changed, Black people occupied spaces in central locations.

Furthermore, Giovanni demands that the city “acknowledge if not respect” that Black people not only occupy but also built places in Knoxville. In addition to highlighting the Black place-making within the local and/or regional context, as Henry Tanner does in *The Banjo Lesson*, Nikki Giovanni illustrates bits and pieces of Black place-making in the context of Black places. Specifically, she mentions, “Reverend and Mrs. Abrum, who raised chickens for their eggs” and “the drugstore where we got our ice cream cones between Sunday school and church” as activities and experiences that made the neighborhood the place she remembers. In the Knoxville of her childhood, a segregated Jim Crow Knoxville, these memories and others gave the Black neighborhood meaning, made it thrive, and ultimately made it a place of Black safety.

Giovanni, in writing this piece and publicizing it in the local newspaper, gives life and permanence to a Black community that no longer exists, claims space for Black people in Knoxville, and forces the city of Knoxville to confront its history of displacing and disrupting Black people and destroying Black places.

Along similar lines as Giovanni's letter to the editor is an entry in the spring 2016 Black Lives Matter-Knoxville newsletter, which was distributed locally:

Knoxville's Black community has no political power. We have no power over what is and what isn't funded in our communities. We often find ourselves fighting for resources that should belong to us. We have historically been kept away from the decision making table and currently have a progressive mayor who confirmed that we have been, and will continue to be, exploited when we are not at the city's public meetings (even though we all know the real decisions are made before and after those public meetings take place)...Ultimately, it doesn't matter what the intentions of those currently in power are. The structure in which they operate is a structure that leaves Black communities, and communities with little to no wealth, out.

The city's plan to redevelop Magnolia Ave is one of the latest efforts that has placed the "interests" of Black folks in the back of the bus.

What good is a beautiful streetscape if we can't afford to live there and don't own any of it?

This city openly prioritizes white hipsters in their plan to redevelop Magnolia and the east side, yet have made no efforts to ensure that the people currently living there wouldn't be priced out and kicked out of their apartments and homes.

Yes, we want the city to invest in our communities and neighborhoods, but we need the power to be able to control it and ensure it works for us.

When gentrification hits, it waters down what little political and economic power that community might have had beforehand and gives it to outsiders who are eager to take what isn't theirs to take.

"Outside investment," "redevelopment," "revitalization," "face lift," and "extension of downtown" are all buzzwords and phrases that cities use that are typically code for meaning "No Blacks and poor people allowed."

We live in a city that has already gentrified and destroyed large portions of the Black community...

In this piece, BLM Knox claims Black ownership of place in Knoxville and challenges the city's efforts to infringe upon that ownership. But what comes through more adamantly about this piece and secures it as a parallel Appalachian story is its resistive nature. As did Giovanni's letter, this statement by BLM Knox represents the resistance of Blacks against racist practices that continuously restrict and control their access to space. In calling out the Appalachian city for its gentrifying practices, BLM Knox boldly and deliberately challenges the victimized image that is usually depicted of Appalachians. Rather than jobless and powerless, whites in Knoxville, in urban Appalachia, are portrayed as decision-makers, powerbrokers, and, most importantly, oppressors who have historically kept Blacks "away from the decision making... placed the 'interests' of Black folks in the back of the bus... prioritize[d] white hipsters in their plan to redevelop" and "gentrif[y] and destroy[] large portions of the Black community." (Black Lives Matter Knox 2016)

This parallel story of Appalachia that is made apparent through a racial analysis not only centers Black Appalachian experiences but also complicates dominant race-neutral understandings of the region that exclude Appalachia from association with structural racism and racist practices, both overt and covert. In the wake of the 2016 election, in which Donald Trump's racist campaign and electoral victory legitimized racist behaviors and the resurgence of white supremacist groups in the heart of what has been termed "Trump country," it is important that these types of parallel stories of Appalachia make their way into the mainstream. Further, white supremacy and racism have always threatened Black safety, necessitating Black places. Understanding Appalachia in this context underscores the relevance of identifying and protecting Chocolate Cities in Appalachia.

Conclusion

Studying Appalachia through the frame of a racial analysis revealed parallel stories that might not otherwise receive adequate attention. This dissertation, however, provides a case study of only Knoxville, an urban space in Appalachia. The region spans from southern New York to northern Mississippi with parallel stories along the way. A racial analysis offers unimaginable possibilities to uncover these stories and further complicate or otherwise alter traditional depictions and understandings of the region. Particularly as it relates to African American experiences in the region, even though the region's Black population is small, it is not insignificant. Since very few research agendas are concerned with understanding this population, there is much research still to be done. Even in Knoxville, this dissertation only scratches the surface in terms of inquiry into Black life and experiences. There are other Black neighborhoods, apart from those directly destroyed by urban renewal, that have been lost and remain largely undocumented. Additionally, there are contemporary issues related to education inequality, displacement of public housing residents, mass incarceration, unemployment, and underemployment that need research attention. Likewise, there are other sites of Black place-making that remain to be explored—specifically the house, the street, and the church. There are intra-racial dynamics at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and generation that must not be ignored. These are just some of the areas to which future research can contribute to develop a more nuanced understanding of the Black experience in local, regional, and national contexts, all of which can in turn lend insight into how we understand places locally, regionally, and nationally.

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Vita

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