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HOW DID WE GET HERE? BLACK PROFESSIONAL WOMEN, PLACE-MAKING AND BELONGING IN PORTLAND, OREGON

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HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Black Professional Women, Place-Making, and Belonging in Portland Oregon

Kim C. Cameron-Domínguez

My dissertation is an examination of what it meant for professional black women transplants to be caught up in the interstices of inter-personal and institutional narratives about race, gender, and class in Portland. I argue that the city benefits from women’s insertion into structures upon which its brand of middle-class livability is dependent. Yet, their labor and complex sense of belonging are not included in historical, social, or political narratives about the city. Between June 2016 and July 2018, I focused on women’s experiences, who were recruited from civic and activist organizations, public events organized for people of color in Portland, and from among my existing friendship circles. I collected data using written surveys, recorded interviews and informal conversations, and participant observations at their workplaces, in their homes and during get-togethers. My research complicates assumptions that black professional women’s class achievement mitigates intersecting forms of oppression. I also demonstrate how contemporary Portland has narrated itself as a predominantly white city by strategizing to marginalize blackness, rather than as a result of its total exclusion. The black population in Portland is historically diverse and the professional women in my study participate in a trajectory of experience where black people have looked for and made opportunity in the city, even when it was not planned for them to do so.
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Introduction

My dissertation focuses on black professional women’s place-making endeavors and belonging in Portland, Oregon. Central to my investigation are the sentiments, articulations, activities and relationships that women, as transplants, pursue in order to create a life that is sustainable. My work is an examination of what it means for black professional woman to be caught up in the interstices of interpersonal and institutional narratives about race, gender and class as well as how they bring their own experiences to bear on those circuits of meanings. At stake is how this labor and black professional women’s sense of belonging is not included in historical, social, or political narratives about the city. I argue that Portland still benefits from women’s insertion into structures upon which its brand of middle-class livability is dependent. My research aim is to convey the importance of black professional women’s lives and experiences in and to Portland, to complicate assumptions about class achievement, particularly its power to mitigates racial and gendered oppression, and to examine city formation as fundamentally racialized and gendered processes.

Departure and Impermanence - before going into the field

Though this study is about black professional women’s belonging in the Portland metropolitan area,¹ the questions that motivated the research took shape around the departures of several black women friends who decided it was not possible

¹ The Portland Metropolitan area includes three counties: Multnomah, Washington, and Clackamas. The city of Portland is located within Multnomah County. Hillsboro, Beaverton, and Tigard are located in Washington County.
to have the good life they desired here. I arrived in Beaverton in 2010 with minimal knowledge that neighboring Portland was a sought-after destination for tourists and job-seekers or that Oregon’s environmental beauty was maintained through a history of racism and exclusion. I had extended family in the state and moving to Oregon appeared an easy transition from California, logistically and emotionally. Moving was not a new experience. In pursuit of my post-secondary degrees, I had long ago migrated from my home in Washington, DC. After a decade away from family, I welcomed being near people in whose faces I could see my lineages. Through that kinship connection, I also became part of a small, but fairly tight-knit community of black families. Very few of the people with whom I interacted lived in Portland. Members of this circle had joined a nations’ tide of creatives and professionals moving to Beaverton, Hillsboro, and Tigard for employment. Several had been recruited or had worked their ways through the ranks at Nike and Intel. Suburban living was convenient to those corporate campuses.

In many ways, our lifestyles were emblematic of the American Dream, replete with nuclear families parented by heterosexual couples. Fathers always worked. Mothers did too, but we had our share of those who stayed at home. We resided in a mix of garden apartments, condominiums, and single-family homes in pseudo-gated communities that were marked by low surrounding walls rather than actual barriers. Our children played on recreational sports teams and, when they were old enough, they took public transportation alone to school. Long streets and intermittent bus-stops separated homes from one another. We came together at the local bowling alley
for our children’s birthday parties, summer backyard barbeques and around the table for Thanksgiving spreads. We were transplants and grateful to the family who took on the work of hosting such a big group.

Our families only dotted the spatial and cultural landscape, however. Gatherings among us were framed by necessity as much as they were by desire. We wanted to see other black people. We wanted our kids to grow up with black friends and adults around them, because we were not guaranteed those encounters as a part of our everyday comings and goings. We were the only black families in our residential neighborhoods. Our aggregate, termed colloquially and affectively as community, was constructed through explicit social practices of planning, calling-in and making space. Race, as an instrument of structural hierarchies that privilege whiteness, forced us to face the limitations of black middle-class desire and consumption.

Scholars have unpacked the construction, unsustainability, and failure of a coherent middle-class at the American Dream’s core. They also provide a rich timeline for its rise and fall. Wall argues that the middle-class identity associated with America emerged in the 1930s as a tensely negotiated post-World War “political consensus” between business, government, labor and civic leadership, and Hollywood to counter European fascism and communism (2008, 7). Berlant highlights “the relation between post-Second World War state/economic practices and certain postwar fantasies of the good life” as embedding desire into the condition of middle-class performance from the mid- to late 20th century (2011, 15). Sassen argues that, during the same period, the structures of attachment that aligned middle-class desire,
consumption practices, and the Dream with one another were enabled by federal investments in “fixed-capital intensity, standardized production, and the building of new housing in cities, suburbs, and new towns” (2014, 17).

Despite its role in preserving “welfare state capitalism” (Brown 2003), the federal government was equally invested in the racial hierarchies that would keep the American Dream unattainable for blacks who were targeted by segregation, policies meant to disenfranchise, and other inequitable practices that forced them to struggle at the social and economic margins. Beginning as early as the 1970’s and marked as a global effect by the late 1980s, racial and class hierarchies were exacerbated in the wake of economic depression, the restructuring of the state apparatus to facilitate privatization, and the reorganization of work from industrial production to a service-sector economy. (Sassen 2014, 32; Dozier 2011; 1834; Harvey 2007, 33). The scope of these shifts affected the poor, working-, middle- and upper class alike, but the degree to which their economic and social well-being were at stake differed greatly. Wage and salary increases skewed significantly towards the top 1 percent of earners (Sassen 2014, 33; Dozier 2011, 1837). For black Americans, this has meant an overall decline in employment that contrasts starkly with the 1950s and 1960s when blacks experienced poverty, but a larger percentage of the population held low- or working class jobs (Higginbotham 2001, 21). This scholarship demonstrates that, for all its projected nationalistic scope and temporal attempts to name the future, the American Dream was finite.
Explicating the stakes for the contemporary black middle-class requires a multi-sited perspective. The American Dream made only marginal space for black people historically, but under neoliberalism, they are further underserved by a contraction in the state’s role in maintaining broad social welfare. Black employees in the manager/professional class, who may have had to overcome economic, educational, racial and gender discrimination to attain their positions, must now also contend with restructured expectations for work life. Black professionals have fewer guarantees of or expectation for lifetime or long-term employment with one company. They experience frequent breaks in employer contributions to retirement and more household moves in order to follow the next work opportunity. Work hours may extend into domestic and private space due to email and other socially mediated forms that create around the clock access between employee and the workplace. Finally, black middle-class professionals continue to experience inequality in hiring, retention and income with white middle-class managers and professionals. In a review of black-white wage gaps and wage inequality, the Economic Policy Institute reports that as of 2015,

“very few African American earn wages that place them among the top 5 percent of all wage earners, where the growth has been concentrated. Only 3 percent of all chief executives are African American, and a disproportionate number of them are employed in the public and private nonprofit sectors, where salaries are lower and more likely to be capped than they are in the private for-profit sector… the hourly wages of the top 5 percent (95th percentile) of black earners was 31.2 percent less than the top 5 percent of white earners...At the 50th percentile (median), blacks earned 26.2 percent less than whites” [Economic Policy Institute 2017, 7]
Framing my dissertation research is the reality that forms of structural and systemic oppression target black women at the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, and class, to name only a few categories. The Institute for Women’s Research Policy reports in the *Status of Black Women in the United States*,

“Black women are also underrepresented in higher paying occupations such as professional occupations and management occupations…[they] experience higher unemployment than all other working women…and experience employment and labor market discrimination…Although Black women’s levels of educational attainment have increased in recent years (National Center for Educational Statistics 2015), Black women remain less likely than White or Asian/Pacific Islander women to have a bachelor’s degree (Hess et al. 2015) …Black women with a bachelor’s degree or higher working full-time, year-round have median annual earnings of $50,000, which is nine percent lower than women of all racial and ethnic groups combined ($55,000).” [DuMonthier, et al. 2017. SOBW-US]

In addition to earning less than white women and men, black professionals of any gender are likely to be criticized or evaluated poorly around workplace behaviors. Wingfield argues that “feeling rules” in the workplace reward white employees’ concerns or dissatisfactions, but target the same type of emotional displays by black workers as threatening and divisive (Wingfield 2010, 259). In settings where soft-skills like communication and teamwork predominate, black professionals who express irritation or frustration may be perceived as undermining the success of projects, colleagues, and the organizational mission. Wingfield and Alston argue that black managers and professionals “may find the ascent [in rank] and rewards negligible, as they are likely to have less responsibility than Whites, supervise primarily other racial minorities, and/or find themselves tracked into submarkets that mostly address racialized concerns” (2014, 276).
When our community gathered, these experiences were evident in people’s talk about “living in Oregon” and about working in organizations dominated by white leadership. In public spaces and on the block, black residents hardly had relationships of more than a passing hello with white neighbors. The black men among us were subject to routine traffic stops by police, and we worried about the time when our adolescents would want their driver’s licenses. I came to learn that these systemic, discursive, and affective dynamics led to impermanence in this community and that corporate opportunities that brought black families to Oregon were also used by some to move away.

The single black women among us pursued those opportunities frequently. They were doing more than following career trajectories. In many cases, women decided to move first and then strategized professionally to make it possible. They sold houses, took their children out of relatively safe, well-performing schools, and negotiated jobs with new teams or different organizations in other cities. These women wanted to move back to the East Coast and Southern parts of the U.S. in order to reconnect with family and networks of support. They wanted to establish themselves in sites where black and brown people lived, but especially where their cultures and cultural products were available. Still, it was not only the strength of attachments elsewhere that drew women away.

[My daughter] was the absolute number one reason that I left. I felt like I saw the writing on the wall and it was the absolute 100% best thing that I ever did educationally for her. She has flourished and has been so affirmed for who she is [in Texas]. She has gotten into the prestigious school and all of the above that I didn’t see happening in Oregon. At all. That was the main driver.
But the other one, I was just tired. I was exhausted because while I did have the success and the house and the things [and] I also had my brothers, I think the self-care that I needed wasn’t happening for me in Oregon. So, it has been bittersweet. There have been some real great things about leaving, but I do miss a lot of people. And I miss my house at times.

Felicia, May 2017

Breaks between economic security and racial and gendered safety have impacted black populations nationally. Not everyone is able to or wants to invest time, money or choice on relocating. In Portland, black working and frontline communities2 expend vast social and politicized will to stay in the northern quadrant of city. Many more have been forced into the suburbs after losing or selling their homes as a result of redline policies, exploitative sub-prime loans, and disinvestment by the city (Gibson 2007). Some may not have the purchasing power of black professionals. The differences between how one moves through suburban space can unfairly burden poor and low-income communities in ways that are costly in both time and financial expenditure. Black professionals with a car, or maybe two, do not have to navigate the precise balance between bus stops or fear that a needed repair might threaten their job.

2 I adopted the term, frontline communities, from interlocutors and environmental professionals of color I know working on the intersection of racial and environmental justice issues and policy. The People’s Climate Organization notes, “Communities of color and low income communities are bearing the brunt of the impacts caused by the interrelated crises of ecology, economy and democracy. These environmental justice frontline communities have a long history of organizing to combat the negative impacts, and are key to providing leadership in building real solutions to achieve climate justice.”
The relationship that I capture between black professional women and the city of Portland could be understood as a partnership. Women can participate in some forms of livability that have come to characterize how the American Dream manifests in this region. There is social and financial capital accrued to professional black women based on the positions they hold within the city’s private and public sectors. Professionals can make choices about how to spend their leisure time, which neighborhoods most reflect the cultures and value they hold dear, and where to expend their intellectual labor and expertise. All the while, Portland surrounds them with the beauty of the Pacific Northwest’s Cascade Mountain range, an extensive transportation system and food culture, and a healthy economy.

However, not all of the black women in my study accessed these amenities of livability. Some commodities were not immediately in reach because women did not view themselves as occupying a singular class identity, nor did they work solely at the behest of capitalist enterprise. Sometimes, women carried forward their parents’ or familial working-class identity, despite their earning potential. At other times, women sought employment in Portland’s non-profit sector over more lucrative option in order to aligned their work with their social values. Finally, over the course of my two-year project, not every woman was employed. Some women used the move to Portland to reimagine and restage themselves personally and professionally (Martin Shaw 2015, 20). There were periods of constraint and consternation that impacted how settled women felt in the city.
Affect and Communicating Racialized and Gendered Space in Portland

Portland is interesting because of the mantra: keep it weird. I don’t think they are talking to black people, specifically. However, there is permission to slip; to be weird. Here, you feel like you are blacker than any place you’ve lived. I feel, in part, like I’m going through a natural evolution [which is] also influenced by place. There are restrictions here, but there’s a current. I can walk with bantu knots and not give a damn.

Sasha, 2017, telephone interview from S.E. MLK

I was walking down the street and a black guy with a white woman were coming toward me. I felt like they expected me to be upset about them being together. I feel like my blackness is always on in Portland. I feel blacker here than anywhere else I’ve lived.

Kathryn 2016, in her residence, NE Portland

During my research, several women articulated that they “felt more black” in Portland than anywhere else they had lived. The frequency of this articulation interested me. I approach it as a feeling structure because it could be used to describe both positive (Sasha) and negative (Kathryn) encounters, but the pattern of its use was to describe a sense that race was the primary frame of interpolation in Portland. Feeling more black is different from the emotions that might be engendered in a situation that is either racist or an affirmation of blackness, like anger or joy. Feeling more black highlights a moment of hyper-visibility in Portland that speaks to assumptions or beliefs about where black women belong or do not belong in a city that becomes a relational figure in their lives. However, the hyper-visibility does not belong to the women alone (Rutherford 2016, 288; Edwards 2012; 224). I explicate it
here as lens for thinking through the relationships, encounters and narratives in which racial and gendered beliefs are communicated, but also how the consequence of those beliefs impact the women in this study. However, it stays with me as a supporting arrangement to explore how and when black women are in simultaneous dialogue with institutional and subjective narratives and meanings.

For example, in the second epigraph that opens this section, one could argue that Kathryn’s perception of what the interracial couple thought of her might be misplaced. However, she was describing an encounter loaded with knowledges recognizable to me and, I would argue, to the couple. First, there is the general belief that black American women resent black men who date white women. Second, notwithstanding competition from women in other racial groups, there is chatter among black Portlanders that the small size of the population and disparate occupational status between black women and black men makes dating a challenge for black women.

It does not matter that Kathryn has a partner. The moment reflects a nearly-out-of-body experience in which Kathryn’s feelings are over-burdened by their function as a stand-in for the social (discursive) and scalar (structural) legibility of blackness as inherently distinct within an American capitalist (affective) political economy. The problem is that this begets experiences in which black women (gender is identified here through the telling devices of negative emotion: being upset), in particular, are supposed to feel inadequate.
The rub is that in an economic system where white, patriarchal society can no longer profit from enslaved black labor, exploitation has to persist under other political and social guises. Though Sasha and Kathryn describe very different scenarios in which they feel more black, their interpellation of themselves in relation to the perception of others arises out of their knowledge that blackness and womanhood are put together and situated into a social hierarchy designed to communicate waning degrees of relational value. Kathryn speaks to this straight on, but even Sasha’s sense of empowerment wearing her bantu knots reflects the unspoken reality that they are not accepted everywhere and, therefore, she is not accepted everywhere.

I found that while the women I talked with were thoughtful and critical about how race and gender make them legible, there was a difference in how the categories were addressed. Few women named gender or womanhood as a category with structural significance for how they lived in Portland unless asked directly. Gender was implied through contingent practices associated with racial identity and performances. However, when gendered processes were spoken of, they were part of workplace encounters where black womanhood was used as a provocation to control and police behaviors. In Chapter 2, I take up the intersection of race and gender in the shift from manual/household to office/professional work that black women experienced in the 1970s. Chapter 3 focuses solely on black professional women’s intersectional experiences at work in Portland.
This approach extends to the analysis of place. I want Portland to show up in this dissertation as something other than a territorially bounded space. There is, admittedly, a bit of anthropomorphizing as I work through Portland as a representation and reflection of the desires, descriptions, and designs of human effort at personal, institutional, and ideological registers. It is not the same everywhere and to everyone. I inscribe Portland with the heat of human struggle and complexity through an understanding of what the city is to black professional women as they navigate the often unexamined racial and gendered underpinnings of livability.

**Research Methods and Positionality**

Beginning in June 2016, I asked 19 black women professionals living in Portland, Hillsboro, and Tigard to share how they make a place for themselves. My primary interlocutors were recruited from women in my existing friendship circle, from civic and activist organizations to which I belong and encounters at community and public events organized for people of color. I also benefited from the snowball method as participants would recommend others for me to include. I documented their stories and experiences using written surveys, recorded interviews and informal conversations, participant observations at their workplaces, their homes, and at informal get-togethers.

Before beginning informal conversations and participant observations, I met each interlocutor for an introductory interview. Prior to meeting, I sent each person a survey. There were places for women to indicate race, gender, education, occupation,
as well as previous travel experiences, whether or not they had done research on Portland before moving, and their feelings about the city since arrival. During the interview that followed, I asked women again how they identified in terms of race and gender. Everyone identified as cis-gendered. One woman identified as queer. Woman who identified as partnered were with cis-gendered men.

On the other hand, women were linguistically kaleidoscopic about being black, using descriptions such as “just black,” “Caribbean, but black as a political identity,” “biracial and learning about my black side,” or biracial “and being estranged” from the non-black side. During interviews, residence and occupation in Portland, but also familial working backgrounds that coded representations of a black identity as cultural practices. The social norms gleaned from growing up in the U.S. or transmigrating between the US and another nation were situational knowledges that facilitate and, at other times, complicated a singular identity of black womanhood.

This complexity sat well within the scope of my research. I approach blackness and womanhood as representations of our struggle with and against multi-sited forms of institutional power. Regardless of whether the categories emanate from us or institutions themselves, they are distinctions that have been produced by systems and structures of exploitation. Place-making and belonging are two sites where I explore the relationship between institutional and subjective understandings of the self. Both institutions and people are embedded in histories of racial discourse and practices. The varied experiences with blackness in familial relationships, in
other work cultures, and in travel gave women criteria with which to assess Portland’s suitability to the life they wanted. These came into conflict with the logics of race, gender, place, and concerns about authenticity that were operational in the city prior to women’s arrival. The encounter between blackness and its many discursive distinctions is critical to an overarching effort to reveal the social constructedness of race and gender (Fields and Fields 2012; Ali 2006).

In most cases, women chose the pseudonyms that I used for them in this dissertation. I decided on a name when others did not care to do so. I also used pseudonyms for family members, coworkers, and places of employment, whether private or public institutions. I sparingly employed composite descriptions when 1) there is evidence of clear patterns of behaviors, beliefs, and experiences and 2) I had some concern that confidentiality might be breached with harmful consequence.

Despite all of its claims to a certain cultural cosmopolitanism, Portland is a small city and the self-identified “black” population held at 7% throughout my research (Gibson 2007, 8). People work and socialize in varying, but sometimes overlapping circles of professional and personal association. This is particularly true of black professionals who engage in racial and social justice organizing, serve on boards and committees, and provide service outside their primary workplace for Portland’s broader communities of color. The use of pseudonyms and composite ethnographic data is an effort to provide additional privacy for the women. What will remain un-masked are women’s occupations and, in some cases, their job titles as I analyze relational
dynamics around black women’s work- and community-related duties and between themselves, family, friends, colleagues, and allies.

Women’s actual participation contracted or expanded dependent upon whether they moved-on or moved-in, figuratively in terms of the research and/or literally in terms of residency in Portland. In the two years it has taken to complete formal fieldwork and write-up the final version of the dissertation, several of the women remain or became friends. I communicate regularly with four women into the final writing of the dissertation. There were many interactions that I chose or indicated that I would not disclose ethnographically. Not every woman that participated in the research continued to do so over the complete two-year project. A few women moved away from Portland. I never saw the moving in or out among interlocutors as ethnographically challenging. Movement is conceptually important to me and, also, a key referent for women as they explained how it was (im)possible to put down roots in Portland. Felicia, who appears in an epigraph above, skyped with me from her new home in Dallas to talk about departures.

I consider the anthropological focus on thick description and a feminist politic of engagements with power to be leading tenets in the conduct of this research (Barnes 2016; Ali 2006; Geertz 1973, 13). Not every person or their experience is included in the dissertation given space constraints. For those who are represented, I provide a deep dive into these women’s articulations, feelings, and their observations. There are three over-arching reasons for this. First, as a methodological imperative, I adhere to an ethically-based obligation and responsibility for the work of
representation and interpretation. It is also salient for me as an urban anthropologist, who seeks more than a political economic analysis of the city. I use interlocutor in this research rather than informant because I view the women in this study as participants in the “construction and propagation of myths, identities, magical thinking, and imagined communities and public” in and about Portland rather than people providing objective descriptions (Brash 2006, 342-44).

Second, ethnographic thickness is a negotiation of power, intimacy, and trust between my interlocutors and me as an explicitly intersectional project of addressing power and differential social relations in knowledge production. As black women in this study described their actions, thinking, and feeling, they often included analyses that came out of their own disciplinary fields and areas of expertise. During the research process, similar ways of speaking and thinking about issues facilitated conversations and reduced, but did not erase, the objectification and experiential distance between myself and interlocutors (Ali 2006, 475; Hill Collins 1999). After conversations, women would often thank me for a “safe space” to talk or say that it felt like therapy. For me, it often encoded my work with a communal feeling. Many knew from their own professional experiences what institutional and personal stakes I had tied up in the production of this dissertation. I was well aware that this research project would not have been possible without their help. The desire for connection and the responsibility for honoring it well persisted for me through the alone and, sometimes, lonely time of analysis and writing. I negotiate the power that I possess around which material to include in the finished project by giving as much space to
women’s exact words as I can, rather than weave short quotes throughout my analysis.

I do not seek to represent every black woman’s experience in Portland, but I am confident that the stories here will read familiar to many living here and elsewhere. My desire to understand and think through race and gender as it relates to space in Portland joins the efforts of other scholars and artists in town, as well as non-profit organizations and private sector interests in the city. Our agendas, questions, and conclusions may or may not align, but I am enthusiastic about being part of a larger conversation in which those concepts are being taken up for critical inquiry.

**Going into the Field/Portland as a site:**

I center my investigation in Portland in order to assess issues of mobility and access. My assumption was that black women who stayed in Oregon also wanted to experience forms of recognition and belonging, both professional and non-professional. Starting in the city and moving outward as was necessitated by women’s stories and place-making seemed the best way to capture a more holistic picture of their lives. At the start of my research, I looked to Portland to serve as it is billed: a city guaranteeing lifestyle maximization and career opportunity. I use Portland as a focal point into and through which one could access diverse landscapes: the physical (from the built environment to the natural areas of the Gorge and Mt. Hood, and the Oregon Coast), the social (cultural, racial, and class diversity among the city’s quadrants, neighborhoods, and urban/suburban divide), the professional and the
interpersonal (workplace and work-culture, family, friends, and community, activism and leisure). The project is to examine if the brand that circulated in the city, but also nationally held for professional black women.

I chose not to conduct research only in the suburbs because I did not want to run-up against the spatial and lifestyle disconnectedness that plagued the women who had departed already. One can find strip-malls with low-budget stores, huge family-friendly restaurants, movie complexes, and car-dealerships in fair proximity in downtown Beaverton, but the overall built environment is spread out. The farther one goes increases the likelihood that you will run into low-density natural and farming areas. These areas are maintained through Portland’s Urban Growth Boundary, a contested legislative move that assures that development of the city does not exceed certain spatial boundaries. In the suburbs, one is likely to encounter more cars than people. I wanted to know how women made multiple connections in the city and I decided that required more space.

I chose to center my fieldwork in Portland and work outwards to Beaverton, Hillsboro, and Tigard as was necessary to track women’s place-making. This meant I had to go into the field. I moved to Portland to experience the significance that is given to the city’s walkability, the infrastructural support for cyclists, and the varied forms of public transportation. I wanted access in order to better understand how women’s use of various transportation options may speak to the ability to choose or mark a difference between what they possess in social and/or financial capital.
Theoretical Groundings

I discuss below how feminist scholarship impacts my work. Specifically, I use an intersectional analysis to examine and address the consequences of how black womanhood is communicated as and through institutional discourse. I approach this as a contemporary artifice in the Portland workplace (Chapter 3), but I also see it as a racial project intrinsic to city-formation as a whole (Chapter 1 and 2). As I pursue those analyses, I also utilize the theory of communicable processes (Briggs 2009) and urban/transnational anthropologists’ approach to branding. I rely on communicability to talk about the ways that racialized discourses permeate and delineate the city, commercial and investment banking, real estate, and even social initiatives as spheres of power in Portland. Those institutions of power have supported or funded key projects of city planning upon which the brand and the ethos of Portland’s livability have been constructed. They also benefit the most when professionals, to whom livability is truly meant to communicate, make Portland their home.

Intersectionality

For the dissertation, I highlight those scholars whose work guided my analysis of the reach and limits of choice in black professional women’s lives in Portland, and for a deeper ethnographic examination of what compels black women in their professional and personal lives (Williams 2018; Barnes 2016; Martin Shaw 2015;

My research contributes to intersectional theory by demonstrating how systemic racism, gendered divisions of labor, and economic exclusion have targeted black women in Portland to assure their insertion into capitalist economies (Ruth Simms Hamilton 2007; E. Hannah Branch 2011; Daniel Barnes 2016). I also center black professional women as producers of much needed expertise and quotidian knowledge as a way to speak to and unpack their locations within those economies (Martin Shaw, interpersonal communication, 2018; Harrison 1995). This obliges me to attend to black women’s descriptions of their reality, their practices of resistance, as well as their feelings of uncertainty, ambivalence, and (dis)respectability as sources of critical insight (Durham, et al 2013; Cox 2007; Brash 2006, 342; Auyero and Swistún 2009). Feminist perspectives on affect picks up on ways that labor and emotions are gendered and racialized as part of the assemblage of societal life in America (Williams 2018; Berlant 2011). I provide a nuanced, ethnographic examination of race and how it jockeys with gender as women negotiate their own understanding of American hierarchies while also contending with the social and cultural manifestations of those hierarchies in Portland. My research looks at this dynamic in several scenarios, such as histories with family, the intimate space of friendship, and the professional space of the workplace. Though intersectionality and affect, I propose that professional black women’s achievements, feelings of inadequacy and success, desire to push through difficult times or engage in self-care
are important radical acts (William, 2018). I am not ready to call the effects of the system, as yet capable of capitalizing on black women’s efforts, fait accompli (Williams, et al 2016; Berlant 2011, 686-7).

Communicability

Against the reality of black people and life in the city, Portland’s rapid development coheres, with exigence, upon being known as the whitest city in America. Black experience here may be invisibilized for those located outside. However, within the city, I contend it is not absence that is communicated, but the expectation about where and how blackness should show up in the city. The consequential violence of gentrification is in the ability to move bodies about, to disrupt affective and functional connections with place, and to create memories of what was and could be framed by loss. The racial and class implication of gentrification are shared by other spatializing processes.

Through communicability (Briggs 2009) I trace the making of these processes and the way power is generative of and generated to the entities that control them. In his ethnographic case study, Briggs argued that the Venezuelan healthcare industry was created and is sustained by the care that it gives, the data it collects, and the knowledge that it produces, particularly as it regards indigenous people and communities. Structural and systemic forms of racism and discrimination reduce the ability for communities to combat certain maladies. Yet, indigenous peoples are

3 Native, Asian, Latinx and, even, poor white populations get invisibilized behind this refrain.
characterized as having a biological propensity towards illness and demonstrating an incapacity in the areas of childrearing, family wellness, and other forms of conventional sociability by medical professionals, insurance companies, federal and privatized healthcare programs. This further encodes indigenous people as unsuccessfully assimilated and, more so, lacking the racial and cultural attributes to do so.

To that end, the institutionalization of the healthcare industry is achieved and maintained through 1) the process of objectifying indigeneity as a type of racialized and medicalized knowledge over which a mélange of professionals can claim expertise with state funding and support, 2) the validation of the industry as sphere of power capable of “distinguish[es] sanitized citizens from unsanitary subjects” through the production and dissemination of specialized language, medical reports and forms, occupational ranks and structures, and 3) through procedural compliance and rational governance as an arbiter of the state (2009, 274). Brigg’s theory of communicability traces the concrete links between the healthcare industry and the state, and explores how indigenous bodies are exploited discursively in order to maintain those links.

I employ the theory of communicability in order to unpack the institutionalization of diversity, equity, and inclusion in some Portland workplaces, and examine how black women professionals with expertise in this field are fitted into hierarchical structures. Legal obligations, external funding, and concerns about personnel diversity and productivity motivate private and public sectors to implement diversity management and development solutions. As these terms and practices travel
up chains of power, they help to create specific, and specialized institutional spheres in Portland that determine where and how these conversations happen. Significantly, the racialized and gendered knowledge that is the material of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion discourse give legitimacy to the institutions themselves for having command of the knowledge and language. Black women professionals in this line of work emerge as both the purveyors and targets of this process.

**Branding**

Branding is a focal point of urban and transnational anthropologists who are concerned with postindustrial urbanization and the neoliberalization of cities, in which financial, real estate, and political interests merge to drive increased competition and privatization of space (Brash 2012 in Peterson & McDonogh; Gibson, 2007; Harvey 2001). Cities are responding to an increasingly flexible, mobile, and global work force, and the goal of urban planners, and banking, business, and real estate interests is to “woo the middle and upper classes back to the central city” (Gibson 2007, 1). In order to do this, city leadership must first envision who the member of the middle and upper classes are: professionals, creatives, and corporate elites. Second, they focus on the lifestyle needs of that middle- and upper-class. This entails “revitalizing” infrastructure, improving parks and streets, and increasing available housing that operate around “complex market nodes” where everything one needs, from a barber to new iPhone, can be had within a walkable distance (Rotenberg in Peterson & McDonogh 2012, 37). These strategies inevitably raise
housing prices, which put the areas and amenities out of daily reach for most working and lower-class populations. Third, in order to be competitive as a city on the national (and sometimes global) stage, narratives and images go outward, but they rely on local instantiations of social, cultural, and economic opportunities to be attractive.

Portland fits this schema well. New Season stores settle in and feature expensive locally-sourced organic produce, mixed-use development gets built in a blink of an eye, and the walkable Tillikum Bridge emerges. Those infrastructural developments are part of the neoliberal protocol for grooming the city’s landscapes and residents’ connections to it through an ethos of convenience and walkable streets. This is the brand that gets communicated about Portland through magazines, in commercials, and to aspiring job seekers and weekend adventurers. What gets left out or, better yet, rationalized as collateral damage in the wake of progress is the displacement of black residents by white residents in the Albina District of Northeast Portland (Burke and Jeffries 2016; Gibson 2007, 6; Bureau of Planning 1993; June 2017 interview with Dr. James Harrison, professor emeritus, Portland State University). The ethnographic focus of this project does not take up the activism of or challenges facing the long-term black population that reside in or have been excluded from that area. However, I put their history into a broader discussion of patterned racialized discourse at the level of city governance as fertile ground out of which Portland’s brand of livability has emerged as unexamined representation of whiteness.
Overall, my contribution to investigations at the intersection of race, gender, and class is about unpacking all forms of inequality. I contend with the complexity of access and capital that my informants possess, on one hand, and the way that challenges to their expertise and professional authority are racialized and gendered, on the other. Despite popular critiques of respectability politics, gains made in education, and a relative narrowing of occupational segregation between black and white women (Branch 2011), black women are still burdened by an oppressive legacy of suspicion regarding their fit for the jobs they hold (Barnes, 2016, Harvey Wingfield 2015). While this small class of professional black women in Portland may live more comfortably and have more influence than poor or lower-income women, it is not guaranteed. The women in my study do not come from legacies of multi-generational wealth and their employment and access to capital may come with responsibilities and obligations that makes articulations of their privilege relative. I argue that what binds them together with black women in other economic strata, however differentially, are the ways that racialized language, behaviors and beliefs are used to target the professionals’ abilities rather than critique the structures or processes around them. This is consistent with historical efforts that simultaneously capitalize upon and undervalue black women’s labor; leaving them socially and economically vulnerable in comparison to white men and women as well as black men.

I join the analytical potential of intersectionality with theories of affect, labor, and communicability to contribute to analyses of place and space as well. These
theoretical and methodological locations assist in my explication of how black professional women encounter regulatory power in Portland. I demonstrate through ethnographic examinations how race and gender are weaponized through workplace emotions. When white co-workers vocalize stereotypical imagery about black professional women they also circulate their feeling into the workplace. If their feelings are privileged over both black women’s feeling and work, then institutional culture and characteristics of acceptable professionalism become simultaneous with articulations of white comfort. Black women may find themselves isolated and professionally constrained though their performance, behaviors, and language are not actually reflective of the narratives circling about them. The onus, however, is on black women to strategize and navigate in the workplace in ways that are never truly recognized.

**Chapter Overview**

In chapter 1, I argue that the ubiquity of whiteness in Portland is constructed through racialized discourse in city planning and reports that rely on statistical data. To support this argument, I rely on previous scholarship about Portland to provide a concise history of black residency in Oregon, starting with the impact of 19th century ordinances that legalized racial exclusion and ending with the late 20th century to account for the segregation and eventual displacement of the long term black population of the Albina District. I also demonstrate that against those historical processes, the black Portland experience has been one of various forms of movement
and emplacement to which black migrant labor and entrepreneurship has contributed from its inception.

I follow that history with an examination of two Portland city plans to suggest that complete black exclusion was never the city’s goal. I focus on the 1912 Greater Portland Plan and the 1973 Model Cities Program Third Action Year Extension plan. I read them as key artifacts of racialized knowledge produced by the city in order to legitimate it as a site of regulatory power over its citizens. I argue that the City of Portland built itself into a suite of bureaucratic entities in partnership with the federal government. The interpretation of racialized knowledge about black residents in the Albina district as objective knowledge (statistical data, tables, budgets, summaries, and proposals) had less impact on improving their lives than it fueled the city government ability to put itself forward as a social tolerant and politically progressive city. The proposal for economic and structural intervention launched legislation about the use of land that would pick up motion in the 1980s and 1990s. I show how blight and crime attributed to Albina in the 1970s city plans racialized the region, but also rationalized leaving it out of early efforts to develop and market a green alternative to the suburban sprawl, automobile culture, and highways commutes that framed economic growth in other cities. I argue that a contemporary ethos of livability obscures the fact that legislative and infrastructural projects have benefitted gentrification and hastened black displacement.

Both the history of the black population of the Albina District and the analysis of the city plans serves as a discursive backdrop to the arrival, belonging and place-
making endeavors of the women in my study. I argue for a place in this history for contemporary professional transplants to the city, specifically as participants in a history of mobility, accommodations of regional and class difference, and community- and place-making. I demonstrate that my research is the starting point for carving out that space in the anthropological literature.

Chapter 1.5 is a Fieldnote Interlude on the Everyday Politics of Recognition. In it, I describe an encounter between a black woman and myself in NW Portland. I describe different aspects of seeing and recognition that constitute visibility, as an affirmation and as a politic, for me as a black woman in Portland. I show how the woman I greet participates similarly. I provide an analysis as to why these ways of seeing are necessary in the moment of the meeting surrounded by white pedestrians. I suggest that the affective displays of emotions, bodily comportment, culturally inclusive language are the practice of carving out space that black women must do for themselves in Portland. It is not promised or guaranteed in any other way. The interlude is an ethnographic moment, but also a poetic event that transition into Chapter 2, where I ask how did black women get to Portland in the first place.

In chapter 2, I argue that as a brand, livability continues to fail the black professional women who move to the city. Their belonging processes are ambivalent as they come to terms with the way racial and gendered ideologies permeate community- and place-making. I outline the character of black women’s work through the 19th and 20th century, with specific attention on the 1970s when black women experienced a major shift from household/domestic labor to non-household
work. This laid an occupational foundation for young women in the 1980s and 1990s to imagine mobility to include travel, not just changes in social and economic status. I also make a case for the importance of including black American women who travel in the scholarship on migration and urban/transnational anthropology. I introduce two ethnographic vignettes focus on the social significance of good jobs, the ambivalence that plagues arrival, and a wistful account of other places as part of place-making in Portland. Through these moments, I view the women in my study as continuous with black, diasporic and migratory pursuit of a good life. Yet, I marking them on the physical landscapes that they traverse because their experiences traveling through and between sites has a deep impact for how they narrate the significance of blackness in their lives.

Chapter 2.5 is another Fieldnote Interlude. In it, I give full account of a participant observation where black people were invited, explicitly, to talk about their experiences living in the city. The diversity of black Portland—gender, working- and middle-class, ethnic and national background, generational—was on full display. I put it between Chapters 2 and 3 because it highlights diverse understanding of belonging, but also the diverse experiences that black women can have at similar axis of oppression. The interlude also demonstrates the different experiences some black men and black women transplants have in the city, as well as how misrecognition exists between the two. Finally, I utilize the interlude as a segue to Chapter 3 because assumed racial affinity between transplants and Portland-born black people is called to task over available work opportunities.
Chapter 3 centers the experiences of black professional women in the workplace (Hill Collins 1990). I focus on woman who are overrepresented as professionals in diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in Portland. I explore how black women’s voices can be marginalized while they hold positions of influence. I am especially concerned with the ways that the speech and behavior of black professionals are policed as stereotypical and, thus, ensnarl women in the very structures they were hired to change. I continue an examination that views whiteness in Portland as a communicable force, not only a demographic one. Specifically, I demonstrate how whiteness in the workplace is perceived as daily business and, therefore, invisibilizes the inclusive, racial equity, and social just work that black professional women labor to see come to fruition.
So, that’s what really got us to Portland. It felt like Portland could probably fit most of what we needed. A little bit of everything. A little bit of diversity. A little bit of affordability. You know, a real connection to nature. Kind of still close to the coast. Seemed like a smart place. Seemed to have the values that we espoused. So, that’s what got us to Portland. It was my idea that I would come here and find it easy to integrate into the community.

*When I got here that was a different experience. Yeah, on every level.*

*Jesse at her home, inner Southeast*

**Chapter 1: They Did Not Plan for Us**

Jesse’s initial perception of Portland’s bounty is shared by many. People with generational ties, aspiring residents, city officials, urban developers, business owners, and advertisers all lend account to Portland’s brand as the most livable and green city in the nation. The ideals of livability have been pursued through an intentional effort to make and market Portland as invested in a people-centered urban lifestyle that is connected structurally and ideologically to the natural environment. The food and entertainment industries work hard toward establishing a provincial cosmopolitan air that focuses on locally produced fare whose preparation or technique can hold its own among other first cities. Portland’s claim to innovation in business and a stable employment sector intentionally seek “young, college educated” professionals from across the nation and globe (Jurjevich, Schrock, and Kang 2017). It is also the site of migration for college students, workers in the service industry, and foreign nationals of varying economic and citizenship backgrounds.

At the same time, Portland persists—like any American city—in the failure to meet the needs of all of its residents. The various claims that it makes of distinction
often manifest in contemporary forms of class selection that occupy discursive and structural space with older racial and social arrangements, thus, setting the stage for conflicts between city inhabitants. For example, Portlanders of varying backgrounds colloquially refer to new transplants as stressing the boundaries of the built-environment. Developers, on the other hand, vie for transplants’ rental and mortgage dollars. Property owners on the outskirts of the urban growth boundary protest urban voters’ sway over the use and development of their land. City officials find the issue of homelessness to be an ever increasing and more difficult challenge to resolve. The generation gap widens as entertainment venues bustle with 20 and 30 year olds, leaving aging and under-age Portlanders with fewer places that cater to their needs.

However, one of the most egregious contests over rights to the city is between long-term black Portlanders and the combined interests of the private and public sector. It is a contest in which the city and business fostered a pattern of underdevelopment and marginalization that significantly impacts Portland’s black population’s experiences of livability. This chapter provides historical background for how that contest arose in order to demonstrate what kinds of spatial and racial logics of place confronted Jesse upon arrival.

I will utilize primary sources, scholarship, and ethnographic accounts to address the discursive assemblage of three overlapping issues. First, I offer a streamlined history of black residency in Portland from the last nineteenth through the late twentieth century. Second, I will discuss two city planning projects to show how a legacy of economic and spatial disorganization targeted at the black population in
Albina is obscured through official language and statistical data. Finally, I explore how these developments are obscured within Portland’s brand, which melds universal livability to the whiteness of the city, and how that resonates beyond the boundaries of the city to some aspiring residents.

My goal is to lay out the historical and conceptual groundwork for the rest of the dissertation on black professional women’s occupational lives and place-making labor. In this chapter’s epigraph, the discrepancy between what Jesse imagines the city will provide and what she encounters echoes for all of the women in this study. The city of Portland built itself as a livable city on the back of exclusionary practices targeted at black residents, specifically. Situating the discrepancy between black professionals’ experience in Portland’s history allows me to show how they, relatively advantaged by contemporary labor market trends, go about making space in a city that was neither planned for them as black women nor guarantees the kind of support system they desire as transplants.

**Political Expectations and Spatial Aspirations**

In the following sections, I discuss two Portland city plans that offer direction as to how the city should create connections between people’s lived experience and ideals associated with the environmental protections and economic growth. I also argue for their interpretation as racial scripts that reinforce the marginalization of black populations through the way that language about race is either avoided or presented as objective data. They are the 1912 Greater Plan for Portland and the
1973/74 Model Cities Program Third Action Year Extension Plan. My interests in these documents are as artifacts of institutional expertise through which knowledge about space is communicated. I want to convey the importance given to the use of space as representative of Portland’s ability to prosper as a city and how race as a narrative construction informs how residents are pulled in as participants or are excluded from the process.

Briggs’ theory of communicability (2009) names the state and state funding as critical forces in the production of institutional knowledge. His ethnographic research centers on indigenous Venezuelans, particularly mothers, who are caught up in processes of medicalization. Briggs critiques the obscurity that is imposed on them in the healthcare system, but he is concerned also with the way the Venezuelan healthcare system becomes an industry using indigenous Venezuelans as objects for and targets of institutional knowledge. He argues that communicability, as a process, invisibilizes how knowledge (racial, class, gendered), collected in encounters with vulnerable people, becomes objective, universal, and prescriptive as it makes its way through administrative and bureaucratic spheres. Of particular importance are the appearance of boundaries between institutional spheres, i.e., one agency versus another, and the exchanges and collaborations between them. Utilizing a theory of communicability would mean tracking how discourses of expertise encode “infectious messages and ideologies” and providing analyses for how and to what consequence official messages about vulnerable populations ‘find audiences and locate them socially and politically” in the everyday (Briggs 2009, 274).
As support for the ethnographic and for the centrality of language within the “messages and ideologies” of communicable processes, I turn to Christensen (2002) and Field and Fields (2012), respectively. Comparing fieldwork data from children’s conversations with one another and with adults in England and Denmark, she demonstrates both the erasure and reciprocity of children’s emplaced knowledge in adult spatial knowledge of risk, security and discourses of safe passage. In her article, she emphasizes the value of ethnographic work with children’s intuitive and experiential understanding of place, termed emplaced knowledge. Christensen joins Briggs in giving attention to processes and false distinction between emplaced and spatial/objective knowledge. In this chapter and chapter 2, I find useful her mapping of emplaced knowledge into rationale considerations of time and space as indicative of maturity and adult behaviors. Adults in this framework are analogous to Briggs’ professionals and are constructed by access to and communication of institutionally-recognized parlance. I will argue in chapter 2, that professionals’ emplaced racial and gendered knowledge is necessary for survival in Portland, but it also matters for which occupations they have chosen and how that work is interpreted as meaningful.

K. Fields and B. Fields (2012) investigate how race, a “conception or doctrine” of social inequality is masked as natural and has come to stand in for a “world of experiences” through practices, utterances, and written language. They argue that racecraft describes the,“shorthand [that] transforms *racism*, something an aggressor *does*, into *race*, something the target *is*, in a sleight of hand that is easy to miss. Consider the statement ‘black Southerners were segregated because of their skin color’—a perfectly natural sentence to the ears of most Americans, who tend to overlook the weird causality. But in that
sentence, segregation disappears as the doing of segregationists, and then, in a puff of smoke—paff—reappears as a trait of only one part of the segregated whole.” [Fields and Fields 2012, 17]

In this quote, the use and positioning of the preposition “because” in this sentence makes all the difference in constructing race as an ontological category for “black Southerners.” If we accept the sentence as written, Fields and Fields argue that what we accept the belief-assumption-knowledge 1) that blackness is the cause of bad things, 2) that blackness is a condition of the blood, bone and sinew, and 3) the people who are affected by this condition, therefore, possess the germ of their own oppression. Read from this perspective, blackness is faulty and black people are at fault for what happens to them, in this case being segregated. Racecraft is the un-interrogated belief in some-thing objective about race so that the cultural and racial script gets re-presented over and over in categorical certainty. It is the difference between, “black Southerners were segregated because of their skin color” and one that takes more time, but is critical for unpacking relations of power in which racial constructions are embedded. I offer the following as an alternative, which I believe is aligned with Fields and Fields argument for making apparent what racecraft dissimulates: White Southern segregationists created hierarchal categories of race and commensurate systems of control in order to persist in their exploitation of black Southerners’ labor.
I find this exercise necessary as a model, but also a politic that is at the core of the production of this research. Fields and Fields authors stress that readers not confuse racecraft either for race or racism. Racecraft is the mundane belief that race is a biological or, at least, embodied distinction that is immanent and immutable. They take social and biological scientists to task for reinforcing these “folkloric” categories in our explanation and presentation of scientific knowledge, thus reproducing the “infectious and ideological messages” with which Briggs is concerned.

I take these scholars’ approaches into my analysis of the 1912 Greater Plan for Portland and the 1973/74 Model Cities Program Third Action Year Extension Plan. My goal is to unpack the discursivity of officialdom in order to trace the linkages and delinkages between space, place, and race and the characteristics associated with a good life in Portland. The plans produced by city-state-federal partnerships operate as objective data and empirical descriptions, but they are also power-laden, hegemonic forms of desire. Admittedly, they represent a small example of the exhaustive, important works that city officials, urban planners, developers, civic and community leaders and residents have engaged in over century or more of the Portland’s

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4 My research, defined as intellectual knowledge and institutionally-recognized scholarship, falls under some of the power relations addressed by the authors in this literature review. Telling this history has been difficult because my overall research project is not about Albina, and race and blackness are called forward to do an inordinate amount of work, as Fields and Fields argue. I do not want to be exploitative and so have relied heavily on the knowledge of those with deeper ties and more research into the community. I have retold what they know and done so gratefully, with care and with appropriate citations and acknowledgement. However, my argument is that Portland would not be what it is without Albina because what happened/s there is as much a part of the systemized, city-making process as it is about the experiential identities and cultural relations in that specific district. To that end, I want to show how race works through place because it has consequences for how my interlocutors’ (and I) enter and make home in Portland.
existence. I do not present them to forecast from a technical or design point of view. However, given the privilege associated with text and language, the reach and impact of institutional knowledge, I argue that the plans can be assessed around hypotheses, findings, and language used, and what relationships of causality are revealed or obscured in disparate relationship of power.

**Portland’s Black Populations: brief history 1840-1970**

Portland was incorporated as a city of Oregon in 1851. Its early industry was based in trade, particularly wheat, lumber, and paper. That economy and the business district that grew up around it was both motivated and supported by the city’s location at the meeting space between the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. It was joined by sister cities, Albina and East Portland, to become a unified city in 1891. The 1905 Lewis & Clark Expedition put Portland on the map, literally and figuratively, for many people. It grew to a population of 200,000 in 1910 from only 800 in 1851 (Fortner 2007, 7). Black people had been in the state of Oregon as free and enslaved labor since the 1700s. The total population was never large, but by the 1900s, most were driven to the city because of better work opportunities and because the racial ordinances of exclusion made rural areas dangerous for them (Burke and Jeffries 2016; Moreland 2013, 7; McLagan 1980).

These constraints did not apply to white people in Portland. During the early twentieth century, the patriarchs of Portland’s business families held great influence in the political, banking and civic spheres. MacColl (1979) wrote admiringly of them,
but also documented the multiple ways in which they exerted undue influence in city affairs through the first half of the twentieth century. As major property owners, investors in the city infrastructure, members of Portland’s Realty Board, and owners of private business, utility services and newspapers, their concerns shaped the spatial and social contours of the city from almost every angle.

**Race, Space and Place: over-planning how to under-serve the black community**

White leadership used public policy and social neglect to divide the city based on racial attributes and class categories. When Oregon was only a territory, white property-owning leadership established sun-down laws which severely restricted black presence, mobility and visibility. In 1840, commensurate with statehood, Oregon further impeded black residency through the establishment of three ordinances of exclusion. The first ordinance outlawed slavery and consequently required the removal of any enslaved black man and woman over the age of eighteen from the state within two and three years, respectively. The stated goal was to avoid the internal conflict dividing north and southern states in other parts of the nation, but the ordinance also allowed white Oregonians to solidify control over land and the direction of the economy. A second ordinance denied rights of entry to free blacks who did not already live in the state. The third gave all blacks persons, free or enslaved, forty days to leave the state. This last ordinance was ratified in the 1857 Constitution. While white Oregonians prohibited slavery in the state to deny black residency, it is important to note that mobility and public accommodations for Native
and Asian populations were also negatively affected (Burke and Jeffries 2016; Gibson 2007; PBUB 1993, 4; McLagan 1980; MacColl 1979; Portland Development Commission Strategic Plan 2015-2020).

Black people remained in Oregon, notwithstanding these prohibitions and attendant punishments. Most of Oregon’s black population settled within the Portland city limits by 1900 and constituted less than 1% of the total population. Black Portlanders were a diverse community from the start. While there were long-term residents who were the descendants of free and enslaved people, black migrants from other parts of the nation came throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Moreland (2013) and McLagan (1980, 148) document the early success that some black families and civic organizations had in accumulating private property. This was no small feat in a city where land and land use was at the center of white Portlanders’ profit interest as well as their political and social identity. In the early part of the twentieth century, there were no restrictions on where blacks could live. Families “scattered within an area from SW Montgomery to NW Kearney and from the river west to 12th street (North Burnside district)” (PBUB 1993, 16). Portland public schools had been desegregated since 1872 and the city even hired its first black policeman in 1894 at the behest of the black members of the New Port Republican

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5 Blacks who did not comply were threatened with and received whipping, fines, and being hired out as labor at public auction (PBUB 1993)
Club (McLagan 1980, 93). A small class of professionals, entrepreneurs, and tradesmen, as well as domestic workers eventually settled around Union Station.

Many of the black middle- and laboring class worked for the electric railway that served the suburban areas of metropolitan Portland and Washington. Black men were recruited from other parts of the nation to serve as an elite cohort of wait-staff in the whites-only Portland Hotel. The establishment of the transcontinental railroad in 1909 brought black Pullman porters and expanded opportunities for Portland-born black residents to transition from “dirty” work as domestics and bootblacks to service jobs as car waiters and mail clerks (Burke and Jeffries 2016, 24; Moreland 2013, 21; Branch 2011, 17; McColl 1979). Black Portlanders built their civic, spiritual, and social lives in the city while negotiating systemic forms of racial discrimination.

In the year of the Lewis & Clark Exposition (1905), when Portland sought membership among the nation’s Beautiful Cities, it also established a color line in theaters, restaurants, and hotels. Blacks, Asians and Native peoples were either barred or received segregated service. The northwest neighborhoods where black Portlanders initially resided were referred to as “‘coon town’ by the local police, veteran Chief Lee V. Jenkins recalled in [1936]” (MacColl 1979, 17). A proposed bill to legalize interracial marriage was defeated in 1917. The Oregonian newspaper reasoned that “[interracial marriage] is not in line with the movement for the uplift of the colored

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6 Kimberly Moreland provides a beautiful pictorial history of black Portland and documents The Golden West Hotel as a “space for several black-owned businesses, including A.G. Green confectionery, a barbershop owned by Waldo Bogle, and a saloon and restaurant…George Moore’s…Athletic Club…Colored Women’s Council meetings…prominent entertainers, athletes [and] civic leaders.” (2013, 30).
race.’” (McLagan 1980, 164). Bills of public accommodation were introduced to the Portland legislature in 1919 and 1930s, but were persistently defeated until final passage in 1953 (Moreland 2013; PBUB 1993; McLagan 1980).

In 1920, white Portlanders were not exempt from participating in the virulent nativism that was sweeping the country (Wall 2006, 134). The Ku Klux Klan established a political and social hold in the city based on the “‘clean-up of Portland [and] respect for the law’” (MacColl 1979, 165). They found a following among working-class whites and some prominent politicians, including then Mayor George Baker, who pledged to keep Portland racially pure as a component of the city’s moral, political, and juridical healthfulness. Post-war retraction in the economy and among employment opportunities affected everyone. However, white business owners refused to hire black job seekers in order to preserve the few openings for whites. This severely depressed black Portlanders economic capacity. “Young black people who grew up in Oregon in the 1920s and 1930’s and who graduated from high school and college had to take menial jobs if they wanted to stay in Portland (McLagan 1980, 115-116). Black businesses in northwest Portland shuttered, which signaled a change in where the community would be located and how they would be treated for the rest of the twentieth century.

The black population in Portland doubled from 775 to 1,566, yet black communities remained the smallest of the three largest minority communities…63 percent of blacks living in Albina were married couples, more than half of the whom had children. In contrast, the ‘old’ black neighborhood of northern downtown remained overwhelming single and male [as renters], with occasional relatives and boarders residing among the men. (Burke and Jeffries 2016, 235)
The Albina District comprises a 4.3 square mile-area that included the eight neighborhoods of Eliot, Boise, Humboldt, Woodlawn, Vernon, King, Sabin, and Irvington (Burke and Jeffries 2016, 51; Gibson 2007, 8; PBUB 1993, 129; Extension 1973/74, 1-1). By this time, black Portland population had grown to 2500-3000 people (PBUB 1993; McColl, 1979; Gibson 2007, 8). During World War II, shipbuilding magnate, Henry J. Kaiser, recruited workers from the east coast and southern United States to the port of Portland, including 7000 black persons. Kaiser built Vanport City and Guild’s Lake housing on his own, bypassing the Housing Authority of Portland’s (HAP), which was hesitant to provide services to the influx of workers. Vanport is articulated as a somewhat successful experiment in interracial housing, where children went to school together and dances included black and white participants. It stood in contrast to the severe housing segregation within the city of Portland (Moreland 2013, 63; Barker 2011; 282). However, people still lived primarily along intra-racial lines and there was little tolerance for interracial romantic intimacy.

Before the flood that destroyed Vanport on May 31, 1948, post-war planning for the area was in the works. It was not inclusive of everyone’s aspirations for a settled period of recovery and prosperity, however. The Housing Authority of

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*Karen Gibson (2007, 8) distinguishes between Upper and Lower Albina to indicate when, where and why the center of the black population shifted within the 4.3 mile areas between the 1940s and 1970s. However, she indicates also that “Although it is helpful to distinguish Lower and Upper Albina…the name Albina is synonymous with the Black community in Portland.*
Portland and the Realty Board hoped that recruited workers would not only leave Vanport City and Guild Lake, but also leave Portland for good. They had several stakes in this hope. First, property owners wanted the land conscripted during wartime service to be returned for potential commercial development. Second, adequate housing stock and job opportunities were not readily available. Third, race relations in Portland were non-improved by the Second World War and there was fear of exacerbating tensions if thousands more black people settled into the city. No one immediately benefited when the flood waters broke the levee. Black and white flood victims received some monetary recompense for their loss, but black Vanport residents got the shortest shrift.

The Realty Board still employed policies against selling homes to blacks in areas other than Albina, and blacks had no legal provision for public accommodations in the city’s rental market (PBUB 1993; MacColl 1979, 538). Ultimately, black Vanport flood victims were shuttled into Albina and expected to make place on their own among the existing community⁸. White victims, on the other hand, were free to seek housing in any area that they could afford. While I do not want to underestimate the difficulties that white Vanport City residents experienced after the flood, their ability to assimilate into the broader Portland landscape guaranteed them a racial and spatial opportunity to belong that was not available either to the long-term black

⁸ https://vimeo.com/vanportmosaic
Albina population or to the black Vanport residents who had lived and worked by their side.

**Beautifying Place: The Greater Portland Plan**

While city and business leaders were instituting discriminatory housing and employment policies against black residents in Portland, they also sought a place for the city on the national stage. The 1905 Lewis & Clark Exposition was a display of Portland’s vision of progress and attempted to emulate, in grander fashion, the Chicago Fair (1892) and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1904). The Exposition “incited Portland’s interest in a plan in the grand scale of [a nation-wide] City Beautiful movement” and inspired the creation of the Portland Realty Board in 1906 and the City Planning Commission in 1919 (MacColl 1979, 65; McVoy 1945, 3). Members of the Board and Commission called upon the expertise of Edward Bennett, collaborator to the Chicago Fair’s architect, to create one of the earliest city plans.

Bennett’s Greater Portland Plan (1912) recommended that the city’s unique views of the Cascade Mountain range and that waterfront access to the Willamette River be the focus of future economic and urban development. Bennett forecasted Portland’s population would boom to 2,000,000 within several decades and recommended that it follow German cities’ zoning practices in order to regulate commercial and residential land use, and to maintain the views of St. Helens and Mt.

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9 [https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lewis_clark_exposition/#.WtU8tNPwZ0c](https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/lewis_clark_exposition/#.WtU8tNPwZ0c). The Oregon Encyclopedia. A Project of the Oregon Historical Society. Accessed April 16, 2018.
Hood (Bennett 1912, 20, 24). He recommended that infrastructural development that sought to capitalize on Portland’s burgeoning automobile culture would benefit from zoning. Streets should be built in a radial layout, allowing for adequate vistas and primary access to the southwest business center; all roads would lead there (ibid 13, 16). Outer residential streets were recommended for widening into boulevards that encouraged leisure use by strolling families. Bennett’s vision for Portland, surrounded by the Cascade Mountains and with the right investment, was that it could grow on par with Europe’s oldest and most influential cities,

The City with a plan prospers. Paris, in the time of Louis Napoleon under the direction of Baron Haussman spent $284,000,000 in systematic improvements, but in Paris tourists leave annually a sum estimated at between $4,000,000,000 and $500,000,000. Other cities that have been built with the idea of utility and beauty skillfully blended are benefiting commensurately.

The accomplishment of the plan for Portland demands a persistent educational effort that will acquaint all citizens with both the utilitarian and aesthetic elements of the work, that will harmonize and unify public, public service, and private improvements and that will automatically produce higher standards of community living. [Bennett 1912, 6]

Bennett’s Plan was never fully implemented, though some major thoroughfares were paved and the opening of the Ross Island, Sellwood and revamped Burnside Bridge improved traffic and transportation of materials (MacColl 1979, 293; McVoy, 1945). MacColl concludes that 1905 Lewis & Clark Exhibition was not successful in branding Portland as technologically or socially ahead of the national curve. Instead, it became a target for capital investment and privatized land use (1945, 4). Disparity grew between those men who “had the ‘foresight’ [and capital] to buy properties that would be someday be needed for public purposes”
(MacColl 1979, 29 & 66) and the immigrant workers employed in the mills and along the docks. In the period following World War I, the lower north and southwest neighborhoods where workers, including black Portlanders lived became increasingly derelict. Portland’s realtors, developers, and landlords simply neglected the area as there were few social or economic incentives to do otherwise. MacColl writes that the leading white families of Portland,

[P]erceived no banking or business responsibility for the creation of such humanly degrading conditions. They lived a world apart. Portland to them was a city of fine homes, gardens, and exclusive clubs, populated by successful, sophisticated and cultured people. [MacColl 1979, 41]

No substantial city-wide planning was implemented until the establishment of the Portland City Planning Commission in 1918. Its primary role was to address inadequate housing stock and blight and, as Bennett had recommended, to anticipate infrastructural needs to meet the boom in automobile sales and use. The Commission’s most contested endeavor was to develop and pass a zoning ordinance designating residential, commercial, and industrial land-use. Property owners and the Realty Board challenged the ordinance, however, as it constrained their authority over use. In an example of how insular Portland’s political and business community was, several Realty Board member were also members of the Commission. Political collusion was used to sway neighborhood residents’ opinions about the benefits and disadvantages of the ordinance (MacColl 1979).

Home and property ownership was “characteristic of Portland from its earliest days;” however, great care was taken to assure that both the quantity and quality of
housing were meted out according to class and racial lines. During the 1920s, impoverishment increased among all working class and laboring people—20 percent of whom were foreign-born whites—contributing to gaps in homeownership and the rise in tenement housing (MacColl 1979, 39). However, segregation meant that white Portlanders had a wider berth than black Portlanders to secure homes and apartments of their choice. When the Commission finally passed a zoning ordinance in 1924, white residents were “spread pretty evenly throughout the city” (MacColl 1979, 539). North and northeast Portland, where black residents were sequestered, was zoned for commercial and industrial use, all of which led wealthier white residents to increasingly abandon the area. The west hills, full of mansions, were zoned to prevent commercial development and the incursion of the wrong sort of neighbor, white or black.

These forms of segregation along class and racial line did not come to the fore explicitly in Bennett’s plan for Greater Portland. He charged city leaders with an instructive function in educating all residents, presumably, in their civic duty to the city. Residents were to be shown how to recognize the common “utilitarian and aesthetic” value of the environment and, most importantly, to create in residents’ a sense of public stewardship toward this value. Public, private, and citizen interests would build an eventual consensus around these ideologies. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, Portland navigated growth and conflict around elite interests (Burke and Jeffries 2016, 21; MacColl 1979, 15).
From Bennett’s 1912 document, it is impossible to know exactly how he interpreted race, race relations or the spatial distribution of racialized populations as he surveyed Portland. It is impossible that he did not see these things at all and, yet, the Greater Portland Plan does not mention that blacks, Native American, Asians, Jews and various other European ethnicities occupied the city. It also does not allude to the working or living conditions occupied by residents of varying racial or class identities, though black Portlanders’ homes were located in the northwest areas that Bennett recommended would benefit from a radial street design (1912, 43). Indeed, nothing was said of the black establishments there, such as the Golden West Hotel that had been in operation since 1906. There was no effort to list the Golden West or other black-owned business among those owned by whites, or to address their potential commercial attractiveness to motorists, transit ways, or the city’s overall growth. There is no indication that Bennett viewed black entrepreneurial and social life as relevant to the city’s economic or aesthetic development.

The absence of race in The Greater Portland Plan may not point to it as explicitly discriminatory or to Bennett as racist. However, the Plan can still be understood as a racialized political project because of the endeavor not to document race as an obvious component of structured residential patterns, differential economies in the city, or how those might stymy or add to the unification of public, private and citizen interests. Realized or not, it articulated Bennett’s expertise in a trending aspiration to determine the qualities and characteristics of a “beautiful city.” He relayed the value of environmental (natural and built) care, modern productivity,
and urban stewardship. At the same time, Bennett would have incorporated elite cartographic desires and ideas about Portland’s present and future populations onto physical space. The Plan begs the question for whom the future city was intended since it overlooked the way that spatialization and racialization processes attempted to deny black participation in the duties and responsibilities of civil society.

The reality was that opportunity and constraint framed black place-making in Oregon through the twentieth century. The institutional sphere of Portland politics, business, and banking played a central role in keeping black-belonging in jeopardy. McLagan (1980) and MacColl (1979) point to this complexity in their respective historical scholarship as “peculiar” and “paradoxical.” On one hand, black people could not legally be present or accommodated in Oregon, yet they were, and from the earliest times, they participated in the one of the singular forms of an emergent American citizenship: land and, then, home-ownership. On the other hand, the future of the Portland’s black populations was designed to be small, not only in real numbers or percentages, but also conceptually. Portland planned not to see them.

Scholarship on black residency and community, particularly the 1920s migration of black Portland life to the north Albina, document this is in tone and in description. Kimberly Moreland writes that “In the early 1900s, blacks began to migrate from North to Northeast Portland, and black businesses and churches followed” (2013, 34). However, their migration seems less innocuous when Karen Gibson documents how The Portland “Realty Board used their ‘code of ethic’ to put into practice the ‘racial real estate ideology’ that property values decline when Black
people live in White neighborhoods” and, therefore, systematically restricted and undermined their homeownership in north Portland (Gibson 2007, 4; PBUB 1993, 29). Kimball MacColl also viewed it as a “herding” into Albina, where property values fell because wealthier white Portlanders fled the 1924 zoning ordinance (1979, 44-46). The mortgage loans afforded to black Portlanders in the resulting falling housing market gave them a taste of the American way, but ultimately served The Realty Board and other institutions of power. The Realty Board sequestered black Portland life in the Albina District, the sole exception to the other residential districts, and used it as a space of institutional under-planning in order to reinforce the city’s perception of itself as white.

*The Portland Model Cities Program:*

Race figures significantly in the implementation of Portland’s version of the Model Cities Program. It was aimed at the Albina District during the period when Portland’s Civil Rights and Black Power movements were demanding attention to the lack of public services, economic development, and police violence in their neighborhoods. The Portland Model Cities Program heralded a small, but important political opening for black people in leadership and the creation of several neighborhood association groups. Unlike in Bennett’s Greater Portland Plan, black Portlanders were named as a group of concern for city officials. In this section, Burke and Jeffries’ (2016) history on the Portland Black Panthers provides the social and political context around the encounter between residents and community activists in
Albina, the city staff and officials of the Portland Development Commission (PDC) and the Mayor’s office.

I also use The City of Portland’s 1973-74 Model Cities Third Action Year Extension Plan (referred to as The Extension Plan) to discuss the ways that race and blackness were represented. I argue that in the Plan, the city’s official declarations about the condition of the target neighborhoods, decontextualized references to residents’ concerns and statistical evidence of educational and social underperformance constitute an unexamined exercise in reinforcing race as an ontological category. The negative and decontextualized descriptions make clear how the city intends to address changes, but they allow assumptions of fault to be made about black Albina residents because the conditions of their neighborhood were not situated within the local history of exclusion, practices of redlining and disinvestment, or political resistance on behalf of groups like the Black Panthers.

The Model Cities Program was part of a federal program designed to help cities address urban blight, crime and poverty. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) 1966 Comprehensive Cities Demonstration Program endorsed the Model Cities Program nation-wide, and targeted areas—termed Model Neighborhoods (MNA)—of underdevelopment. Over a 5-year period, HUD provided funding in conjunction with local, private and state-specific investments in several key areas: improved education, healthcare services, job access and training, and economic development. The program also called for the rehabilitation of existing
homes or the removal of supposedly dilapidated, unsalvageable homes. Affected residents were to be relocated to housing that was affordable (USHUD 1969, 4).

According to HUD, successful implementation of the program was predicated on citizen participation with “early, meaningful, and direct access to decision-making, so they can influence the planning and carrying out of the program” (USHUD 1969, 8). Its application procedures required the city to demonstrate how it would collect and streamline effective communication between parties. The city should demonstrate and legitimize their efforts through the submission of budget proposals, diagrams of organizational structure and occupation titles, and a tally of local employees by race and gender (Burke Jr. 1971, 761; The Plan 1973/4, Fig. 2-2, 3-1). How the Program was accomplished in Albina was far more complex.

The Portland Model Cities Program happened in stages over the course of four years: Initially through Action Year Plans FY70/71, FY71/72, FY72/73 and a Third Action Year Plan Extension in FY73/74. The Model Neighborhood encompassed the 4.3 square mile area of the Albina District and was referred to as the MNA. The program was implemented under the purview of the Portland Development Commission (PDC). Created in 1958, the PDC directed urban renewal and economic development in the city. The PDC has played a particularly noxious role in the social and economic disorganization of the Albina District and in the lives of long-term

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10 There is no explanation in the Portland Third Action Year Plan as to what the last “A” refers to in the acronym for Model Neighborhood. The HUD Q&A brochure (1969) refers to Model Neighborhood and so does the critique of the Model Cities Program by Burke, Jr. (1971). I will utilize MNA in accordance with the Third Year Action Plan.
black Portlanders. So significant has it been that in a May 2017 video announcing the
PDC’s name change to Prosper Portland, Executive Director, Kimberly Branam
acknowledged and apologized for the agency’s history of “taking advantage of
powerful financial tools allowed by urban renewal legislation [leading] to the
bulldozing of neighborhoods with African American, Italian immigrant and Jewish
communities, amongst others, sometimes with little notice or compensation.”

In the early phase of consideration (1966), the Portland Model Cities program
was a focal point of the PDC chairman, Ira Keller’s “top down approach…[offering]
blacks nothing more than token representation in minor planning positions and public
forums” (Burke and Jeffries 2016, 49). The PDC routinely ignored this component
much to the chagrin and protest of Albina neighborhood residents, the Portland Black
Panthers and left-wing white allies. This was in direct violation of a central HUD
directive and the federal agency eventually issued the city a reprimand. In order to
appease both HUD and Albina residents, Mayor Schrunk appointed Charles Jordan to
the city council to oversee the program (Burke and Jeffries 2016, 51).

The Black Panthers and other Albina black residents were initially concerned
about Jordan’s appointment. He was African American, but he was neither from
Oregon nor a Portland resident. There was some concern about Jordan’s ability to

a similar project had been carried out previously in the Eliot Neighborhood of the Albina District when
“476 homes, roughly half of them inhabited by African Americans [were removed] to make way for
Interstate 5 and Highway 99” which was funded under the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 (2007,
11). This history and the approach that Prosper Portland intends to the take in future economic
development and urban renewal projects are addressed on their website
https://prosperportland.us/social-equity/ and in their 2015-2020 Strategic Plan.
respond appropriately to their local and place-based concerns. The worry was that Jordan’s appointment was only a token effort made by the City. Consequently, residents’ protests became explicit. Albina residents organized a rally to stress the importance of rehabilitation, not the removal of their homes and cultural life. It became violent and resulted in a two-day clash between young black Portlanders and members of the police and fire departments. Neither the mayor’s office, the PDC, or even some black civic leaders admitted to the real source of concern. The upheaval was attributed to “outside agitators,” thus, “[sweeping] problems of racism and urban renewal under the rug” (Burke and Jeffries 2016, 55).

By the early 1970, Neil Goldschmidt, a white community activist and civil rights supporter, became mayor. Jordan was also elected to the city council as its first black member. Goldschmidt eventually appointed him Commissioner of Police and the head of the “newly created Office of Neighborhood Associations (ONA), an arm of the [Portland] planning commission” (Burke and Jeffries 2016, 212). Albina residents experienced greater support from this mayor’s office, the PDC and ONA than they had from the city prior (ibid, 210). Still, a “1971 [Oregonian newspaper] article revealed that more than 80 percent of residents living in the city’s target areas for antipoverty funds were unaware of the economic development programs in their neighborhoods and the majority that were informed believed…funds were being wasted” (147). A critical example of these competing belief was black Albina residents and Black Panthers protests against the renovation and expansion of Emmanuel Hospital and the PDC proceeding with the renovation (Burke and Jeffries
To undercut both Jordan’s authority and the Black Panther’s influence,

The city’s political leadership…refused to compromise on some of the most profitable redevelopment plans. In particular, the [Portland Development Commission] kept its most contentious project from the jurisdiction and the oversight of the Model Cities Program: the renovation and expansion of the Emanuel Hospital [Burke and Jeffries 2016, 149]

By the mid-1970s, the PDC had abandoned much of its proposed expansion of the Emmanuel Hospital due to the loss of federal funds, but only after the city had demolished a significant number of homes and businesses to the south of the hospital. Eventually, the city replaced the areas with public parks, but for many locals, the razing of the center of black businesses…marked a devastating turning point of the economic future of the African American community in the region. [ibid, 215]

Since the early 1900s, The Portland Realty Board, the banking and mortgage industry, private developers, and city government fostered a separate political economy in Albina using housing segregation, anti-public accommodation laws, redlining and disinvestment strategies. Then they persistently undercut Albina’s with some of the same forces in 1973. Property-ownership, land, and development was ever at issue between the city of Portland’s wants and the Albina’s residents’ needs.

The City of Portland and PDC report in the Third Year Extension Plan:

The land in the model neighborhoods of the Albina District had been assessed as “available…in small scattered parcels” but “With respect to industrial land costs, Model Cities land is expensive…industrial realtors indicate that land prices are high [because] of their former commercial value and because there is expectation of reaping large gains from Urban Renewal…The Emmanuel Hospital Renewal project paid prices far above market value and thus reinforced these expectations.” (The Plan 1973/4, 1-8).

Those rewards came to developers in the 1990s when banking and mortgage companies’ subprime loans schemes and the PDC’s newest urban renewal projects
ramped up black resident displacement (Gibson 2007). In 1973-74, however, five years into the implementation of the Portland Model Cities program, “Home values in Albina remained just two-thirds of the city’s median value, and while residents were able to achieve the rehabilitation of several hundreds of units [through the program], this still fell short of the need” (ibid, 17). Burke and Jeffries use Portland’s application for the Third Action Year Extension Plan FY73/74 to cite the city’s finding that poverty, education, and a suspicion of the political system still existed among Albina residents despite increased political consciousness and neighborhood organizations.

I would like to use the Extension Plan to explore disparity in Albina as a building block in the City of Portland’s formation in a way that is slightly different than the historians (Burke and Jeffries 2016, MacColl 1979) and the urban studies/planning (Gibson 2007; PBUB 1993; Harper et al 1990). I am interested in how the language that was used set precedents for how race and blackness in the Albina District appeared as narrative, statistical and topical “emergencies” that required city attention and federal aid (Extension Plan 1973/74, 1-1\(^\text{12}\)). The Extension Plan framed the overarching racial culture and social relations in Albina, but it also reflected broader shifts in the nation around urbanism, urban planning, race politics and social services. To that end, the city demonstrated its worthiness of federal

\(^{12}\) The Extension Plan 1973/74 uses a section-page number format. To that end, a citation written, 1973/74, 1-1, does not indicate “publication year, through pages”, but instead “publication year, section 1-page 1.”
attention and aid through the presentation of race and blackness as procedurally compliant data (Briggs 2009).

The Third Action Year Extension Plan FY 73/74 was submitted under the aegis of Portland Mayor Office and the Commission of Public Affairs. The application was introduced as ordinance 136326 and requested grant-in-aid from HUD in the amount of $1,985,000. The ordinance states, “In order that said grant money may be made available to continue the City’s Comprehensive City Demonstration Program without undue delay; an emergency hereby is declared to exist” (1973/74, 1-1). It is divided into four sections: Development, Implementation, Funding, and Relocation. The scope of this chapter only allows space for me to address the sections titled, Development and Implementation.

The Development Section was further divided into 10 subsections. Of those subsections, Model Neighborhood (MNA) Condition, Crime and Delinquency, and Education reported out information that most often refers to race, and utilize narrative and statistics to differentiate black populations and white populations’ participation and experience. Finally, they include some cautionary statements that framed the negative conditions in the MNA. The subsection on Social Services: Welfare was the only subsection in which racial/ethnic groups other than black and white residents were indicated to live in the MNA. Brief statistical data was given regarding “Asian/Indian or Spanish-American” and others “of unknown ethnic/racial status” who also comprised a “percentage of the sizeable ‘hard core’ welfare cases…” (Extension Plan 1973/74, 1-34).
The MNA Conditions summarized six trends that “exhibit dynamic characteristics…as well as some indications of stabilization” (The Plan 1973, 1-1). I am interested in construction of this sentence as part of the conclusory report on the Albina District. It is the first information that one encounters in the report. Therefore, it is intended to be the key set of knowledge that the city of Portland possess and that HUD should understand about Albina. I unpack the sentence, however, in order to trace the relations of cause and effect that may be obscured and to ask what other beliefs or assumptions are being crafted by official language use and word choice.

The Plan did not specify which conditions were dynamic versus those that were not dynamic; nor are the terms dynamic ever defined. Unlike stable, dynamic is a vague term with no explicit understanding of its effects. Yet, we know that the focus of The Plan was to indicate conditions in the MNA that were deemed so egregious that they required both city and federal intervention. The conjunction “as well as” suggests there are composite features (stable and dynamic) about the MNA, but “some” indicates that the stable features were few. Therefore, stable sits in opposition to dynamics. If stable referred to conditions in the MNA that were enduring and supportive, then those were few. Dynamic, in opposition to stable, then appeared to reference constant negative activity, or trends, in the MNA like the “61.7 percent” decline of black students in public school in 1972-73” and the “high unemployment, poverty, poor health and “high usage of available social services.” (The Plan 1973, 1-1).
On the following page, under Crime and Delinquency, the report indicated that younger people committed more serious crimes than adults. One does not learn why there is a decline in school attendance among black Albina youth. In the absence of the explicatory information, the proximity of statistics that report a decline in attendance among black youth to that of crime and delinquency among black youth creates an implicit, yet negative association between the two. Black youth who are not in school may be engaged in crime and delinquency. The sign of stabilization—that crime and delinquency among black Albina youth trends at national levels—does little to problematize the association.

Citizen Participation was addressed separately and took the forms of neighborhood organizations “composed of residents in each eight subneighborhood…to discuss physical environment and social issues” and working committees “formed along HUD-suggested program category lines…to consider continuing and proposed projects” (Extension Plan 1973/74, 2-8). It was indicated that active involvement in the participant structure of the program remained low between 1971-1973. This was credited to repeat rather than new participants, but black middle-class residents were noted to be more likely than white residents to attend meetings. The report indicated that in 1971, “91.2 percent of the household had heard of the Portland Model Cities Program. However, few attended meetings…The greater interest displayed in the Neighborhood Organization than in the Working Committees is probably a function of resident interest in housing conditions and a lack of identification with the MNAA as a ‘total’ community” (Extension Plan
The Extension Plan’s assertion of a well-informed MNA appears contradicted by a 1971 Oregonian article that reported more than 80% of the people in the area did not know about the program (Burke and Jeffries 2016, 147). The contradiction has importance for thinking the discursive significance of racial groups named in the plan versus, what I argue, is overall elusiveness of the race. We are forced to make assumptions about the character of Albina and blackness with the statistical and cursory explanation available in the plan.

For example, when it is noted that white MNA residents do not participate at the levels of black MNA residents, the lack of explanation leads one to wonder where the white residents are and what motivates their detachment? Only much later in the report do we learn that young, white families were leaving the MNA, and that it appeared mostly senior white residents remained. Who among the residents lacked identification with the total MNA? Which residents were not involved in the Working Committee and why? In the Extension Plan, racial representations of populations are provided so haphazardly that it is difficult to see who is pushing for change at it regards urban renewal. It is also easy to assume that MNA residents surveyed were all of the neighborhood, but given the HUD mandate that residents (including business and labor) from all over the city were be included, one cannot be sure which aggregate interests were being put forth. Also, no context is given for what residents might want to retain. Two issues make this obfuscation significant. First, the historical scholarship on the black Albina District demonstrates that while it emerged through of coercion, the residents developed both a communal, racial and political
identification with place that became particularly political during the years of the Model Cities Program (Burke and Jeffries 2016, Moreland 2013, Gibson 2007, Barker 2011, McLagan 1980, MacColl 1979). Second, when blackness was identified in the Extension Plan, it was most consistently marked in regards to crime and underperformance.

The Crime and Delinquency report provides a narrative description and Tables 1-2 that breaks down arrests, number and type of crimes, and levels of drug addiction by race. Of the total number of arrests for burglaries in the City, “More than two-thirds of those arrested were white, and slightly less than 29 percent of the burglary arrestees were black.” However, in the report on robberies, it is reported that of the total number of arrests in the City, “Almost two-thirds of the persons were arrested were black.” (Extension Plan 1973/74, 1-5). No effort is made to indicate the percentage of white persons arrested for robberies. Crimes committed by white Portlanders is not mentioned beyond this note. Burglaries and robberies (armed and unarmed) are further broken down into the percentage for city and inside the MNA. The report concludes, Figures indicate a higher arrest for blacks than for the total population. While the total arrests of all persons in 1970 was 25,863, and the number of black arrests was 3,882. Thus, while blacks represented 5.64 percent of the total population of Portland in 1970, they represented 15.0 percent of all arrests. Since 77.9 percent of all blacks in Portland reside in the MNAA it is reasonable to assume that a large proportion of the black arrests involve black MNAA residents.” [Extension Plan 1973/74, 1-6]

In the Education Report, black residents were the only group to be identified racially out of a “total” population in the account of low-performance in the areas of
the student enrollment, teacher hires, and academic achievement (1973/74, 1-12). The only reference to white students came in a comparison of enrollments in career education curriculum, where black students were reported as “under-represented” (1973/74, 1-15). With no prior introductory statistical evidence broken down by race or gender for white students, specifically, a paragraph was added, “Although it might be reasonable to assume two-thirds of the white males are enrolled in the college preparatory curriculum, it is not reasonable for black males or females” (1973/74, 1-15) The report concludes with a question asking how blacks would find work opportunities if they are not in the career or employment prep courses and states, rhetorically, “Although the black youth may have a high school diploma, he has no classroom experience to prepare him for work or use in applying for work.” (ibid).

The language of the plan makes no mention of the social or political context of the Civil Rights Movement in which the program got underway or the shift in ideologies about public participation that happened at the federal level (Burke 1971). Race is elusive while blackness is less so. Black poverty and underperformance were made explicit through naming practices, statistical representation, and assumptions of “reasonable” findings. But poverty, underperformance, and potential stagnations were also implied because they were paired with decontextualized and random statements of white practices of upward mobility, i.e. white males in college preparatory classes, young white families moving out of the neighborhood, and white males in charge of the administration of the programs. We do not know for certain that these white students reside in the MNA. Nor is there a number, percentage or whole, associated
with the white families moving out of Albina or the young, black families replacing them. As it regards crimes, the percentage of white Portlanders arrested for burglaries was assessed at the city level, but there is no specificity as to location. Black Portlanders were cited as arrested for burglaries within the MNA and in the rest of the city. A stereotypical portrait of black-on-black crime that potentially spills out onto the rest of the city was further exacerbated by a list of the types of crimes that MNA residents experienced by other MNA residents. Further, the lack of clarity between the number of black persons arrested versus those that were convicted allows perceptions of the extent of black crime to run rampant.

I argue that black MNA underperformance is paired with, rather than compared to, randomly cited white over-performance to mimic objectivity, but what really happens is a concretization of blackness and various social ills as distinct characteristics of the Albina District as a whole. This is where I say that race is elusive, but blackness is not. The Extension Plan alludes to white Portlanders, but never pins them down so that they are legible in either spatial or statistical terms. As a result, whiteness shows up in the report as both ephemeral and ubiquitous, but never harmful in the way that blackness does. That is the problem.

I do not take issue with identifying the educational, economic, and health challenges that black Albina residents faced and to which they worked to find solutions (Extension Plan 1973/74, 2-10 through 2-16). However, if understood as an objective instrument of comparison, the Plan uses the representational power of black statistics and descriptions (not statistics about blacks and whites) as shorthand that
obscures the “segregated whole” that actually includes both white and black Portland (Fields and Fields 2012, 14). To that end, statistical information that addresses race, but does not examine how it functions to racialize can 1) obscure the experiences, social relations, and historical events that contribute to race relations in Portland, 2) obscure how those experiences are assembled in support of a structural hierarchy long existent and 3) obscure an institution’s role in the first two processes and, therefore, deflect the work and practices of racism (Fields and Fields 2012; Burke and Jeffries, 2016).

The next section of the Extension Plan is Implementation, which addressed Overall Administrative Organization first. We learn in this section, how the city will grow in scope through the administration of the Extension Plan before we are informed as to the specific resolution to the emergency conditions reported previously. Though the program had been in process for four years, as of January 1973, a newly appointed Commissioner of Public Affairs was appointed, a new Bureau of Human Resources was created, a complementary Bureau of Community Development was proposed, and the mayor’s office “appointed a Model Cities Coordinator to his staff” (Extension Plan 1973/74, 2-1). Only the Bureau of Human Resources was designated as a consolidation of other agencies.

The staff overseeing the Central Administration included 42 full-time employees and 2 part-time community organizers positions assigned to Citizen Participation (ibid). This is supported with an occupational chart that lists titles, their relationship to one another and ultimately to the citizens’ groups. The chart is divided
down the middle with those staff on the left working most closely at the district and neighborhood level, and those on the right with more city and overarching community-related responsibility. This chart is not broken down by race or gender, but given that Charles Jordan was the first black person to be elected to Portland city council in the mid-1970s, it is unlikely that black Portland were represented among the staff in great numbers. Indeed, though race and gender were not made explicit on that chart, under the Relocation Section of the Extension Plan, there was an Agency Employment Report (Exhibit A) that broke down the administrative staff who would oversee Relocations when Albina District homes were removed or deemed unlivable during rehabilitation. There are nine staff in total. Two black male administrators and one black female professional were identified as living in the MNA. It might be expected that these persons would come into direct contact with Albina residents over one of the plans most traumatic or, at least, protested concerns. The six additional staff, four white men and two white females, were not designated as living in the MNA. Though the occupations range from Administrative, Professional and Clerical, seven are indicated as full or part-time staff positions and seven as employees. It was not reported by race or gender which two positions were neither staff nor employees and, thus, potentially unpaid.

The overall Model Cities Program was designed to work best with city residents’ participation, not just as recipients of federal or local aid. In the 1969 HUD Model Cities brochure, Question and Answers, Residents are named last among four key stakeholders, following the ranking: Cities, Communities, States. According to
the brochure, “Community responsibility was vested in the principal local executive office (Mayor, City Manager) and elected governing body (City Council, Commission)” and they were beholden to “Residents of the neighborhood and the city as a whole (including Labor, business and other civic groups and community)” (USHUD 1969, 3). Ostensibly, this inclusive category of Resident, which went beyond the strict boundaries of the Model Neighborhood (MNA), was meant to impart a shared sense of responsibility for the state of blight in the MNA as well as for its resolution,

“Q. Are the residents in the model neighborhood the only ones who should be involved? A. No. Citizens from the entire metropolitan area should be involved…Such broad participation is important because many slum problems have their causes in attitudes and behavior of the wider community.” [USHUD 1969, 9]

Barlow Burke, Jr. (1971), reviewing the Model Cities Program around the time most local iterations had been in progress for a year or more, assessed that citizen participation was structurally and organizationally untenable, regardless of the program developers’ social justice intentions. He argues that the social service professionals, urban experts, and city planners who developed the Program were armed with new theories of “citizen participation” that rejected top-down government-led approaches to urban problems and sought to keep time with the demands of the 1960s Civil Rights Movements. The idea was to survey citizen’s concerns about their neighborhoods, at minimum, and to facilitate their actual involvement during decision-making at best. This was supposed to lead to the “democratization of [governmental] bureaucracy…in order to make programs more
effective” (Burke, Jr. 1971, 757). This posed a theoretical difficulty for federal experts, however. How would the funding of additional sites of popular expertise reconcile with the effort to break up bureaucracy? To that end, a presidential task force on the Model Cities Program produced a report that,

“rejected the idea of funding a ‘direct democracy’ of the poor…Instead, it substituted a ‘general will’ filtered through the local government and thereafter expressed by a joint government citizen coordinating group” [Burke, Jr. 191, 758]

Burke, Jr. argues that the “citizen” idealized by the Model Cities Program, and described as resident of target model neighborhood in the HUD brochure, was a product of a future as yet unattained. A close reading of Portland’s Third Year’s Extension Plan, where the distinction that HUD made between the Community as category to be cared for or overseen by the Mayor’s Office, City Council, or Commissions and Residents differential levels of access represented within the Resident category (i.e., a commercial business owner versus an Albina resident that was, potentially, unaware of the development plans) signals a fundamental challenge to equitable input. The distinction also invested additional power into the spheres (the mayor’s office, city council, or the commission) that were responsible for creating the procedures and administrative structures to support citizen participation. Finally, the distinction made it possible for the creation of other spheres of institutional power to then administer and disseminate information. Therefore, bureaucracy was not broken up, but enlarged at the scale of governance. The circulation of power between city offices and representatives and federal offices and representatives was predicated on
the circulatory value of citizen participation—a summation of racial and class knowledge—even before it was put into practice.

My reading of the Extension Plan, as a cultural artifact of institutional expertise, is an effort to think through the partial abstraction of the Albina’s District and the willful destruction of its business center (Moreland 2013, McLagan 1980) into a set of problems/emergencies that sustained and communicated the power of the City of Portland, particularly as it engendered other agencies and intra-bureau collaborations at the local and the federal level. Burke and Jeffries argue that under the combined effort of Mayor Goldschmidt, Commissioner Jordan, black Portland citizen groups and the Black Panthers, “by the close of the 1970s, Portland had done much to address the legacy of racial discrimination and of political and spatial exclusion….Still, this brief moment of progress was neither permanent nor universal among Portland’s black population” (2016, 222).

While Albina’s black residents were forced to reconcile, once again, the reality of the economic and spatial disorganization in their community, Mayor Goldschmidt and Governor Tom McCall were partnered in a comprehensive set of the land-use legislations that would become The Urban Growth Boundary (UGB). Indeed, the Model Cities Program’s deep investment in citizen participation, enlargement in the scope of bureaucratic entities, and consistent support of business set the stage for a consensus between government and civil society that would help to brand Portland, globally, as a new kind of city.
“Livability” as a Moral Economy

The forest and waterway access that made Portland a draw for timber and milling industries at the beginning of the twentieth century took on a different emphasis in the later part of the century. In 1973, Governor Tom McCall spearheaded the effort to balance Portland’s economic and spatial growth in such a way that was people-centered, rather than lean into the car-focused, suburban sprawl that took over much of nation. The Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) “required that sufficient land for 20 years’ development be included within the boundary; a boundary that included not only Portland, but 26 other jurisdictions making up Greater Portland” (Tillett 2018, 14; Burke and Jeffries 2016, 193; MacColl 1979) and would preserve farm and forest lands toward Forest Grove to the west, Gresham and Troutdale to the east, and Wilsonville and Sherwood to the south (Metro Council webpage). As much as the term, livable, has become a directive within planning circles, it also is ubiquitous in promotional material to tourists, on banner advertisements for new rental developments, and it part of the soft-sales pitch to job candidates and businesses alike.

A 2009 video, Portland: Quest for the Livable City, starts off distinguishing Portland as an “American city” with residents who are “different.” That difference is understood to correspond to a responsibility for maintaining the area’s surrounding environmental beauty, while at the same time preferring a people-centered urbanism where an extensive transit system of light rail trains, streetcars, and bus system promise a 20-minute ride from any of the inner neighborhoods to the city center.
Visiting foreign city officials are shown walking through the Portland City Center in wonder and enthusiastically hopping on and off the streetcar. One person, in accented English, compares the city center to Barcelona; reminiscent of Bennett more than a century before.

Like other positivist approaches to Portland’s growth (Tillett 2018), the video casts both the city and the young professionals who have moved here as green iconoclasts. Contemporary residents are narrativized as participants in the “coffee house culture [of a] young, off-beat, and creative community” and visually represented by a trio of bearded young men in a sun-filled room who earnestly sipped coffee samples in the manner of a wine sommelier and by a heterosexual couple with a child in a stroller getting off the streetcar. An author, David Oates, invoked the intrepid colonial explorer. He was dressed in summer-flack with canvas bag and camera tromping solo along various rural and urban terrains of the Urban Growth Boundary. In a brief recognition of gentrification’s effects in the city, a young mother and her small daughter were filmed in the Albina District, lamenting the challenge of rising housing costs as they walked along the streets with disused buildings or sat in a well-worn car near apartment housing. Unaccompanied and walking hand-in-hand with her daughter, rather than was strolling like the couple in the city center, leads one to believe that she is a single mother.

From these urban scenes, the footage moved fairly quickly to an aerial view of the forested Cascade Mountain Range. The narrator corresponded brightly with the entreaty that to “understand Portland and why it is so different, it is best to start
outside the city” (Portland: Quest for Livability 2009). At this point, we come to learn the point of the video is to promote the Urban Growth Boundary and shape perception around Measure 37. When the video was produced, Measure 37 was proposed as an amendment to check the power of both the Metro Council, the regional government in charge of adjusting the UGB, and central Portland residents to determine the use of privately held, rural land within the UGB. Proponents of Measure 37 wanted to exercise their rights to determine when, how, and the price at which they could sell or develop their land. One called the UGB a “communist” over-extension of government power. These profit-centered concerns were paired with the story of another rural landowner.

The owner of Hertel Farm “fears Portland and the people in it,” but eventually learned to navigate both the physical distance and cultural divide by starting a CSA and daring to drive her truck into the city to sell at the urban markets. We come to understand how Hertel saved her farm. She respected the UGB and was able to extend her community to include Portland mothers and their small children who enjoyed coming to “see” where their food has been picked.

The connections between urban, rural, and un-tamed, natural space was drawn through visual beauty and cleanliness. Vistas mattered. Camera were sat low, so that the angle to both Hertel’s truck and author Davis were wide, back-dropped by broad skies and typographical expanses with sparsely built structures. Even in the urban scenes, congestion was kept at a minimum. People were shown with space to bike and walk. The streetcar that officials used was absent, for example, the low-income and
domicile-less passengers who use the NS line to go to Legacy Good Samaritan Medical Center in NW. Balance is demonstrated as responsible access: one should take public transportation into the city; be able to drive, but only endeavored as a family affair that supports local neighbors or facilitates a hiking adventure to the carefully maintained trailheads of the The Columbia River Gorge Scenic Area. But most important, responsible access means defeating Measure 37 at the ballot. Yet, these forms of livability can only be assured with economic growth and employment. The video’s narrator exuberantly states that Nike and Intel were heralds to Portland entrepreneurial landscape of “hundreds of start-ups; attracting professionals from all over the country!”

Tillett (2018), a Portland-based architect and author, extolls the combined virtues of the partnership between Portland eager young professionals, corporate expansion, and government. His description ties classical, Greco-romantic features to the bold minds and bodies of those engineers and scientists trekking west:

“In the 1970s, the city itself was in many ways unprepossessing […] Young, well educated, and liberated by the era in which they grew up, the newly arrived pioneers felt neither duty nor loyalty holding them to their parents’ hometown—or to their parents’ values, for that matter. They could make a new life in the West where like-minded folk abounded. Eventually, intellect and ingenuity led to a means of making a living—some entrepreneurial, many occupations were artistic and tenuous…

an extraordinary shift [in the 1980s] that was apparently unnoticed by the mainstream fashion industry: people began to show up for work dressed as athletes—and in liberally minded, meritocratic Oregon, a few employers objected…Among the earliest adopters of athletic dress were the techies who inhabited the “Silicon Forest” that sprung up around…Tektronix west of Portland…Defiance of convention was part of their way to the future. Fashion may be skin-deep, but this change was a clue to membership of a growing fealty to fitness and agility of both mind and body. It was a

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natural progression from the environmentalism that had recently attracted so many to Oregon.” [Tillett 2018, 11-12]

For all the community-building ethos that underscores the promotional video, the people-centered community is starkly the same. Almost every person in the video is white even the young single mother who laments economic disparity of north Portland. The one exception is the single mother’s small daughter. She appears biracial. Thus, the documentary accomplishes the marking of a stereotype—the absence of a black father—and invisibilizing blackness in Albina by emplacing the white mother there. Without denying the class and spatial gap that might make this white young mother life feel vulnerable in comparison to the white gentrifying persons and business moving into her neighborhood, white racial affinity with its attendant privileges underscore mobility and access for her that many black north Portlanders indicate they have lost. The video manages to secure three things together: an American virtue of independent thinking to Portland-based values of common care for place to an un-interrogated whiteness that excludes and obscures. The city’s intent to bind environmental responsibility, urban revitalization, and innovation-led economic growth together as the distinguishing component of “belonging” in Portland, at the expense of black residents’ well-being, is a moral and political economy dependent on racial exclusions and marginalization. That it could be obscured and rationalized demonstrates that the intent may not be necessarily consigned to history (Tillett 2018, 13).
In the fall of 2017, while I was concluding field-work, a fire raged in Columbia River Gorge affecting 48,000 acres of land in Washington and Oregon State. No one was hurt in the fire, but many people incurred property damage. Access to the forest was indefinitely closed as trees and trails were so grievously harmed as to be unsafe for human use. It was a difficult story not to follow because it was covered in print, television, and online media. I loved hiking the area and felt for the people experiencing loss, but I was also concerned about the kinds of nativist dialogue that emerged in comments sections of online posts and showed up in newspaper’s letters to the editor section.

The fire’s perpetrator was identified only as a 15-year-old boy from a Ukrainian family. Hateful commentary called for the boy to be outed by name, to be tried in court as an adult and, sadly, also for his death. Conflating his European background and his non-Pacific Northwest origins, commentators lambasting the number of outsiders to the area who did not possess the proper level of respect or the moral care that was required of forest and property interests in the area. Many Gorge residents encouraged generosity and forgiveness because the boy was so young. They enfolded the calls for respect and care used in the hateful comments back into reminders of a Pacific Northwest reputation for compassion. Others added to these moral economies with practical appeals. They placed the fire in historical and environmental contexts of indigenous cosmologies of evolutionary partnerships between forest and fire. The argument was that the forests of the Columbia River Gorge would eventually return, as an ecological terrain that has long endured both
human and natural activity.\textsuperscript{13} The fire also reanimated contentions between conservation groups and logging interests at the state level.\textsuperscript{14} The latter used the fire as an opportunity to call for clear-cutting great swathes of timber as an environmental revitalization strategy. Conservationists countered that leaving the burned forest trees was the best ways to that end.

These debates and structures of affect that represented assumptions about who could claim access to the Columbia River Gorge was interesting and alarming. Even though Portlanders and Oregonians were talking about a white-identified person and his family, the assemblage of his ethnic and national otherness with outsider-ness did not prove the irrelevance of racialized discourse or, even, race as a part of our everyday cultural language. Indeed, the ease and accessibility of hierarchical scripts and their application to perceived differences between whites only further reinforce the place that Oregon’s has designated, legal, spatial, and socially to blackness. A pecking order emerges, not a post or de-racialized discussion. A perception of the city and the region as white is reinforced through this protectionist discourse as non-American, non-Pacific Northwest whiteness is pushed nearer, but not into, the margins where blackness has been localized. This is as much the work of a broad institutional consensus of what Portland should look like to the world, as it is about maintaining internal populations numbers.

\textsuperscript{13} https://www.oregonmetro.gov/news/rebirth-forest-columbia-river-gorge-after-eagle-creek-fire

\textsuperscript{14} https://oregonwild.org/about/blog/did-eagle-creek-fire-renew-columbia-gorge

\textsuperscript{15} https://gorgefriends.org/protect-the-gorge/walden-clear-cut-bill.html
As I write this section of my dissertation on April 17, 2018, I turned to my Facebook account and in my feed is a sponsored post by the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT). PAT supported Jo Ann Hardesty for Portland City Council, Position 3. Hardesty is a community leader, has been a legislator in Portland since 1995, has served as President of the local NAACP, and is a black woman. The teachers featured in the commercial talk about the housing and food security challenges that face their elementary students. As representatives of PAT, they put their support behind Hardesty as the kind of leader able to address a century old problem: the existence of “two Portlands” where business interests are catered to at the expense of the residents. The commercial makes clear that for all its self-congratulatory distinction as a different kind of American city, it is also—as I began—no more than an American city.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a brief history of black marginalization in Portland and an analysis of racialized discourses in the ideological and spatial formation of the city. My hope was to demonstrate how Portland as racialized terrain is not a white city, but it is one that has narrated itself so by strategizing around the marginalization of blackness, rather than its total exclusion. Despite all infamy around Portland’s whiteness, black people are critical members of the city, the black population has been historically diverse, and notions of an Albina “community” reflects both coercive governance and the labor of black residents making it amenable to their
experience. Black professional women transplants participate in a history where black people have always looked for and made opportunity in the city, even when it was not planned for them to do so.
Fieldnote Interlude: Everyday Politics of Recognition

It is the middle of June. The Portland sky has not achieved that piercing blueness that best displays the solstice sun. There is still enough of a chill so that a sweater is in order. I am walking along NW 23rd avenue and among the crowd of pedestrians, I see a black woman walking towards me. She is fair-skinned and light-eyed. Her curly hair frames her face in a beautiful Afro that has no distinct shape. We are, at least, a block away from one another, but she sees me too. Her presence and mine are notable for reasons that differentiate our sightline from those around us. NW 23rd is a major thoroughfare through the Slabtown area. Whether midweek or weekend, couples, teens, lone walkers, and their dogs cue on this avenue in front of Salt & Straw ice-cream shop. They crowd the curtained entrance to Fireside Restaurant and peruse discount women’s shoes stacked—rain or shine—in front of Ether. This afternoon is no different.

Yet, as far as I can see, there are no other black people among the throng. I am not surprised. Slabtown sit between the upscale shopping district of the Pearl and old, mansions on the West Hills. It is an eclectic site of intense development and architectural residue from the city’s industrial and manufacturing past. Any trace of the early 20th century black homes that may have occupied this track above the Park Blocks have long disappeared and as yet it is not a place to which black newcomers flock. The woman and I are made visible to one another in this space because of lack, but also because of a desire that has become strategized to see in specific ways.
We are at least a block away from one another and I see her gearing up for the encounter. She puts her body in motion by smiling at me at about the ½ block mark. I had long returned her smile and adjusted my body in welcome—chest open, turned slightly in her direction, arms and limbs down at my sides. At the point before our shoulders align, she says, “You are so beautiful.” I smiled and said, “Oh, thank you! You are beautiful too, sister.”

The exchange took only a few second of our passing. I do not know if the white pedestrians heard our voices or even the particular words that we spoke. She and I were crafting a place grounded in practices of intentional recognition through our vocalizations and comportment. However, the purposefulness of our exchange takes the multiple forms of whiteness into account. It is evident in people’s corporeal forms, but also in the way that the contours of space and time are similarly racialized. This phenomenon has given a great deal of branding purchase to Portland as one of the best cities to live and within that framework. This research explores how black women enter and navigate this space and what it means to call the city our own.
Chapter 2: How Did We Get Here?

This chapter is ambitious. My primary aim is to explore, ethnographically, the emotional labor and practices of belonging that frame black professional women place-making in Portland. However, in order to situate my interlocutors’ contemporary emplacement in Portland into broader context, I map the occupational and cultural shifts between the 1970s and the present that have most affected black women’s insertion into the labor market and facilitated their entry into the professional rank. A key lesson in that history is that black women’s work has been systematically undervalued, notwithstanding their achievements in education and in their careers. This history and social paradox are central to understanding women’s subjective experiences in Portland as reflective, too, of institutional and systemic narratives and circuits of meaning that work to obscure them.

I also aim to demonstrate that how the city communicates with national and international networks of labor and capital exchange is consequential to how the women in my study ended up in the city. Portland rose into an economic and cultural hotspot during the same period that black women’s occupational distribution among certain industries were changing. When college-educated black women in the 1980s and 1990s entered managerial and professionals of a new service-based economy, they were positioned well to respond to Portland’s external amplification of a strong, competitive economy, progressive politics and laidback lifestyle. Black women’s professional expertise matched up with various forward-thinking technological, environmental, and social justice industries in Portland. They described feeling
optimistic, fearful, excited, or depressed about the move to Portland; however, the actual experiences place-making and the labor necessary to gain a sense of belonging was framed by ambivalence. How black professional women feel about being in Portland is not part of the tale that the city either tells itself or communicates outwardly.

In the ethnographic section of this chapter, I detail three women’s place-making endeavors in Portland. Two women’s choices of whether to live in the city or the suburbs impacts what kind of community they will find. The residential hopes of one are challenged by long-term black populations working to keep their neighborhoods intact. A third woman finds that achievements at work take her farther from the community-based work with communities of color than she anticipated. However, as she connects with friends and colleagues of color in Portland, her own black identity becomes more of an outward politic.

I approach these cases studies in two ways. First, I account ethnographically, historically, and analytically to the diversity of women’s experiences with place-making, the emotions engendered by that labor, and to the different outcomes they have. I show place-making as a continuum. My research into black professional women’s lives demonstrate that how they feel or talk about belonging in Portland is greatly impacted by their life histories. There are larger socio-political events that frame women’s career paths, but their particular experiences of mobility are central to my analysis of their expectations of people, things and places in Portland.
Second, my examination of the challenges that black women confront as a form of ambivalence addresses the discrepancy between what Portland’s brand of livability is supposed to offer all residents and how it falls short for black women. Ambivalence is not a personal emotional state for my interlocutors, necessarily. They are not sad, mopey, or frustrated all the time. Black women make and miss connections, find and lose friends, and engage in activities or let work take over. Their lives are as complex and mundane as anyone else’s. I propose ambivalence as black women’s awareness that racialization, gendering, and classed processes were unfailingly underway as well as a simmering uncertainty about whether they want to navigate those processes in the cultural and historical context of this city.

Background and Literature Review

I engage with black women’s place-making in this chapter as processual, discursive, and circuitous; representing both the challenge of belonging under systemic and structural forces that have historically sown doubt as well as symbolic and real violence into the black experience. This is part of the labor as everyday affect and productive-oriented work that black women do to survive and thrive. The literature below emphasizes non-linear and non-binary approaches. I use them 1) to map the history of black women’s work in which the black professionals in my study are situated, 2) to point to the ways that gender, race, and class have been used to assure black women’s oppression at every rung of the social ladder and 3) to propose that travel is an important form of class mobility for black women professionals in the
The attention that I pay to middle-class and professional black women’s ability to travel and move, and the motivations and the coercions that frame travel provides dovetails with feminists concerns about women and work, affect and emotional labor, and giving due recognition to black women’s knowledge production. I also contribute to a political economy of neoliberal effect through an analysis of the subtle and unsubtle ways that intersectional oppression continues to work through economic, political, and social restructuring processes.

History of Black Women and Work:

Black women in the United States have taken on primary responsibility for the home, a gendered burden they have shared with white women. Unlike white women, however, the type of work that black women performed—housekeeping, food handling, and the disposal of material waste—tracked between home and places of employment for the better part of their inclusion into the wage labor force (Branch 2011; Tucker Anderson 1982; Platt Boustan 2017; Davis 1981, 238). Between post-emancipation in the late 19th century and passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, black women’s work was perceived to require the least socially-regarded skills, entailed the most manual labor, and was used by employers to justify paying black women the lowest wages. Branch (2011) demonstrates that even when black women were employed in factories, they still existed on the “industrial fringe.” In the early twentieth century in the south, black people were excluded completely from mill work on the basis of race. In tobacco factories where black women could find wage
labor, they were further segregated on the basis of gender into the “labor intensive process of sorting, cleaning, and stemming tobacco leaves, whereas White women were hired as semi-skilled operatives who rolled cigarettes” (Branch 2016, 77).

During war times in northern factories, black women were hired after black men, whose employment usually followed a wane in the supply of white immigrant labor. In northern factories, black women were subject also to physical segregation from white workers, were least welcomed or recruited to unions and were vulnerable to being fired “when there was the slightest workplace disturbance” (ibid, 94).

The general condition of black women’s work in America stayed consistent with manual duties of cleaning and disposal of waste through the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the 1970s, however, black women of the baby boomer cohort made important strides in attaining non-household-focused work. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act which legally prohibited segregation in higher education provided more institutional options for black women to pursue degrees than were available to the previous generation (Barnes 2016, 54; Brown II, et al 2001, 565). While social work and nursing emerged alongside traditional fields, such as teaching, as avenues for black women’s incipient professionalization, it was through clerical work\(^\text{15}\) that most black women entered “majority White private firms, institutions, and nonprofit agencies” (Branch 2016, 127; Dozier 2010; Higginbotham 2001, 21).

\(^{15}\) Higginbotham distinguishes between clerical and administrative office-work as located in the primary labor market where wages, condition, and potential for advancement are high, but not part of the professional/managerial class where one has the potential to direct the work of others (2001, 25).
“By 1970, clerical work, which hitherto had been reserved almost exclusively for White women, employed more than one-fifth of all Black women workers, more than two and a half times the proportion of Black women workers employed in that occupation category in 1960 and nearly five times the percentage employed in 1950. Additionally, Black women increased representation in all occupations categories by a significant margin, with the exception of farm labor, which continued to decline, and management, where they held steady at 1960s levels. These shifts reflected a fundamental change in the allocation of occupational opportunities for black women, and for the first time their occupational structure began to look like that of White women. [Branch 2016, 128].

We should not overstate black women’s occupational gains during this era. Black women on the cusp between the black community and predominantly white-working worlds, whether college educated professionals or working-class clerical workers, were under-valued based on attributes of race and gender. A consequence of this new positioning created a moment of parity at the very beginning of the 1980s when black women earned, at least, “99 cents for every dollar White women earned” (Branch 2011, 134). It was a brief moment, however, and black women’s income fell so immediately and precipitously that by the mid-1980s the income gap between them and white women was stark. (Branch 2011, 136; Dozier 2010, 1849). There were three primary reasons for this.

First, black women were overrepresented in clerical work and the relatively small percentage of women who identified as college-educated professionals were segregated into teaching (Branch 2016, 134; Higginbotham 2001, 35). Consequently, black women lagged behind black men and white women in bridging the gap to managerial positions. Second, by the time that black women entered the fields of teaching, nursing and social work, as well as clerical positions, the character of these occupations was perceived as feminized labor/women’s work and subject to lower
salaries and wages. In contrast, white men had exited these occupations as a demographic and were firmly established in technical, managerial, and leadership positions that were perceived to require specialized skills and expertise. White men’s wages outpaced those earned by all women and black men (Branch 2011, 132; Higginbotham 2001, 22). Third, black women were largely relegated to the least desirable positions even in desirable professions. They entered at the lowest ranks within education, social work, and para-professional clerical positions as white women exited for higher ranked and higher paid positions buoyed by their own educational achievements and affirmative action policies\textsuperscript{16} (Doizer 2010, 1837).

Relatively, only a small number of black professional women have been able to move into professional and leadership ranks when compared to white and, in the contemporary moment, Pacific Islander/Asian women. Whether low-wage, working- or middle-class, the decline and relative stagnation of black women’s overall pay persists. The Institute for Women’s Policy Research report on The Status of Black Women indicates a slight rise for black women professionals [SOBW 2017, 19-22, 32]:

1) More than six in ten (62.2 percent) Black women in the workforce [represent] one of the two racial/ethnic groups of women with the highest labor force participation rate among women and the only group with a higher labor force participation rate than their male counterparts.

\textsuperscript{16} Enobong Hannah Branch (2011) indicates that legal and social scientist debate the impact of affirmative action policy in the 1970s on black employment rates. Outlining the debate, Branch demonstrates which scholars argued that a bureaucratically burdensome process and weak enforcement prevented full implementation of the policy (Bell Jr 1977) or attributed the policy’s success in increased employment for black people as a result of \{“government intervention” (Fosu 1992; Freeman 1973), employment (Leonard 1990) or economic growth (Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2009)\} (Branch 2011, 138-139)
2) Black women’s median annual income earnings ($34,000 for those who work full-time, year-round) lag behind most women’s and men’s earnings in the United States.

3) Between 2004 and 2014, Black women’s real median annual earnings declined by 5.0 percent.

4) Black women’s unequal earnings may be partially attributed to the fact that they are disproportionately concentrated in jobs that pay the federal minimum wage and subminimum wage (which has remained at $2.13 since 1991; Cooper 2015; Vogtman, Gallagher Robbins, and Bergeron 2015).

5) Between 2004 and 2014, the percentage of Black women in managerial or professional occupations increased by 8 percent, while the percentage of all [women in the same] occupations increased by 10.2 percent…Between 2004 and 2014, Native American women were the only racial/ethnic group of women to experience a decline in the share of women in managerial or professional occupations. As of 2014, Asian/Pacific Islander women were best represented in managerial and professional occupations among women (48.8 percent) while Hispanic women were least well-represented in these occupations (25.2 percent). [SOBW 2017, 19-22, 32]

Overall, feminist and intersectional studies of black women and work in the U.S. remind us that a consistent feature of their insertion into the economy and into the labor force has been coercive (Ruth Simms Hamilton 2007). Branch (2011) demonstrates in her 1860-1960 labor history that racial discrimination and gendered segregation locked black women into “dirty” or “fringe” work. She argues it was the single most enduring feature of black women’s employment regardless of whether they worked in domestic, agricultural, factory or institutional settings, and has been particularly deleterious for black women in relation to white men, white women, and black men during times of economic boom and bust. Dozier (2010) supports this argument. She reveals that when black women shifted to non-household work in
1970-1980, they consistently held the “bad jobs,” within respective fields of good jobs, that paid an hourly wage rather than a salary (2010, 1849). The decline in their wages in the 1970s set the stage for working black women’s further embeddedness at poverty levels in the contemporary post-industrial, low-wage service economy (Branch 2011, 136; Dozier 2010, 1833; Higginbotham 2001, 20).

What Is So Special About the 80s-90s Then?

Black women clerical workers and professionals in the 1970s shifted societal perception from one in which black women were seen as engaged primarily in domestic and/or manual labor. They would also witness the next generation of black women move into changing occupational terrain all their own though, as the report on the Status of Black Women indicates, not necessarily towards more financial or occupational security.

In the 1970s, black women were part of a shift in certain group’s distribution among traditional occupations. Neoliberal financial and political restructuring in the 1980s, however, changed the type of industries that workers would enter as well as new considerations for how work, work culture, and work-time would be conducted. The manufacturing and industrial sectors upon which the economy and the working class had been dependent were disappearing. Harvey argues, “by the mid-1990s, the Republican party had lost almost all of it liberal elements and became a homogenous right-wing machine connecting the financial resources of large corporate capital with a populist base, the Moral Majority” (2007, 30). Economic under-development and
disinvestment, from California to Washington, DC, exacerbated the negative impacts that hyper-policing, the introduction of crack cocaine, and gang violence were having on black and Latino communities during this time (Asch and Musgrove 2016 123; Rios 2011; Gibson 2007, 18). A two-tier business sector emerged based on the provision of services, with technology, transportation and finance at the top and low-wage service jobs at the bottom. A college degree and soft-skills attributed to good communication and teamwork began to make difference between what could be considered good and bad jobs (Dozier 2011, 1837-1838).

At the same time, black women’s educational opportunities in the 1980s and 1990s were impacted by the institutionalization of curricular, pedagogical, and cultural praxis of diversity and anti-racist critiques. Barnes points to the continued importance of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in educating young black women, but also points to the increased availability of scholarships and recruitment efforts directed towards “a few promising minorities” provided by “predominantly white institutions and corporations” (Barnes 2016, 54-57). In 1993, black women college students would have had increased exposure to curriculum designed to “challenge academic power structure and the Eurocentric curricula” with access to “the more than 700 ethnic studies programs and departments in the United States” (Hu-DeHart 1993, 51-52). Hu-DeHart demonstrates that, while programs were mostly clustered on the west coast, there was still a broad investment at institutions as diverse as the University of California, Berkeley, Hunter College and Queens College in New York, the University of Washington, Seattle, The University
of Colorado at Boulder and Harvard University in Massachusetts. Writing about the
decade of 1985-1995, Harrison asserts that anthropologists, in particular, “have
revitalized their interest in the complex and often covert structures and dynamics of
racial inequality” (1995, 47). Joan Morgan pointed to the scholarship of black
feminist scholars of the 1980s and 1990s, “Angela Davis, bell hooks, Pearl Cleage,
Ntozake Shange, and Audre Lorde to name a few” (1999, 22) as foremothers to Hip-
Hop Feminism, a politic among black women for whom middle-class respectability
was no longer a primary concern. She writes,

Coming of age in the eighties and nineties, the hip-hop generation
is caught in a quagmire of conflicting social, moral, and political
values that typify American society at the close of this millennium.
Our elders left us a lot of mixed messages. Older heads spent the the
sixties and seventies enjoying ‘Free Love,’ but we reaped the
repercussions of the Sexual Revolution—among them the
devastating advent of AIDS, a one-out-of-two divorce rate, and
waning value for the cornerstones of a stable society: monogamy,
marrige, and the nuclear family [Morgan 1999].

I quote Morgan at length here because I want to move to the other, but
mutually constitutive way that the 1980s and 1990s had for black professional
women’s contemporary mobility. The reorganization of work and industry and an
increase in educative opportunities are joined by the cultural shift in black feminism.
Morgan’s appeal to the “waning value [of] monogamy, marriage, and the nuclear
family” locates failure squarely in the limits of the American Dream to knit together
the supposed difference between social and economic lives. Her proposal of a hip-hop
feminism was not meant to depart from the radical gender or class critique of her foremothers, but to resist the ways it fell back into discourses of homogeneity and shame, specifically for black women around sex and sexuality. Instead, Morgan proposed that black women’s feminism and its attendant demands for gender equity did not have to sacrifice desire, minimize the gestural, or eschew an aesthetic that indexed certain consumption practices. She joined Crenshaw (1998) and Hill Collins (1990) in describing and unpacking, what we have largely come to understand, as the intersectional experience of black women’s lives. As the American Dream revealed its fraying edges and discordant structures, black women helped us see how we were positioned in the interstices. To the analysis of black women’s intersectional positioning, hip-hop feminists added a politic of the unapologetic with a focus on process, performance, language, embodiment and emotions (Durham et al, 2013; Morgan 1999). Ideally, black women no longer owed apologies for the many ways in which society, inclusive of black communal traditions and expectations, police and attempt to “correct” black women’s behaviors. This argument indexes black women’s proximity to structures of affect, certainly as attention is called toward psycho-aesthetic adjustments necessary in and towards certain feeling regimes. Intersectional analyses caution us to be aware of the ways that forms of reifications (heteronormativity, citizenship, governance) arise in the turn towards the political as the place where action, resolution and, perhaps, solace among communities of affinity are sought (voting, party affiliation, activism, self-care and liberation from
heteronormative structures) (Durham 2013, 725; Berlant 2011, 228; Hanchard 2006, 64).

I also think that, perhaps in its weakest discursive form, intersectionality can be invoked to decenter analyses of the axes of oppression where race, gender, and class are brought together. I understand this is a potentially dangerous critique, especially when part of the overall argument of this dissertation is that every aspect of black women’s existence, histories and futures, have been subject to commodification and exploitation. However, I am positioning myself against an unexamined intersectionality that might exclude people in the effort to celebrate. For example, #blackgirlmagic and appeals to black excellence are digitally mediated forms of racial and gendered affirmation that have arisen out of a politics of the unapologetic; but the symbolic weight of having made, not just something of oneself, but a distinctly beautiful, energetic, confident, entrepreneurial, educated thing out of capital’s playbook, can leave women who feel and see themselves unpossessed of these characteristics at a loss.

On May 24, 2017, I went to a public screening at the Whitsell Auditorium of Beyoncé’s Lemonade video, which was the focal point of a panel discussion titled, “Nothing Can Real Can Be Threatened: Lemonade Screening. The organizer and panel discussant said that initially, the panel was smaller and included non-black women, but the feedback from black participants was that they would like a space to “talk about their feelings.” All identified as black and inclusive of lqbtq and heterosexual persons. Their ages ranged between the early 20s to 50s. The following
ethnographic quotes are from my handwritten notes taken during the panel. Italics indicate exact quotes and brackets indicate paraphrases. The initial responses to the video were overwhelmingly positive.

[So black, so southern, southern black things, so nice].

*She’s tapping recently into community of black women and femme. The imagery is joyous.*

*I’m not gonna stunt. Beyoncé got me looking at her.*

Panelist affirmed what they saw as Beyoncé performing the response to her pain of learning about her husband’s adultery. The video includes various scenes in which Beyoncé shares her space with other black women celebrities and dancers. Her southern background is reflected in romantic shots of the built and natural environment. In her lyrics and performance, she also rejects a code of silence that has its roots in norms of black female respectability that shelters black masculinity, even in transgression, from a white gaze. In many ways, she was Morgan’s “nose-ringed/caesared/weaved up/Gucci-Prada-DKNY down/ultra-Nubian/alternative-bohemian/beats-loving/smooth jazz-playing magic of us” hip-hop feminist in all her glory (1999, 24). However, the talk amongst the women watching Beyoncé’s complicated this version of “us” when one panelist, a queer artist, said,

*The video does not show class distinctions going on; it is oppressing us through imagery. Beyoncé’s beauty is iconic. The video also doesn’t show that the black female community can exclude. Reminds me of growing up in the south and in a community of women where I needed to “mind my corners.”*
The artist cut through all of the #blackgirlmagic by naming how conformity actually went unexamined in the spectacle of Beyoncé’s feminism. Subsequent responses were also more critical in the sense that discussion began to center around what the video allowed and disallowed. The evening concluded with a panelist remarking,

*The space in which the panel is taking place, Portland, is important because Portland white people feel uncomfortable with visible black women expressing themselves.*

From my point of view, the panel succeeded in offering a critical and diverse affective intervention into the frayed assumptions that come along with monogamy, marriage, and the nuclear family—all issue’s that Beyoncé made into a public event. That those feelings may have been witnessed by a white audience is not the same thing as a black panel performing for a white audience.

The 1980s and the 1990s were truly a reckoning for the poor and disfranchised. The revolutions had been privatized and multiculturalism was beginning to dilute the identity politics through which black and brown people had brought their demands before the state (Hale 2005, 1997; Chatterjee 2004; Sørenson 2004; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Greenhouse, et al 2002; Ohmae 1995). Even the privileged could not pretend the Dream was anything more than a state of disrepair, and few but the very wealthy could look to neoliberalism to provide succor (Greenhouse, et al 2002; Gill 2000; Steinmetz, 1999). Yet, I believe that changes to the moral and political economy opened up space for black women to look critically at spaces and places in which their structural oppression resided, and at the ways in
which patriarchy and white supremacy entered into their lives through familiar and traditional expectations about black womanhood. Women’s mobility was facilitated by career trajectories, but those trajectories were sought because women wanted to be mobile in a different kind of way.

Black Professionals Women in Portland: How did they get here?

The women in my study hold positions in proximity to power at a time when black populations and black women, in particular, are experiencing deepening poverty. I utilize “professional” as defined by Higginbotham in her social accounting of the professional/managerial class that is “involved in accumulating capital by designing and controlling the work of others, even though they themselves receive wages and/or salaries” (2001, 22). Her goal was to correct scholarly accounts that attempted to swell the ranks of the middle-class by including clerical workers and skilled blue collar workers. She argued that black clerical and skilled blue collar workers had little impact on the means of production. Therefore, we could better understand their potential exploitation if they were counted with the working class. For my project, the professional/managerial category is useful as a socially-able class, because my interlocutors may be advantaged there relative to income. Through it, I account for 1) the potential and real mobility that comes with their terminal degrees, 2) variation in incomes between them dependent upon whether they were learned or
creative professionals, 3) women’s descriptions of themselves as professionals, and 4) for the shifting degrees of economic or occupational security they experienced during the period of my research.

Professional Black Women Portland: The Research Period

In 2016, at the start of my two-year research project, interlocutors in my study were variously occupied with careers or pursuing new job opportunities. I set fairly loose criteria for recruitment: women self-identified as black and as a woman. Because I wanted to talk to people who had trained or been educated toward the professional sphere, most ranged in age from mid-30s to mid-40s in order to account for the time it would have taken to complete graduate programs and enter the working world. Outliers included a person in her late 20s, just beginning a career, and two women in their early 50s with long and successful ones.

https://www.dol.gov/whd/overtime/fs17d_professional.htm Accessed January 11, 2018. The USDL makes a distinction between kind of professions, i.e. 1) Learned, who must have advanced knowledge in a field of science or learning; 2) Creative, who’s work require “invention, imagination, originality or talent; and 3) highly compensated employees, who’s total annual compensation of $100,000 or more. As employees, professionals “generally must meet certain tests regarding job duties and be paid on a salary basis” in order to qualify for a minimum wage and overtime pay exemption, earning a salary no less than $455 per week (as of Nov. 2016).

My decision finds support in the work of Riché J. Daniel Barnes whose ethnography centers black career women in Atlanta, Georgia, all “solid citizens of the professional and upper-middle class” (2016, 21). Her interlocutors are contemporaries of mine in many ways as transplants and as first- or second-generation college graduates. Women in her study were caught between expectations of extended family that they do well in high-level professions and their own desires to leave or curtail careers to focus on their husband and children’s best welfare. Barnes proposes the analytics of “strategic mothering” and “neo-respectability” to talk through the shift that distinguishes her interlocutors from their mother’s generation in the 1970s: the physical and class distance from a wider black community, the conscious, though difficult decision to focus on their nuclear families and, in their activism and outreach, feeling less bound by a civil rights-inspired notion of “uplift.”
With one long-term Portlander as the exception, study participants had moved to Portland from all over the nation including Texas, Louisiana, Missouri, Tennessee, Ohio, New York, and California. No one had arrived in Portland directly from the place in which she was born, and their travels for education, work, and leisure included various stops in the United States, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Two women had been in Portland for at least 6 months, two for more than twenty years, and the rest between one and five years. Three people were single and one had children. All else were partnered with men. Two of the couples had children.

Research participants lived and worked across the metropolitan area of Portland (Multnomah County) and the suburbs of Hillsboro and Tigard (Washington County). Portland employs a grid system with the southern quadrants separated from the north by Burnside Street, and the west quadrants separated from the east by the Willamette River. Differences between urban neighborhoods within Portland, and the urban and suburban divide mattered as women navigated middle-class propriety, representational racial politics, and gendered articulations of safety and security.

Jesse, Jali, and Sapphire came to Portland for positions within academia. Jesse and Jali chose SE and Sapphire chose NE. Petra had an 18-year corporate career before arriving with a young family to Portland. She settled in the suburbs soon after and advanced to an executive leadership position in under 10 years. Eleanor came to pursue a master’s degree program in sustainability education. She and her partner bought a house in SE during the research period. Destiny, a community organizer and educator, Kathryn, a lawyer, and Brenda, an urban designer arrived to support a
partner’s career move. Paulette was a new graduate living in Minnesota and had been recruited by a Portland-based firm. She was a 4-year resident at the time of our introduction and her new job featured prominently when making decision about where to live, what communities to engage with, and how she envisioned a future in Portland. Pam, a pediatrician and lactation specialist, lived in NE and practiced at two healthcare centers in Portland and Oregon City. Pam left Portland before the end of my project. Laquita was the only non-transplant. While much of her family resided in north Portland, her mother had moved with the family to a neighboring suburb. Laquita grew up in a predominantly white area, had moved to California after high school and returned to Portland so her children could be closer to extended family.

Representations in Anthropology: Black Women and Contemporary Mobilities.

At present, there are two trends in which black bodies are tracked in movement. The first focuses, generally, on migration, diaspora, and refugee or asylum-seeking persons from African, Latin American, and the Caribbean. These emigrants are cast in terms of masses either responding to or being pushed out by shifting global labor markets (Stoller 2002, Oso Casas 2009), following commodity trails (Anderson 2009), fleeing from the consequences of the nation-state in retreat and/or increased state violence (Bixler 2006). Other ethnographies account for the experience of place-making in sites of destination that are troubled by racism (Das Gupta 2009), the socio-cultural relations that transform or maintain expectations of migrants women’s labor roles (Toma and Vause 2014), vulnerability in temporary-
worker status and contemporary immigration policy (Pessar 1995), familial obligations and remittance payments (Lu and Treiman 2011), information technology and transnational communication (Johnson 2013) and generational differences in the approach to origins and homeland(s) (Glick-Schiller and Fouron 2011).

The second trend is that ethnographic works that focus on black or afro-descendant women’s mobility pulls primarily from emigrant experiences from the Caribbean and Africa, particularly as it regards women’s insertion into global labor market (Arthur, et al 2012, Flynn 2011), diasporic religious and spiritual practices (McCarthy Brown 2001), and aesthetic practices and gestures of national identity (Candelario 2007). Also, black women anthropologists have created the epistemological field that centers black women in Africa and in the diaspora in critiques of capitalism, globalization, and the reach of Western schemas of knowledge production (Martin-Shaw 2015; Navarro, et al 2013, Jacobs-Huey 2002, Bolles 2001, McClaurin 2001, Harrison 1998, 1995, Hill Collins 1990).

As the subject-focus of ethnography and anthropological knowledge production, black/African American women, emerge to trouble or reinforcing cultural traditions and sites of black cultural patrimony in Louisiana (Browne 2015), racism and poverty in Detroit (Cox 2015), the entanglement of homemaking and grassroots politics (Martin-Shaw 2015, Isoke 2011) and the complex balancing of racial uplift/respectability politics, mothering and mentoring, and professional pursuits (Barnes 2016, Wingfield 2009). Central to the scholarship above are deeply analytical and affective approaches to black women’s positions at the axis of race, gender, and
class oppression as defined by the spatial contexts of the home and place-making. What is rarer in the anthropological literature are ethnographies that track black/African American women of the U.S as travelers or travel as central to women’s understanding of self (Eison Simmons 2013).

Two exceptions are Paula Ebron’s (2002), *Performing Africa* and Bianca C. Williams’ (2018) *The Pursuit of Happiness*. Written sixteen years apart, these ethnographies document black women traveling to the Gambia and Jamaica for research and personal exploration, respectively. The tendency among African American women to view themselves as recognizable members of the African diaspora is complicated by black nationals in non-American contexts, who have their own perspective on the meaning of black American women’s excursions. What unites these texts, however, is an anthropological perspective on how class and national privilege stymie desires of racial commonality (Ebron 2002) or engender emotions around belonging (Williams 2018). These scholars center what this means for black American women travelers, who may be acting beyond the boundaries of home and nation, but carrying those expectations and desires with them as frames for transnational solidarity.

As I consider what mobility and travel mean in my research, I join Williams and Ebron’s insight to Ruth Simms Hamilton (2004) and Jim Clifford’s (1997) focus on routes as literal pathways to be trod, but also propose routes as analytical tools for guiding scholars through the heterogeneous and *circulatory* process of making difference between peoples, places, things and times. I start with Clifford’s concept of
dwelling-in-travel as an apt neologism for that combined function of routes. If we consider travel as a key human practice, then encounters between peoples and things becomes consistent as events which bundle various histories, presents, and futures together. Clifford does not deny the structural and hegemonic force of Western Europe and US to shape events in Latin America, Africa, and Asia and South Pacific and, to that end, admits that the word travel fails when confronted with forced displacements. However, he suggests that if we are able to “untether” movement and mobility from leading into respite categories of home and bounded identities and, instead, opt for a more circuitous approach to the making of difference, then the problematic before us is to understand how travel may be constitutive of representations of boundedness, i.e., identity, culture, nation-state, while also revealing of their permeability.

Ruth Simms Hamilton’s use of routes was more pointedly historical. She was not speaking in terms of travel or the general capacity, or tendency, of human populations to be shaped by movement and encounter. She was focused on the “geosocial mobility” and “the circulatoriness phenomenon” experienced by members of Global Africa and its diaspora,\(^\text{19}\) which describes and maps the actual movement of peoples of the Africa diaspora across time and space and involves a ‘proliferation of departures’ from the fifteenth century to the present, which have been involuntary, semi-voluntary, and voluntary. Circulatoriness also maps the process of identity reformation due to mobility. From new socio-racial categories, to new languages, to competing notions of nationality and citizenship, circulatoriness illustrates how identities change as they are changed (Simms Hamilton 2007, 2)

\(^{19}\) “the geographically and socio-culturally diverse peoples of Africa and its diaspora” (2004, 1)
Simms Hamilton sought to distinguish and theorize the routes of dispersal of Global Africans from other diasporic peoples. In the first effort, she focused on historical social relations, i.e., actual and imagined connections to Africa as a homeland to which to return, African internal migrations, and the *Maafa* or Atlantic Slave trade. Her second focus was on modern relations of black dispersal, i.e., labor migration, brain drains, and the pursuit of better lives. As a method for theorizing Africa and, specifically, its relationship to the diversity of its internal and diasporic subjects, circulatoriness is a genre for conceiving of how forms of historical and modern mobility, intersect and overlap with forms of Power, domination, and inequality, and with forms of Resistance as constituent of an imaginable—not imagined—group of people. Emphasis on the imaginable centers the possibility that there may be differences in the ways that dispersed peoples conceive of their relationship with or against Africa that is countered by historical events and national narratives. Simms Hamilton viewed this discrepancy as create fertile ground for the emergence of new identities and forms of the connections. Together, the texts by Ebron, Williams, Simm Hamilton, and Clifford offer analytic guidance for me to think through race, gender, and mobility in black professional women’s lives as a discourse on productive gain, but also to the everyday, yet oft puzzling, processes of self- and place-making.

**Staying as a Process**
The ethnographic material below is organized into two sections: History and Future. Each section will feature women with access to elite spaces and with the ability to contribute to conversations and decision-making processes. Each person is also shown navigating through and overcoming challenges where their abilities and fit within a particular context are called into question. It is by working through or confronting such racialization processes—systemic or interpersonal—that women start to reflect on the types of occupational work and community-building they want in Portland. Women get what they want in some cases. In other’s they do not.

I convey women’s experiences in sections that appear linear, but this is a limitation of language, text, and my desire to track the histories of different persons’ lives, of social relations and relations of production, and of differential places as distinctly labored for black professional women staying in Portland. The assemblage is far more complex and I hope to index that descriptively and analytically, even if I do not achieve it organizationally.

A Good Job: Straddling Working and Middle-Class Beginnings

Under this framework of history, I introduce Sapphire and Petra. Both grew up and matured into young college age women in the 1980s and 1990s. Their mothers occupied the clerical/administrative status in their respective jobs. Using the social class model predicated on parental occupations, Sapphire grew up in a working-class household and Petra in a middle-class household (Higginbotham 2001; Barnes 2016). Higginbotham’s ethnographic subjects were educated in the 1970s as professionals,
and her interests was in the differential ways that either their middle- or working-class parents were able to provide advice and counsel about the transition to college. I will show that Sapphire and Petra find commonality with Higginbotham’s subjects because they too received college advice that was influenced by their parents’ educational experience. However, there is a critical difference between Higginbotham and me as to the importance we give to social class as impacting the course of our subjects’ lives.

Higginbotham’s goal was to provide a study of the working-class that she felt was missing from the historical literature on black labor that had, heretofore, focused either on the poor or the black middle-class. To that end, it was necessary for her to draw more rigid distinctions between those three classes. While I utilize her category of managerial/professional occupational class in order to talk to differences in rank and their proximity to power, I am more invested in the ways that Petra and Sapphire actually straddled these three classes in real and conceptual ways. The social class identities that Petra and Sapphire hold because of these straddling experiences have had consequences for the communities that they sought out in Portland, and the ways they talk about inhabiting blackness in relation to other people and places in the city. I view Sapphire and Petra’s experiences as different from Higginbotham’s subjects in the following ways.

First, place and space matter to both Sapphire’s and Petra. Below, I will discuss how Washington, DC’s majority black population constituted a complex terrain of intersecting economic, class, and residential connections in Sapphire’s case.
Her mother’s job in DC’s public sector and the location of their home in northwest had consequences for how middle-class sensibilities and amenities were deployed. Petra, on the other hand, grew up middle-class in Dayton, Ohio, but she traveled to New York every summer to live with her father and his extended family in working-class and low-wage conditions. Both experiences were significant to Petra’s articulation of being a professional who can easily relate to different people and places.

Second, the strict moral economies that operate in Higginbotham’s study where middle-class parents wanted their daughters to look for husbands in college and working-class parents wanted to daughters to establish professional careers do not quite hold for Sapphire and Petra. The message that Sapphire received from her, technically, working-class background was that she should find a husband in college. Petra’s parents encouraged her to go to an all girl’s historically black college and the emphasis for those graduates was to establish a career in order to do good in the world. This does not mean that Petra was not expected to marry or that Sapphire was not expect have a career with positive social implications, but this points to my argument that some of the traditional expectations for Higginbotham’s interlocutors’ educated in the 1970s were loosened for my interlocutors educated and looking for careers in the 1980s and 1990s.

Third, I focus explicitly on Sapphire’s and Petra’s mother’s possession of a good job. Neither mother’s respective administrative or technical job fit in Higginbotham’s category of managerial/professional with impact on the means of
production who would populate the middle-class. My focus is on the ways their mothers were able to use their proximity and access to those means in order to create the foundations from which their daughters would eventually venture into the world as black professional women.

*Growing up in Chocolate City: Sapphire*

Sapphire and I were the only bald, black women on the shuttle that would take us to the transportation hubs of southwest 6th Avenue, Portland. There was no way I could have missed her because I am always on the lookout for other black women in spaces around me, but seeing a kindred hair-spirit made me smile wide. I greeted her, “Good afternoon, sister.” She looked so familiar to me; not in the sense that I believed that I knew her but in the way that her aesthetics seemed to announce, “I am not from Portland!” She wore big earrings, several necklaces of varying lengths, multiple rings and bracelets, and gestured in mutual recognition. She looked me straight in the eye and had returned my greeting loudly and enthusiastically. Before I knew anything about her, she was like the grown-up version of my girls from back in the day and I could not have been happier to have seen her on the bus.

When I saw Sapphire again a few days later, we were waiting in front of Shattuck Hall on Portland State University’s campus. She was already waiting among the crowd of students when I walked up to the bus stop. I sat in the aisle across from her on the bus. I introduced myself and we began talking. Indeed, she was new to Portland and had arrived only weeks before from the mid-west. She
already has some news about who I was. I did not learn about this until our first
formal interview during which Sapphire explained,

I look up and I see you on the transport bus. Then a few days later I am on the
regular city bus and a sister gets on the bus and we kind of just acknowledge each
other and compliment each other. When she learns where I work, she asks me if I
know you. And I’m like, “Oh my god, I just saw her on the shuttle bus! And so, I’m
like, the next time I see her, I’m going to let her know this story.

During our conversation on the bus, however, we discovered that we had
grown up about four blocks away from each other in the Mount Pleasant
neighborhood of northwest Washington, DC. We lived in those areas through the
1980 and 90s, after which we had both departed the city for good.

Sapphire and I were not really shocked that we had not known one another
then, but we were amused to meet each other so many years later and so far away. We
wondered aloud about whether we had ever crossed paths. Demographically, Portland
could not be more unlike the Chocolate City we knew as teenagers. One did not look
expectantly for characteristics of racial familiarity in a city where you saw black
people all of the time. It had been appropriate and expected, however, that one would
nod at other black people when passing on the street. We missed the frequency of that
act in Portland. As children and young adults in Washington, DC, sometimes racism
and racial and gendered forms of inequity were muted as structural problems.

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20 Gabrielle Modan writes of the neighborhoods “west of Mt. Pleasant S[reet],” where I had been
raised among working and middle-class black homeowners, that Latinos and Vietnamese residents in
1996-1998 described as the area “‘where White people live.’” (2007, 81)
because many of those in civic, civil and governmental positions of power were black.

When Sapphire and I talked within the formal context of my research, we reflected on those background experiences,

Yeah, so I grew up in Washington, D.C. which in the 70s, 80s, and partial 90s was a completely black city. And what I mean by that is, everyone who ever touched my life was black.

So, from pre-K, all the way through in school, all of my social networks, all of my biological and other mothers, you know, um, my aunties, everybody…my uncle, everybody was black. So, stores where I went. It wasn’t until I got a little bit older that I saw white folks, right. And of course my mother, she had a good job, as they used to say.

She came up in the time when she only needed her high school diploma to get a good job and she was down, kind of near K Street. And I remember this, so she put me in summer camp and it was this little school down off of K street.

I don’t remember, but I do remember that Jimmy Carter, at that time President Carter’s daughter attended that public school. And so I attended summer camp in that school, but still never experienced what you would think about as racism or white supremacy as I know it now.

Sapphire and I had chuckled when she described her mother’s occupation as a good job. The chuckle represented a nostalgic reckoning with present knowledge.

When and where we grew up, a parent that possessed a “good job” was shorthand for a middle-class, black life. That understanding was abetted by the fact that we lived in the residential neighborhoods to the northwest of the Mount Pleasant’s central business corridor that stretched from Park Road and Mount Pleasant Street down to 18th and Columbia Road. Red-brick, row-houses, with four to six bedrooms, a small front yard and aligned porches from which one could almost see to the end of the
block. Families resided in the homes, some of which were parented by heterosexual couples and others by multigenerational mothers.

In Sapphire’s case, the home in which she and her mother lived belonged to her grandmother. The middle-class-ness of northwest residents who lived in row-houses was also made distinct in relation to apartment residents a few streets south of us, and perceived lower-income black populations in the quadrants of Southeast and northeast Washington. While the size of the DC black population was different than Portland’s, the quadrant system they share reflected real and perceived class associations. In DC, however, these spatial distinctions were complicated by kinship connections and workplace relations. Black people and families extended across spatial, perceptual, and occupational boundaries. Middle- and working class, and low-wage workers could be bound by familial and friendship relations, as well as their proximity to one another in the organizations and large government buildings in which they worked downtown.

Good jobs in the public or private sector, such as Sapphire's mother possessed, were colloquially understood as those within various federal agencies and non-profit organizations in an area roughly bordered by K Street to the north and Hwy 395 to the south, and extending from northwest, Dupont Circle towards Union Station in northeast. These jobs offered a salary, health insurance, and vacation time.

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I would argue, from personal experience growing up in the community, that this belief held quietly even during the epidemic of crack cocaine usage swept DC in the mid- to late 1980s, because the “real” violence related to the selling and use of crack cocaine was thought to be more frequent and egregious in southeast and northeast. Yet, people in the northwest were also affected as many saw family members and friends become addicted, go to jail or die as a consequential effect of being caught up by the drug economy.
It was not unheard of that black women would work their way from secretary positions to higher level administrative managers with a high-school diploma or an associates’ degree. As children, a mother with a good job, residence in a single-family home and amenities, like camp, were the material attributes of black middle-class achievement.

*I don’t think I really understood that I was a different kind of...like black, black until I got to college. That’s when I knew that I was black. Right?

I wanted to go to a HBCU. My heart was set on it, but my family was more into this notion of ‘If it’s all black then it is just not right. Something about it is just not going to be right.’ So, sure enough I applied to this one large HBCU, very well known. I was in the marching band in high school; a flag twirler. And I wanted to be in this band. This band was famous. I sent in my paperwork. This school had accepted me and I wanted to go to, but my mom was like, “They haven’t even sent your paperwork back. I’m not sending you down there. You see what I mean?”

So, I ended up at the predominantly white institution in the same city. That’s when I knew that something was awry. There were only 10% of us on the entire campus and, at that time, that was significant.

Higginbotham argued that high-school educated, working-class women and men of the 1950-60s were unable to fully advise their daughters because they lacked preparedness for how institutions of higher education worked and black middle-class families promoted primarily white institutions with the belief that they would best prepare their daughters in a world already rife with discrimination (2001, 26).

Perhaps, Sapphire’s mother’s suspicion of the southern HBCU\(^{22}\) was demonstrative

\(^{22}\) Howard University, in Washington D.C., is one of the nationally recognized, Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and the University of the District Columbia, at least in the 1980s and 1990s, was a Primarily Black College and University (PBCU).
of these thought given that her criticism was of the school’s ability to meet a minimal standard of bureaucracy.

It would also have been consistent in her practice, as Sapphire described, of providing new opportunities for her daughter. Sapphire’s mother may not have had a college education, but she used her knowledge to place her daughter into a children’s camp where a president’s daughter had attended school, and kept attention to the procedural importance around the handling of the college application paperwork. Both of these are material and practical resources that Higginbotham associated with the professional-managerial middle-class. Rather than only reticence about the HBCU or indicative of a lack of preparedness, perhaps Sapphire’s mother was also acting in accordance with middle-class expectations that a child be exposed to opportunities that help her to transcend what the parent has obtained. Certainly, going to a white college did not protect Sapphire from the inevitable awareness of a black identity that is formed in relation to the pre/dominance of whiteness in wider society.

Another interesting piece was, when we had dorms, when at that time in the dorms we had maids. There were black maids and so those of us who were in the dorms, black girls who were there from different parts of the country...mostly, from the south though. You know, we did everything we could to ensure that their lives were easy because we identified with them through our own grandmothers or mothers or aunts being maids.

Kim: can you give me an idea of what you did tried to make things easy for black women who were laboring of your care and the care of others?
So, we would make sure, you know, we would push hard on the white girls about picking up their stuff. You know, making sure that they weren’t intentionally leaving things for the elders to have to do. And in turn, the black women who were maids in those places, would say to us, “Don’t take this. Don’t take that.” They would give us this kind of advice that I don’t think I ever needed before. Don’t allow white women to do this. Don’t allow white people to do this. Stand for this. Stand for that.”

I don’t think I had a good understanding of it, because I remember that we went through this phase of coming in innocent and the next thing you know we are angry, right? And then we are performing acts of activism. So, you know, myself and about 4 or 5 of us started on this campus, and it is still there, the first NAACP chapter. It was those types of...I mean, you get that, “Oh, my god I’m black.” And then, “Oh, now, I’m mad that I’m black” and then it’s like, what are we going to do about it?

We can see from Sapphire’s description that a maturing black identity is different from the naiveté associated with youth. For black women, the transition between childhood’s emplaced knowledge to adult spatial knowledge does not “strip emplaced knowledge of its local particularities and social and personal content” as Christensen (2002, 16) argues happens to white children in England and Denmark. Sapphire’s growing anger is indicative of perceptual and embodied development that is more complex. When she moves into the white space of the university, older black women are there to articulate how spatial knowledge (assertions of institutional power) matter as instrument of emplacement (white women’s potentially using their power in white male-led university to assert control over black women) and providing advise on how Sapphire and her friends should counter it in context (Don’t allow white people do this. Stand for this. Stand for that). This is not just a matter of security, but a matter of survival. Sapphire’s mother’s insistence that she go to a
primarily white school could be understood as her positioning Sapphire to taking up space—not simply to assimilate or accommodate middle-class standards—in white worlds.

After her experience in college, Sapphire moved to California with her first husband. After nine years, she moved to Memphis with her second husband and children, left for Virginia to complete a master’s degree in conflict transformation with a concentration in restorative, and then moved back to Memphis to commute monthly to Pittsburgh, PA, where in her 40s, she earned a doctoral degree in Educational leadership with a focus on social justice. When Sapphire and I sat down to talk in 2017, she had arrived in Portland as a single mother. She had only been in town for a month, and she had moved to northeast Portland where she understood that most of the black Portland population resided. Of the experience, she recounted,

*It's been interesting. I am pretty much...I'm always comfortable with black folks. So, even moving to Portland I am...I've said this to you, I have said this to my colleagues. Probably everybody I meet. I tell this story to and it’s that I could not get into the hood. When folks said to me, you know, Portland...you are going to need some time” and I was saying in the back of my head, “Tsk, I don’t need anytime, because I’m going straight to the hood, and I know I can get in there and find a place."

*No! like, No. you can’t...no, you can’t even. I don’t even know. Yeah. I think getting into the hood in Portland means you have to know somebody who knows somebody. And that’s not even possible because people don’t even know the somebodies, right?*

Well, what happens when you are looking for the “hood” and it does not exist? Sapphire’s use of the word “hood” was not a derogatory, it reflected optimism in black communal spaces of support that received distinction from the surrounding
white community. It was a desire to embed herself among people that would understand why she would need support. What she did not expect is that the marginalization and exclusions that would create a “hood” anywhere would be filtered through a particular politics of place in such a way that the remaining Albina residents would be wary any outsider.

Some city and municipal governments (Boyd 2005) and black incoming-residents (Prince 2002) may not see black middle-class gentrifiers as problematic. The assumptions about race as a category through which affinities must work obscure intra-class concerns as well as the continued displacement of low and working-class blacks. Sapphire is aware of these effects, and her expectation of finding place in Albina is borne also of her particular navigation between historical experience and social and economic class. The notion that Sapphire had to know someone in order to get into the neighborhood points to the necessity that she be vouched for. This would not be an unacceptable expectation as personal connections and word-of-mouth verifications can be as important as public information or institutional guidelines for facilitating peoples’ transitions to new cities and new jobs. Sapphire was willing to find the right person to talk to and to make a personal appeal for assistance. Demonstrating faith in the knowledge of those already living in Albina would have been a first step to indicating that she wanted to belong.

However, Sapphire also admits that she assumed it would happen quickly. She did not heed those with counsel that she was “going to need time.” A commitment to racial and social justice, but also single motherhood and the transition to a new full-
time position imposed limits on her ability to flex financial capital and, perhaps, impressed a need to find housing faster. However, if privilege is associated with her mobility, it may appear as an ability that is unavailable to or undesired by black residents of Albina, who had been working to protect their neighborhoods from external incursion long before Sapphire’s arrival.

Sapphire eventually found a place in northeast and made friends with Vietnamese and Latina women, a more diverse community than I have experienced before. Ten months after her initial arrival, in the summer of 2018, Sapphire said that she had come to the realize that she had been living in Portland as though it were a temporary stay. I asked what that it entails as it regards coming to a sense of permanence. She offers that it will include looking for a four-bedroom home where she wants to live in with her kids, and she is willing to look beyond northeast Portland. Perhaps, the hood that Sapphire was looking for never existed as she imagined it. It is not Albina role to meet up to those expectations, but it is also true that the district has experienced enough change and displacement where long-term members also express nostalgia for what the neighborhood used to be. The forms of racial and social inequity against which Portland’s black community provided emotional, physical, and psychological buffer also have the power to pull at its edges, keeping both residents and Sapphire moving in affective and literal ways.
Middle-class in the Midwest and Working-class on the East Coast

I turn now to Petra’s story. I put her in conversation with Sapphire because they name the decades of the 1980s and 1990s as the years in which they grew up, matured into young adults and went off to college. They also talk about the impact of the mother’s influence on them as daughters and how they would deviate from their mother’s life choices. Finally, Petra and Sapphire grew up in close-knit black communities. The small black community of Petra’s childhood, however, existed within a predominantly white, middle-class neighborhood in the suburbs. Her mother was a technician and her father was one of the first black executives in the same corporation in Dayton, OH. They were among the first to integrate the mostly Jewish neighborhood. During the summer, however, she traveled by plane to the black and Latino neighborhood in New York where her biological father and his extended family lived. I asked how she felt moving between family in Ohio and New York,

_I found it fascinating! Only because you had two different worlds, and you adjust to the world. Case in point, in Dayton you went to Kroger’s. You had all your food lined up. You went to one place._

_[In New York] We would wake up in the morning every day and my aunt planning out the meal. So, we had to go run to the fruit market. We had to go to the meat market. We had to go to the laundry. In Ohio, everything was one-stop shop. We didn’t have to go to the laundry. We had a washer and dryer. So, it was those differences that I appreciated. It was like this is how you survive in this household. Everybody has to, doing what they need to do._

_Oh my goodness. It helped me to adjust to different environments, right? I don’t get freaked out. I probably tend to be, lean more conservative in some things. In other_

23 In the course of our conversation, Petra simply referred to her (step)father as “step father” and “Dad”.
things, just fine. That’s how we living, right. In New York, it was day by day, so we shopped every day because we didn’t know…. You know trying to feed 12, 13 people in a two family, three family home...

You know what was going on, but never felt like, “Oh, woo is me. I just felt like my family here is different than how we lived in Ohio. So, I appreciated it. There were some things that you were, like “Oh, god! I miss the comfort of… Gotta sleep on the pull out bed. We can’t eat Captain Crunch. We gotta eat grits.” [Petra laughs at the memory]

Place and space were significant in Petra’s childhood as it regarded behavioral and gendered expectations. In New York, Petra was interpolated by other children based on where she lived. Her family owned a home there and despite their occasional reliance on public assistance and daily practices of subsistence, it set her apart from children who lived in the projects. Petra developed her New York accent as a part of an assimilation to other children’s expectations and to narrow the economic gaps that was supposed to exist between home and project dwellers. Due to her aunt’s immobility, Petra was given responsibility for money and going to the store alone. In the evening, she was allowed to play out after 7pm and as long as she could be monitored by her aunt from the screen door or window. Adult conceptions of childhood safety morphed around the role that Petra had in the home, due to physical, spatial, and economic constraints. Petra’s freedom of movement and access to some adult forms of spatial knowledge framed her working class/low-wage experience in New York. She also knew not to tell her mother in Ohio of the places that she was allowed to go alone.
In Ohio, her movement practices were viewed differently by her parents. Greater choice in commodity possession, i.e., home-ownership in a less urban area, access to an in-house washer and the ability to buy name-brand cereals came at the expense of being able to move freely as she had in New York. Her family had an automobile and could travel the distance to the grocery store, thus allowing her parents to stay in control of where and how Petra moved about. She also had to be inside by 7pm after outside play.

*In the neighborhoods in Dayton, they were well manicured and maintained. So, you know... I just think... all kids come in at 7. I think it was just like, some of the structure. Like, “What are you doing outside at ten years old? Girl, you need to be inside.”*

Petra’s ability to move spatially in Ohio was constrained in comparison to that of New York. That does not mean that other forms of mobility and navigation were not at available to her. She was bused into a community of white people to attend school, but her family moved into the middle-class neighborhood where her school was located eventually. She was also challenged by children in Ohio who questioned where she belonged. White students who may have come to terms with the presence of black students in school were incredulous to learn that she was also a neighbor.

“*Once I moved into their neighborhood, it was interesting how people categorize you based on your race. And then when they can’t wrap their heads around the fact that, “Oh, you have the same thing that I have?” It takes them off balance.*

Petra’s father and mother were deeply involved in her childhood and in her decisions around where to go to college. Petra said that in addition to the expectation
that she would go to college, and that her father’s position as an executive lead her to believe that all opportunities were open to her. She had initially applied and been accepted at a primarily white institution, but went with her parents on a tour to the historically black all women’s college, Spelman, where she fell in love. It was only after she had completed her first year as an undergraduate that her parents expressed their happiness that she had chosen the school.

Kim: Did you like Spelman?

*I loved it. To see very progressive women in one place. To have that sisterhood and that affinity. We were all going to change the world in our way.\*  
*For some of us, being an attorney or supreme court. The fact that you were in Atlanta helped because you could see it. You didn’t have to say, ‘Oh, I have to dream it.’*

Petra’s father had a strong influence on her life. The position he had attained and the lifestyle that he was able to provide for her were important. However, she also valued his counsel even though she characterized him as being a bit “chauvinistic.” I asked if it mattered to her father that she had chosen an all woman’s college, rather than just a historically black college. She said,

*‘I think both schools they were okay with. He said he was glad I chose Spelman. He said, ‘I don’t think you would have been prepared for all of the liberty, the freedoms in Washington, DC. You needed more structure.’*

When she recounted this, I was reminded of the small liberties Petra had in New York, and how she had been moving among multiple racialized, gendered, and adult/child, spatial contexts for a long while. In her ethnographic work among
European children’s and adults’ use of space, Christensen was led to explore how
time, not just knowledge, was differentially oriented. She proposed that adult spatial
knowledge accounted not only for the present, but also the future around concerns of
safety and security. Christensen, however, does not account for the things that neither
children nor adults share with one another, perhaps, for the same concerns. Petra did
not tell her parents about what she was allowed to do in New York. She said if her
mother knew they “would probably be like, ‘Oh, my god! Are you kidding me?! We
need to go to court!’” She relayed this with much humor, but certainly for a 10-year
girl it suggests an awareness or belief that various people’s sensibilities and, perhaps,
peace between her families would be maintained if she did not tell all that she knew. I
am not suggesting that as a child that she had the same experience to assess all the
risks an adult might, but only that as a child she also found it necessary to project her
emplaced knowledge into the future in order to made decisions around her security,
but also that of the adults in her sphere.

I knew Petra long before my research began, and she is one of the most put-
together and confident women that I know. She gave me a lot of professional advice
when I first arrived in Oregon, but I did not know much about her personal life. She
has moved up the ranks of executive leadership in the corporation where she works,
and shows great facility at cultural-class straddling. It was not code-switching, a
practice in which people of color possessed knowledge and the ability to switch to
language use and intonations, gestures and bodily composure, and dress deemed
appropriate in different racialized, often white-dominated, contexts as a matter of
survival and accommodation. In the most casual settings where I was most familiar with Petra, she maintained a careful balance between friendliness, down-to-earth colloquial speak, and a confident and composure that did not invite too much familiarity. I found that she behaved equally so when I observed her at work and in interaction with her corporate colleagues and staff.

I asked Petra why she chose the corporate work in college when many of her friends were planning to be lawyers and doctors?

_To some degree, it was role modeled in my house. But the other piece of it was, I think it was the times. Female. You had corporations coming down and setting up interviews. They were very aggressive and it was a badge of honor. [she mimics other students awe] ‘So, you are going to work with who? Goldman Sachs?’_

I gained a good sense of what influence Petra’s father, her undergraduate college and peers had on her. I also wanted to know what impact her mother, a technician without the same educational opportunities had.

_I have never been one of those people—and this is what I admire about my mom—she always pushed us. She was not one of those helicopter moms that said, “Stay close.” She was one of those, “I want you to go out and do what I didn’t get to do and I will live vicariously through you.”_

_The fact that we went to New York [from Dayton] on our own and my mom didn’t shuttle us there; sitting on that one row with the stewardess, finding our way. She was very comfortable with us going outside and experiencing life._

Kim: what do you think allowed you to be more vocal and more mobile than your mom?

_I think just the times, to some degree. So, my formative years really were the 80s when there was the realm of possibility around women’s liberation. Blacks were_
moving into corporate America. I had my dad as an example. ‘Oh, okay, he’s an executive. I can be too.’ So, um, I think that all just kind of influenced how I saw things.

So, I’d like to tell you that I know exactly, but part of it is character. But the other piece of it, I just think, the time in which blacks were making advances in the corporate environment, I think that helped.

When Petra’s was recruited out of college, she was disappointed that her desired corporate job led her back home to Dayton, OH, where she said that she had acquired her mid-western values. She arrived in Portland in 2005 after 18 years in the automobile industry. She had moved five times previously, from Ohio, Michigan, Texas to Chicago. I asked if she knew anything about Portland before arriving,

This is my playbook in every city. One, I would go find a black church. When I was here visiting, I was like, “Give me the list of black churches. Let me go visit and feel which one is more aligned to where I would like us to go.

One of the advantages I have, you know, is my friend, K. Her husband happens to be from my hometown. He hired me. He was on the hiring committee. He never told me that he was from Dayton until I got hired.

Kim: So you have an extension of kin folk, right?

We know some of the same families because Dayton is kinda that...you are about two phone calls away from knowing who is who. And you go by family name. ‘do you know the such and such?’ ‘yeah!’

I highlight Sapphire and Petra’s together in this section on History for many reasons. Similarities in their youthful experiences in the 1980s and 1990s give insight into the socio-cultural contexts of black life in America as well as changes that were on the occupational landscape for some black American women. Sapphire and Petra’s
mothers reflected a broader period of transition for black women out of the singular frame of domestic, household work. They had also moved beyond conducting non-household, office or technical work serving the black community exclusively. They had entered white dominated firms where physical working conditions and a salary, rather than a wage, would have helped to characterize their jobs as “good.” Each mother used the benefits of these good jobs to provide amenities for their daughters, such as camp and travel, that expanded their experiences, knowledge, and social competencies.

At the same time, we can also see how in the broader context of black life in America, black women were still vulnerable economically. As detailed earlier, black women’s wages declined at the beginning of the 1980s putting them well behind white women, white men and black men (who also earned less relative to whites, but were more evenly distributed across different industries relative to black women, and more likely to be represented in managerial/professional positions). For all the status that Sapphire’s northwest home may have provided, as a single, working mother, Sapphire’s mother gained by sharing expenses and counting on familial support from Sapphire’s grandmother. In Petra’s case, her mother benefited by getting married and by marrying a man with more financial and social resources. At a time when traditional and, perhaps, conservative expectations of black respectability were pervasive, Petra’s transition from divorced motherhood to marriage to an executive would have meant an improvement in her social status, benefit from a second income
in the care of children and home, and a transition into Dayton, OH’s upper middle-
class standards. As Petra put it,

_We had it pretty good once my mom remarried. We had it pretty good._

I argue that Sapphire and Petra’s mothers’ good job allowed for a straddling
of working- and middle-class sensibilities. The daughters were positioned to move
economically beyond what the mothers had achieved, but also to retain an extremely
nuanced understanding of the social and cultural complexity of black life. In neither
case were Petra or Sapphire shielded from supportive communities of working-class
or poor black people. Sapphire received counsel from black domestic workers in
college that reminded her of women that surrounded her as a child. In New York,
Petra learned from her aunts the day-to-day strategies of providing care and guidance
for family in the face of difficult economic circumstances. They witnessed how black
populations fared under systemic racial discrimination, economic marginalization,
and spatial segregation.

School is where both come to learn what it means to be black in proximity to
whiteness. The displays of power by white professors and the privilege of white
student peers impress upon Sapphire the responsibility and need for a visible black
identity politics. Petra responded to racialized interactions as an elementary student
who was bussed to a white school and as a member of a family moving into a
primarily non-black neighborhood. At a historically, black college she entered an
academic community of black women who replicated the support of her Ohio black
community in social and class status. At the same time, the women at Spelman, academics, lawyers, and politicians, as well as the corporate recruiters expanded the career choices available to her.

When Petra and Sapphire talked about their post-college years, two things were significant across their experiences. First, both moved several times to pursue additional education and career opportunities. Second, neither desired to return to the cities and communities in which they had grown up, though in Sapphire’s case she expressed a willingness during her job search to “focus on the eastern part of the country so she could be close to my family.” Third, they recounted having black people around them to help buffer against some of the challenges of living away from familial connections. Though Sapphire lived in Cincinnati, which she described as “pretty white,” she relied on black women “sister” peers, as well as white and black male mentors, to counsel her through graduate school and to connect her to the career opportunities that to Portland. Petra’s experienced grave gender discrimination in Chicago, where she was the only black person and woman on her sales team, was prevented from advancing in her position and routinely given the “crappy” territories. She described it as the lowest point ever in her career. Yet, she initially turned down a job offer on the west coast because she was reluctant to leave the black population and networks of support in Chicago.

Fifth, Sapphire and Petra’s came to Portland expecting to find a black community, in some fashion, that was cohesive and coherent. In many ways, the “black community” that Sapphire and Petra expected to find, had changed critically
during the same decades that black professional women put new capacities in motion. Increased privatization, redistribution of city tax structures, and global competition would simultaneously grow corporate profits and a prison industrial complex in Portland as it would nation-wide, while disinvestment, hyper-policing, defunding of urban schools, and white gentrification pulled at the cohesion of Albina’s black community. Simultaneously, the city had maneuvered the social and politically progressive reputation it gained in the 1970s through a period of economic depression to emerge in the 1990s with tech, design, and green industries capable of calling in skilled professional migrants from across the globe. While Portland has been primed to meet the growing service sector economy for a long time—also small-scale entrepreneurs, a diverse and influential healthcare industry, and a burgeoning development and construction sector—the city has never included the long-term black population into these projects consistently either as contributors to or beneficiaries of the city’s economic stability.24

The neoliberal push towards a more flexible and mobile workforce would frame Sapphire and Petra’s choices to look at Portland as a new home. This matters to both Petra and Sapphire’s experience despite their different approaches. The black Albina Community that Sapphire attempted to enter in northeast Portland exists on

24 The 1973 Model Cities Program Third Action Year Extension Plan lamented the lack of preparedness offered to black students to enter the workforce. A 2015 Urban League report on the State of Black Oregon indicates the same critical problem exists. The top priorities it recommends are to “foster greater racial inclusion in Oregon’s rapidly growing tech sector...Green sector, neighborhood-focused inclusive and sustainable growth [and] tapping the potential of the black entrepreneurs.” The Report argues that “While Oregon may have a small Black population, the community has significant economic potential that will help the entire state succeed” (SOBO 2015, 94-95).
the spatial and historical terms constitutive to Portland. That there were gatekeepers monitoring access to the neighborhood through bureaucratic means such as school enrollment or that Sapphire seemed unable to find the right person to vouch for her entry may be their forms of resistance to more external incursion and the dispersal of resources. The potential for social relations abetted by notions of racial affinity between Sapphire and communities in northeast may need to be decentered for that labor to be effective.

The black church that Petra became a part of is a satellite of one of the oldest black Albina churches in Portland, but the people that attend it are mostly transplants like herself. From a young college graduate who was reluctant to return to her hometown, she had become a seasoned professional reconnected to a kinship network of Dayton, Ohioans in Hillsboro. But this group is scattered as many black residents in the suburbs are. When her children were young, Petra had to look to Portland-based organizations for them to make connections with the other black people. When her sons were younger, she enrolled them in a program aimed at providing support, self-esteem, education and fraternity for black boys and drove them in every week.

Sapphire and Petra came to Portland by choice. They took positions that would advance their career and provide new leadership opportunities. Their engagements with the black Portland communities were handled differently. Petra’s method for finding black community was framed by her residence in the suburbs. She accessed what was available to her there and was strategic about what she needed in Portland. She was open to meeting a black Portland population as it might come to
through the church or through other community-based programs. She did not seek to live in northeast, however. Petra may be said to have been more successful than Sapphire in finding a network of support that mirrors what they were both in search of. Their different experiences problematize the assumptions that are supposed to bind black-identified people to one another beyond the boundaries of place. At the same time, their expectations constitute real knowledge about how black people have clustered or been coerced together under systemic racial discrimination. These assumptions and knowledges emerge from women’s affective positioning in American U.S. racial and gendered hierarchies, which class achievement cannot mitigate and livability in Portland does not address.25 The imagined community that Petra and Sapphire’s see themselves a part of and search for in travel demonstrates that neither woman is or believes herself to be wholly immune from those hierarchical effects.

Black Women into the Future of Elsewhere:

I met Eleanor in the summer of 2016. She moved to Portland to complete a master’s degree in sustainability education, and defined herself as a community organizer and STEAM garden educator. We had agreed to meet six blocks from the NW lower Macleay Trailhead where we would hike after our 50-minute interview. I had emailed Eleanor the short survey I asked all interlocutors to complete. I was

25 The Urban League’s State of Black Oregon and the Portland African American Leadership Forum’s People’s Plan of 2017 provided policy recommendation to the city toward racial inclusion, equity, and social justice at the level of the economy, education, use and planning of space, etc.
pleased when Eleanor returned the form and had filled the page, even utilizing the blank end-space to write,

_I was a bundle of emotions before and after moving. We moved frequently during my youth. I bounced around quite a bit because I was a military brat. My dad was in the Air Force. I often looked forward to moving too. After living in Texas for 9 years, I was ready for a change. I was also anxious and sad to be leaving friendships that I'd cultivated for almost a decade._

_When I got to Portland, I felt so isolated, my friendships formed primarily with folks from graduate school. Four years later, I still miss my friends and colleagues and the diversity of the city. I am also very disappointed with Portland’s politics, the prevalence of racism and oppression and the slow rate of progress. I love the ecology, however, and have recently been forming meaningful relationships with black folks and a diversity of people of color. So, I am feeling more hopeful, and developing a strong sense of belonging._

Though Eleanor was in her early thirties, moving and establishing home-place anew had been commonplace. As the daughter of a serviceman, she was used to moving at least every four years, and counted two-years in the lush environment of Panama as stoking what had been an inchoate love of the nature into a passion for the environment, gardening and the desire to do work around combatting climate change. After attending college in Houston, she describes “fleeing” from drudgery of that city for the cooler temporary and sights in Austin. Emerging from what she self-designated as a “road-tripper” mentality, it made sense to her to drive from Texas through the “stark and horrible” New Mexico landscape to the Grand Canyon and Utah before ultimately landing in Portland. She hoped Portland would be her last stop. I asked how she cultivated a sense of belonging since she has moved so much.
I've been very aware of my intentions, my activities towards reaching a goal of where I have a sense of belonging with Portland and just differences in how I'm approaching it here to how I approached it or didn't really approach it when I was in Austin.

I stretched a two-year graduate program into three, so I could really think about how to become a leader and commune with folks in such a way that formed my goals. My specific goals were to be able to connect, reconnect people, especially people who are typically not thought about in the natural environment...to connect those folks back to the environment. I wanted to work and I'm interested in working in the nonprofit sector, primarily.

Kim: What do you think Portland offers you in that regard?

It's interesting...I'm in an interesting spot right now with how I feel about Portland. I'm starting to feel better about my sense of belonging than I did in my first two years. I think a lot of that has to more to do with what I've been doing and so, you know, I was frustrated with... I was putting a lot on the graduate program I was in. I was expecting that program to help get me more entrenched into Portland than it did.

I realized that I need not hang out with the whole grad program family and if I do, then I need to do something else more long-term and meaningful.

I really had to start putting myself out there, being more vulnerable, taking risks, and really like going beyond my comfort zone because I am an introvert. Forcing myself to speak, to go out to events, and join organizations and because my interest has been to work on reconnecting communities of color with the natural environment while enhancing their leadership to do something about the built environment.

I started focusing on communities of color [and the] organizations that serve them. That was daunting at first and part of that was because in Austin, I wasn't part of that movement, so to speak. The work that I was doing, was not impacting that concern.

Kim: What movement exactly?

EGE: So, the movement is working with communities of color, on the ground, in the natural environment and in the built environment.
Kim: Is it challenging to be a person of color doing this work in Portland?

*It’s challenging in some ways and easier in other. I’m recognizable. Me being there is one of those things that people who are aware of the discrepancy, they act like they appreciate that I’m there so much, “Oh god, you are here!” and they want to stay connected. On the other hand, it can be isolating. Now, I grew up around primarily white people because my dad’s in the Air Force, so it’s become a thing of isolating to me—not because I don’t feel like I don’t belong but because I get angry. I’m like, “How come no one else is here? This is just not right.” I decided to just stop noticing that and to do something about it, which again, was something that caused me to get out of my comfort zone.*

Growing up, I was used to being the only person of color and relating to people, and with white people mostly. Am I going to be perceived as this Oreo²⁶? It has happened in the past. That’s been a challenge for me.

Eleanor did not grow up in a predominantly black community as Sapphire and Petra had. When I asked during the initial stages of research how she identifies, she defined herself as black, African American, and biracial. “I think right now, whatever falls out of my mouth, that’s what’s happening.” Eleanor was aware of the objectification that came with being a person of color in mostly white spaces, and she demonstrated a weariness that white people in Portland would view her as an “Oreo”, a derogatory label that reflects the unwelcomed categorization of the one’s behavior and speech as not fittingly racialized as black.²⁷ In contrast, her verbal appeal to a

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²⁶ Characterizing someone as an “Oreo” is a phenomenon addressed in scholarship primarily focused on black student academic performance and their peer-to-peer social relations. There is debate as to whether being labeled an Oreo and accused of “acting white” can be burdensome or whether it can be a form of appropriation through which black students can claim authority to tools of power (Carter Andrews, Dorinda J. 2009, Erickson 1987).

²⁷ Characterizing someone as an “Oreo” is a phenomenon addressed in scholarship focused on black student academic performance and their peer-to-peer social relations. There is debate as to whether
complex black identity emerged from a multi-ethnic familial background, that was also socially blended as a result of remarriages and intentional kinship. Eleanor had grown up with her “dad,” who was her step-father and her mother, but came to know her biological “father” and learn that she had a half-brother as a young adult woman. However, I would propose that her identity was framed by the tension between movement and emplacement as well.

The other reason why I feel so connected to the natural environment is because it really was a place of refuge for me. Growing up, in my youth, things were really intense and not great at all. So, I would, because we moved around a lot, I would frequently like, flee the house and go seek refuge, literally, go into the stand of trees by the front yard, climb the tree to do my homework assignment in the tree.

Eleanor desired to transmit her experience and knowledge in a position with a non-profit, outdoor organization that focused on connecting people directly with the earth. When Portland’s race and class logics disappoint her, Eleanor developed connections with various sites of blackness—professional and popular—that emphasizes the social and communal aspects of race. Her reasoning was not absent a critical approach to perception of the environment as deracialized space, where black people have been systematically excluded. Eleanor explicitly wanted to address the lack of access, the policing of institutional knowledge, and the lack of preparation that kept people of color in Portland out of the natural environment that surrounded them. Eleanor said that she wanted to teach communities of color the benefit of being labeled an Oreo and accused of “acting white” can be burdensome or whether it can be a form of appropriation through which black students can claim authority to tools of power (Carter Andrews, Dorinda J. 2009, Erickson 1987).
getting their hands in the soil. This puts Eleanor’s work in conversation with the limits of livability in Portland, and grounds her efforts in correcting problematic exclusion both in the city and in her field of environmental sustainability.

The non-essentialized identity where Eleanor chooses between different terms of self-operative blackness is shaped by the racial ontologies of what it means to belong to a biological family. It is phenomenologically expressed, however, through feelings of isolation, anger, and objectification in white space. At the same time, it expresses a politic of recognition through the occupational and environmental activists’ laboring to see a communities of color mattering, physically and materially manipulating the earth, in a space that is discursive through exclusion (Edwards 2012, 224). The construction of Eleanor’s black identity is affective, emotional, and effective as an opportunity to use her expertise to carve out presence that should be enlarged for others like her.

Eleanor and I started hiking after the interview. We began at the lower Macleay Trailhead, which is located under the Balch Gulch Bridge and leads us up into Forest Park. It is well-maintained, but rocky and wet due to natural and piped water leakage. It is really only accessible on foot. Mountain biking is banned in Forest Park though there is quite a bit of criticism of this decision as exclusionary. I was a bit surprised that Eleanor showed up in a pastel-colored skirt and sandals. Trail aesthetics tended towards black and dark grey running or workout attire. However, Eleanor’s outdoor knowledge put me in my place. I run the trail frequently, but Eleanor identified various nurse logs that fostered continual growth along the path,
pointed out the Heritage Trees that had been dedicated as unique for their age and size, and showed me which plants were sorrel. She moved a spider and a slug from the center of the trail to the un-trod growth on the side, and took photographs with her phone; a digitized form of emplacement she later transformed into art.

Eleanor was more reflective during our walk in a way she had not been in the coffeehouse. She needed less prompting from me to talk about some of the vulnerabilities that still plagued her ability to settle into Portland four years after her initial arrival. She had been working on a contract basis with several local non-profits. Together they were not sufficient to make her feel financially stable. Part of her desire to become more outwardly engaged with Portland and to test her ability and confidence was to help in the search for permanent employment. Working in the non-profit sector and choosing a position where the responsibilities were focused on direct community engagement, rather than policy or leadership came with financial sacrifice. She felt the weight of wanting to engage an activist-centered career with the need to contribute to her partnership and meet the costly demands of residence in Portland.

“My partner works full-time and takes care of the bills. I don’t even see them. I want to get to the point where I can contribute to the household and relieve him of most of the responsibility.”

Two years into my project, we were talking over brunch in a cute shop on a corner of southeast Clinton Street. By that time, Eleanor was onto her second permanent position. She had left behind contractual work and had been hired as
program manager at a local chapter of a nationally-known environmental organization. That work had been a transition for her in terms of social commitment and workplace context. She had her own office and worked primarily with white, older volunteers. Eleanor stayed in the work because of her colleagues, especially the Chapter Director, who Eleanor felt was truly committed to equity and inclusion. In an interview with Director, I learned that she had quit the position because she felt Portland’s local chapter of volunteers were obstructive in efforts to include people and frontline communities in conversations about environmental sustainability and the conservation efforts. Eleanor left that organization soon after the Chapter Director.

In her current job, she was now a Director responsible for coordinating the work of several organizations made up of constituent communities of color. Her professional profile had risen in the city too. I attended panels where Eleanor had been asked to speak about environmental and gender equity issues. She had become part of two organizations geared to professionals of color, one black and the other multi-racial. Finally, she and her partner had bought a house deep in SE Portland. This time, she was wearing jeans and a black T-shirt emblazoned with the names of prominent black women writers on it.

Eleanor had talked always and enthusiastically about the affective transfer of well-being between human and natural ecologies when “spores and pores” encounter one another. Though she was happy about the stability that her new career had enabled, she was ambivalent about her career path taking her farther away from the
face-to-face work that she initially desired. I asked if she was excited about buying a house. She indicated, “Yeah, but I thought we would never find a place.” Their home was located far from inner southeast Portland where they had been renting. The move has motivated Eleanor to think about alternative, more sustainable modes of travel into the city center that do not require driving.

She proposed biking to work. Portland is a cyclist’s dream-town because of bike lanes on almost all thoroughfares, street signs that tell riders how many miles there are between unique landmarks, and some urban access to forested trails or along the Willamette River. However, the route she would take is long and moves through congested and high traffic areas. I asked her why she would bike? Was there no access to adequate public transportation? She assured me that there was bus access, but dismissed my concern. She was more concerned with reducing her carbon footprint and becoming more active physically.

Ending the cycle of travel became part of Eleanor’s narrative of emplacement. Compared to when I had first met her, Eleanor appeared to have found important footing in the city. I was surprised when she told me that she really wanted to sit for a final, formal interview. She liked the questions that I asked and wanted an opportunity to reflect on her present self through them. I agreed, and informed her that much of what she had achieved—the job, finding community, and becoming more outgoing—was explicitly what she’d set out to do. But she was wistful and looked past me and said,
If [my partner] asked me to leave Portland right now and set up a Bed and Breakfast on the beach, I would happily go.

**Conclusion**

The women in my study were no longer exclusively bound to traditional gendered roles and spaces. As educated professionals, they have the knowledge and capacity to determine what to do with their bodies, voices, and incomes. Maturing in the 1980s and 1990’s, Sapphire and Petra had a different relationship to the concept and outcome of personal and professional choice than the previous generation. However, they benefited from the socio-political transformations of the 1960s and 70s, whose cohort was living through key advantages of the civil rights and women’s movement. The 1980s and 1990s also were decade in which some black women could imagined a different kind of citizenship that came with their entry into previously excluded academic and professional occupational spheres Portland fared similarly on the same timeline.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the city’s reputation swung between that of a province and city on the brink of prosperity. Its social and politically progressive reputation took off in the late 1970s under Mayor Neil Goldschmidt’s tenure with the implementation of the Model Cities Program, and Governor’s Tom McCall’s success with the legislation that would establish the Urban Growth Boundary. Despite a period of economic depression in the 1980s, the tech and design industries have kept Portland on the map as a locus of innovation and
creativity for a cohort of skilled professional migrants with national and global origins.

The women in my study appreciated the ability to engage in leisure activities that are affordable relative to larger, more diverse cities. There was also opportunity for black women to engage in various forms of activism and to make choices about how their service connected to race and support for the black community. However, I argued in chapter 1 that Portland’s brand of livability developed without a lens of racial or gendered equity, so women’s encounter with the legacy of black exclusion and contemporary forms of black displacement and marginalization created challenges around their sense of belonging. Black professional women came into this scenario with resources to weather some of the challenges that affect more vulnerable black populations, but conversations and observations with them revealed that they were not unscathed. Systemic and institutional representations of race obscured the complicated work of creating a black identity in Portland that feels intuitive and self-sustaining. To that end, no interlocutor was so settled here that the question, “What’s next?” had been answered.

For black people, ideological and practical forms of race-based collectivity have helped to defend against the harm associated with American racial and gender hierarchy, while negotiating the failure of American class discourse to ever truly include us. But defense is not eradication and, truly, the responsibility should not be ours to bear alone. Yet, as evidenced by my interlocutors’ practices of place-making,
it is clear that black women in Portland bear in their personal and professional lives the onus of navigating the fissures that the city has created.
Fieldnote Interlude: A Reflection on the Constructedness of Black Community

Just before the 2016 holiday season, I am on a Trimet bus to northeast Portland. I am going to participate in an informal, community event focused on black experiences in the city. The December afternoon was frigid and cloaked by a steel-blue sky. Nonetheless, I am grateful for the absence of the usual winter drizzle because it was an hour long one-way ride from my home in northwest. I disembark at the intersection of NE Wygant and MLK, the latter heavy with vehicles that traverse north and south of the city. I missed my intended stop and I am not sure how many blocks I have to walk in the cold back to Prescott Street. There is no one on the street to ask. The sidewalks are wide and long. The few trees planted at their edge are only saplings. To my left, there is a wall of windows that belong to small retail shops, convenience stores and new apartment buildings. Each place is dark inside so that the reflected landscape only makes MLK appear larger and lonelier. MLK appears today to get people going, not to encourage them to stop.

I turn left on Prescott and I enter the residential neighborhood of mixed unit housing and bungalows with expansive, wood-posted porches that are so coveted in Portland. The trees here are large and the sidewalks are cracked, slightly raised underfoot as evidence of deep root systems. It is quiet and no one is about. Ironically, this is disquieting for me. Because of the rapidity in which the Northeast is gentrifying, I do not know if I am among black homeowners or white ones who are looking through curtains and wondering about the lone black woman walking down their street.
The Playhouse is located in a lovely defunct church of white, wood siding, red, brick stairs, and intricate, blue stained-glass. I heard that the space was bought and renovated by two black actors. It is not a huge building. I do not walk up the brick stairs into the front of the church. I go around the right side, because I had seen a black woman come out of the building and return that way as I walked up. The doors in the back were open-wide and led into a semi-lit first foyer. I am greeted by a young man, perhaps late twenties, dressed stylishly in a wide-brimmed hat, and black pants and a shirt buttoned to the collar. He is seated behind a table replete with name-tags and markers and directs me to choose a green or blue circular sticker in order to indicate whether I am a transplant or native, respectively. I take the green sticker and passed into the next foyer. There I am greeted warmly by one of The Playhouse co-owners sitting behind a kiosk/booth. He asks if I had rsvp’d and I find my name on the list for him. We chat briefly about origins. We are both from the East Coast and talk a bit about the difference in weather from the Pacific Northwest; a very Portland thing for transplants to do.

After leaving that foyer, I enter a hallway with small windows on the left to the outside and a right wall with entrances to the main playhouse room. In the hallway, I get my food. It was announced beforehand that Caribbean cuisine would be available, gratis, to participants. I am really looking forward to it. Even with all the chefs, foodies, and claims to culinary cosmopolitanism, unless I make it, I have found it challenging to get in Portland the Afro-Caribbean stews, black beans, pigeon-peas, fried plantains and sweet maduros, or chicken and rice dishes that I adore.
This meal is prepared by a black chef and today’s participants are encouraged by a flyer on the table to support her catering business beyond this singular event. I choose rice and peas (red beans utilized in some of the English-speaking Caribbean, not gandules—or pigeon peas—as is used in Puerto Rico), chicken curry, and fresh slaw. I take my plate into the theatre.

Seats are installed coliseum-style to either side of the stage-baptismal pool. I see a friend four rows up. I take my plate and sit beside her as the organizers begin to introduce the day’s event. The organizers, two enthusiastic black women, explain that the event was planned as an informal space just for black folks. The informality is an endeavor not to lecture at attendees, to facilitate the sharing of experiences and to meet people with whom we are unacquainted. It is also noted that the space is free from the oversight of white people. That is something difficult to achieve, unintentionally, in Portland. The organizers gratefully acknowledge the diversity of blackness in the room. For my part, I observe that there are more women there than men in attendance, though approximately 45-50 attendees in all. A little girl keeps an undercurrent of lightness to the room as she talks and plays at her mother’s side.

The center stage is not set up. It would sit over the church’s original baptismal pool, which is embedded into the floor. Today, however, the area of the pool is clearly visible, though the surface is covered by a black rubbery tarp and silver electrical tape. We are advised several times not to step on it by the man who was previously at the kiosk. When the time comes for everyone to get up and meet other people, I step right in the middle! He is there to tell me, urgently, to get off. That
time I hear him say that there is water under the tarp. I am so embarrassed and apologized profusely.

We broke out in groups with a charge to talk to someone and get to know one another. We are meant, I understand, to make friends and network. I don’t go far at first. My friend introduces me to the woman to her left, Jali. She had lived in Portland as a young woman, but returned 8 years later to take a tenure-track position as an assistant professor. She had since left academia for consulting and activist career at the community level. I tell her of my research and she agrees to meet me for an introductory interview at another time.

In the next group activity, I venture a little farther and sit with a young man and woman. The woman tells a story about her up-bringing. She was raised by white parents in a black community of north Portland, where they attended a black church but were not allowed any black friends. She describes herself as only recently coming to terms with identifying as black. She says that she feels more readily accepted by whites. The man is a transplant from the southern U.S. At his new place of work, he had been asked by his supervisor to take “one for the team” when he feels racially mistreated by clients. The man is rewarded financially “on the backend,” but was growing tired of the situation. Overall, he is having a great experience in Portland and describes himself as “the man” when he walked down the street. I told him that, anecdotally, I understand that black male transplants have a very different experience than black women. He looks pensive and acknowledges that he has heard the same. He wonders aloud whether it has to do with “sexism or something else.”
When we return from our small groups, the agreement is to share stories about how blackness intersected with belonging and place-making. Some are difficult and familiar to me. Others are not. A young tradeswoman speaks about the joy of black people and black life. She urges us not to let our fun be taken away from us. A black medical professional speaks next and she is very emotional. She laments that black patients and parents returned her professional care and diagnoses with skepticism. “I expect that from whites, but not blacks.”

One long-term Portlander in her late 40s indicates that what we see now as the black community is not the way it used to be. Even so, she considers her youthful experience as somewhat distinct even among the long-term black residents because she was bussed to a white area for school. She says that at that time, most black people stayed in their neighborhood, stayed in NE, stayed in Albina, and Mississippi. The woman pointed out the importance of returning to the black neighborhood for community and dance classes, however. “Growing up, people spoke to each other all the time,” she laments, “Now, 1,500 black people have moved to Atlanta.” She claimed there is an area in Atlanta where “you could meet all the old Portlanders that you used to know.” She ended by noting a key difference between native black Portlanders and transplants. She says the companies do not hire native blacks. They bring black people from the outside. She looks out to the room and says, “Y’all taking all our jobs.” This last point is delivered with some humor, I believe, in

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28 This practice among black Albina residents is reported in the Portland Model Cities Third Action Year Extension Plan FY73/74.
deference to maintaining the community-building effort underway. No one attempted
to counter her claim.
CHAPTER 3: Affective Labor, Black Professionalism and White Discomfort

“As a black woman, the consequences for me are very different. And the labor, even of driving down there is not worth it. So, we had an argument about different values. She was like—this is the white [female] observer—“It’s so much cheaper for us to drive.” In terms of money, I get that. I get that. Mileage. Whatever. Before that, I couldn’t articulate race...I couldn’t racialize that.

Kathryn is describing a growing awareness of the multivalent roots of anxiety that she felt while traveling for work recently. She does so routinely as a full-time facilitator with a company that contracts with organizations, local and national, to provide on-site trainings that include the tools and communicative strategies that will aid them in assuring racial equity in the workplace. Facilitating in this capacity is important to Kathryn. Before relocating to Oregon, she had decided on a career change, preferring to utilize her professional knowledge and skills in work, where “I wanted to really help people and I found ways to do that even if...I wasn’t worried about money all the time.” The company meets key professional and personal requirements in her life. “I feel like the training is a comprehensive, transformative process for folks of color and white folks.” Kathryn appreciates her coworkers as well, expressing appreciation of the company’s founder, solidarity with the other black women employees and noting that the white women there are “A-typical” of others she has met in Portland. One of the white co-workers, who Kathryn feels is “thoughtful in a conscious way” is her described companion in travel.

They had been going back and forth to central Oregon over several months to conduct facilitation workshops and follow-up sessions at a “mostly white
organization serving a population that is 80% Latino.” The co-worker, however, was there to observe the facilitation process in an effort to gain a more holistic understanding of what the company does. During that trip, Kathryn’s role was to fulfill, simultaneously, her service obligation to clients and to demonstrate, in real time for her colleague, what those obligations look like.

When I go [to Central Oregon], like, physically going there is labor for me. She is a white woman. She loves Central Oregon. On the way there, we stop because she had to go to the bathroom. And my anxiety was so high because I was like, ‘What if something happens to me?’ This time we drove. Last time we flew and I experienced such a relief and a lack of stress. What I said was, ‘As a facilitator I was in a better state of mind when I got there.’

It was the stress and the anxiety and the emotional labor of like, ‘Please don’t get a flat tire because we are in rural Oregon. What’s going to happen to me?’

I love nature, but I don’t want to be on the curve with all the trees and all the...I don’t want to be there. When we get there, I don’t want to jump in the river. I don’t want to get on the trail. I might go missing. As a black woman the consequences for me are very different. And the labor, even of driving down there is not worth it. So, we had an argument about different values She was like—this is the white observer— “It’s so much cheaper for us to drive.” In terms of money, I get that. I get that. Mileage. Whatever. Before that, I couldn’t articulate the race...I couldn’t racialize that. Before I was like, “Well, as a facilitator, I need to be in the right state of mind.”

And this week, I was like, “My life is worth more. I would rather buy a plane ticket to Redmond and then get a car and go.”

In this fuller transcript of Kathryn’s description of travel to central Oregon, she expressed worry about the stress of driving and seeming, perhaps, unprepared to clients that have contracted with her company. To facilitate well, she must be able to instruct, lead, and respond to participants with calm and clarity. Under those circumstances, she prefers to fly. Choosing to drive made little sense when accidents...
and flats might interfere with a smooth and timely arrival in Central Oregon. On her co-worker’s part, perhaps, there is less at stake because there was no need to conduct herself in front of workshop participants. According to Kathryn, the co-worker “was not there to share space,” but to observe because she had never been through the whole facilitation process before. The white co-worker’s preference for driving also included a desire and an ability to enjoy the experience of travel, while keeping expenses low and ensuring a timely arrival in Central Oregon.

Fly to reduce stress or drive to enjoy the scenery and save money in the process? On one hand, that Kathryn and her co-worker are having a discussion about how best to travel bears upon their mutual recognition that time, expense, and labor should be expediently deployed in service of work. Also, each articulates the value of different modes of travel in the language of affect; what would help them to feel good upon arrival. In other words, they seem to agree on the constellation of productive relations and feeling regimes that constitute an effective display of professional conduct. Despite the gloss of comparable frameworks of efficacy that lead to a calm and punctual professional, the contradiction about how to travel becomes a further entanglement—troubled by its in-articulation—in which perceptions of racialized and gendered experience imbue professional conduct with different meanings and consequences.

Kathryn’s realization of a “difference[s] in values” signifies more than a preference for pragmatic modes of travel. Instead, Kathryn is negotiating the historical inequity through which work performance is not only gendered and
racialized, but how white and black women experience those racialization processes in disparate ways. It is not travel that concerns her, but what are the multiple and, potentially, deleterious consequences of putting her body in grounded proximity to a particular environment, the people that inhabit it and for an extended period of time.

At best, the drive lasts three hours and a half. On a summer day, the sky above highways US-26E and 97S offers an expansive backdrop as one winds between the rock face and floating range of Mt. Hood National Forest and the Cascade Mountains, respectively. During the winter, one can feel a little claustrophobic in a car. By then the sky would be grayish-blue and raining pretty consistently, making it seem as though the landscape were hanging a little closer. The way is well-utilized by vehicles of all types. You can expect endurance cyclists, family cars, motorhomes and, sometimes frighteningly close, 18-wheelers to pass you by.

A few view-points are accessible on four-lane sections, enticing motorists to stop, look, and record the vista for posterity or Snapchat’s sake. As a motorist, the most visible parts of towns are fronted by gas stations, casual dining, and singular storefronts. Restaurants offering Mexican cuisine and the signage for the Kah-Nee-Ta Desert Resort give way to American flags and the occasional Trump for President sign that is large enough to read from the car window. The ability to stop and eat or to go to the bathroom exists only momentarily as the availability of those amenities hangs between huge swathes of farm and meadowlands. It is not difficult to imagine
Oregon’s infamous “whiteness” residing here, but without any of the pretense to the socio-cultural progressiveness of Portland\textsuperscript{29}.

It was into this place of “\textit{rural}” Oregon, as Kathryn describes it, that she and co-worker drove, and where she expresses fear about curves and tree groves, and trails that are inhospitable to her body, specifically. The perception of how little her blackness and her body are valued in Oregon, and the further thinning of that value as she moves from urban Portland to rural space is not indicative of the simple haphazardness of travel, but a real declaration of concern about who could hurt her and doubt about who would care enough to look for her. Oregon’s natural beauty is storied and real, but so is its history of hostility to black people (Nokes 2013).\textsuperscript{30} The latter interferes with Kathryn’s desire to learn to navigate the former.

It is possible for Kathryn’s white co-worker to face the same physical dangers; getting hurt or getting lost. Unlike Kathryn, however, she has kin- and friendship networks in central Oregon. Her casual stops at a public bathroom and other recreational trips demonstrate more experience and familiarity with the place of central Oregon. They also signal comfort with and in a space of shared racial identity. Her personal enjoyment of the environment--absent of racialized fear--is facilitated as well by a historiography of legal and illegal land seizure, ideological narrativizations,

\textsuperscript{29} In a 2011 report, the Oregon Community Foundations reports that white people make up 86% of all of central Oregon population and that Hispanic/Latinos make up 8% as the next largest demographic. \url{http://www.oregoncf.org/Templates/media/files/regional_profiles/central_or_profile_2011.pdf}. Accessed Aug. 21, 2017
racial exclusionary laws and conservation policy, and land use and government
subsidization that posit white Oregonians as the stewards and beneficiaries of the
environmental bounty (Finney 2014, Nokes, 2013). Regardless of whether she would
articulate experiencing it as such, belonging for the white co-worker and people in
Oregon appear as a right of citizenship that is achievable along an axis of race,
gender, and class privilege,

Kathryn’s entrée into central Oregon as professional facilitator includes
significant forms of access. She meets this co-worker across educational achievement
and the possession of work that allows some financial and physical mobility. From
one perspective, Kathryn’s ability to pay for a flight in order arrive in “the right state
of mind” and the choice to do so over other less costly alternatives reflects a class-
based achievement lauded in discourses of meritocracy and notions of the American
dream. However, it is here that the contradiction between a shared articulation of
spatial professionalism and the perceptual difference in racial and gendered
professional conduct are less visible.

Because work and the distinctions it allows are not divorced from historical
currents and social forms that make up American racial hierarchies. The white co-
worker’s suggestion that they drive to save money requires a decentering of the
subjective person for the productive-minded personae that cannot exist easily with
Kathryn’s experience in Oregon, regardless of the financial capital that she might
wield. For Kathryn, money is not “no object”, but the medium of exchange,
instrumental as well as affective, to assure arrival as a composed professional, but
also safely as a black woman. Kathryn’s work takes her into white-dominated organizational structures and makes dialogic space for white people to voice their support and, maybe, apprehension, for equity initiatives. In central Oregon, she is the only black woman in the room explaining why and how there could be more people of color in the room.

Evaluations of professionalism and productively deployed labor will be determined by her ability not only to facilitate well, but also to represent the company and to do so as a black woman encountering a community with little to no experience with black people. Kathryn’s desire to fly in order to arrive in the right state of mind when she engages with workshop participants is framed by notions of professional conduct and access to capital, but more importantly, also against the fungibility of black bodies and the biases that could potentially label her as angry, harsh, and unqualified.

**Doing Diversity while Black on the Job**

When I began research, I had little criteria for the type of professions in which interlocutors would be employed. As outlined in the introduction, I wanted to explore how and why Black women stay in Portland if they possessed adequate capital to leave. I refrained from limiting the types of professions in order to capture meaningful difference between social and financial capital(s) as part of black women’s laboring in the process of making place and belonging. While I achieved that for the most part, I found myself in dialogue with people who overwhelmingly
identified diversity, equity and inclusion as key component of their occupational responsibility and/or framing key tensions in their workplace experiences. This is not coincidental.

Portland proudly views itself as politically liberal, socially progressive, and entrepreneurially innovative. It follows national trends of the New Economy in producing a workforce of creatives and stocking the service sector to support them. Significant to this trend is the diversity “industry” and a social and employment agenda to meet it. Yet, the black women in my research who work in the field of diversity, equity, and inclusion routinely expressed being thwarted in this work. In four case studies of black professional women working, respectively, in two corporate, one secondary and one postsecondary institutions in Portland, I will show that black women are overrepresented in this industry, but also are underserved and unsupported in their workplaces. My goal is to demonstrate how white privilege and institutional practice are co-constitutive through analysis and ethnographic description of black professional women’s encounters with some co-workers who are unprepared or unwilling to examine whiteness in the ways that equity, inclusion, and social justice work require.

Even with these dynamics at play, interlocutors did have co-workers with whom they had relationships of support or alliance. There was a distinction between the type of support that these co-workers could or chose to provide to black professional women dependent upon their own proximity to decision-making power. I categorize “advocates” as those persons in executive leadership positions who
provide funds or make career/professional development opportunities available to black women that specifically addresses racial or gender inclusion or equity issue. My interlocutors described the work of advocates as having long-term effects on their ability to feel a sense of belonging on the job. The other category is the peer-allly. Peer-allies are often positioned laterally to black professional women. They cannot or are less likely to provide funds or facilitate career/professional development opportunities for black women. They are aware of the challenges that women face because black women and their peer-allies exchange stories, advice, and casual talk in the office and, perhaps, outside the workplace. Peer-allies support for black professional women can be conditional depending on their own sense of occupational vulnerability or unwillingness to alienate other co-workers.

The Privilege of Unexamined Whiteness and Diversity as Industry

As employed professionals, black women in diversity, equity and inclusion work are tasked with dispensing information, creating relationships and alliances, overseeing the distribution of funds, implementing best practices to assure inclusion, and/or communicating knowledge that will reshape the organizations to which they belong. This was consistently described by these professionals as “messy or uncomfortable” but necessary work. For them, discomfort and necessary are not contradictory terms, because creating a scenario in which racial equity is at the forefront required fundamental changes to the culture, practice, and in some cases, policies, upon which organizations in Portland relied. They do this work despite being
the only black person and, often, the only black women in-house at their professional level.

However, some white co-workers or members of leadership are unprepared for or unsupportive of the changes diversity and, particularly, inclusion and equity initiative require. The impact of their stance is further complicated by ways that white co-workers choose to mount their opposition. Some of the women have been targeted in ways that rely on racial and gender stereotypes, thus redoubling the harm that diversity initiatives are meant to reverse. Yet, consistent with expectations of black women’s occupational responsibility and simultaneously blind to the harmful impact on professionals as black women, white co-workers expect the women to resolve the complications all on their own. Not only are black professional women tasked with making difficult organizational changes that are supposed to dismantle white privilege, but they are to do so while managing white co-worker discomfort and while ignoring acts of implicit and explicit bias turned their way.

An irony lies in the emergent concern, over the last twenty years, of various gatekeepers about how to incorporate diversity initiatives into the workplace. Marginalized and frontline communities have worked for and demanded equitable economic, social, and political participation long before, but the 1980s saw various changes that compelled a structural response. Corporate-led globalization and neoliberal economic policies led to new patterns of migration and accelerated older forms of oppression. Cities found themselves with a rapidly diversifying social demographic, and fewer wage, health, and housing resources at the ready to meet the
needs of new residents. Nation-wide, federal and state agencies, educational institutions, and corporate entities have stepped in with an array of diversity management and development solutions. This includes recruitment, hiring, cultural assessments and legal/policy changes that affect both internal organization and external presence (Oberfield 2016, Nishishiba 2012, 58; Lewis 2013, 434; Thompson and Wells 2000; 46).

Portland is a hub of such initiatives. In a qualitative investigations of public sector diversity management plans in Oregon, Nishishiba identified “eleven local governments in the Portland metropolitan area and the Willamette Valley” engaged in that effort (2013, 55). Portland’s chapters of the NAACP, the The Urban League, the Black United Fund articulate, via their websites, timely efforts to advocate not only for black communities, but all local communities affected by socio-economic insecurity. The Portland chapter of Sierra Club, as signaled by national leadership, seeks to diversify their membership base by establishing dialogues with communities of color over issues of environmental conservation and sustainability. Formations, such as The Coalition of Communities of Color, offer a much needed corrective to top-down, policy-oriented quests for diversity with a focus on racial justice and social equity as defined and articulated by the frontline communities that compose their alliance.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive of all Portland-based organizations navigating the complexities of fair representation and just participation. Nor is it the focus of this research to assess their overall successes and challenges. The latter
would require a keener investigation of what diversity does or does not mean in a particular organizational context and what goals and outcomes they have to meet. The list is meant to demonstrate that regardless of the setting or scope of concern, inequity is a professed issue for which Portland’s business, educational, and community are seeking solutions. What follows, then, is a fertile employment and social landscape in which those with diversity needs encounter black professionals with the requisite skills, training, or desire to meet them.

The women with whom I am in dialogue are among those who argue that the goal of diversity is of limited use or value when the focus is to attain “compositional diversity.” Simply getting bodies of color and women into the door should not supersede a critical examination of what keeps them out. Without examination of patriarchal structures and white privilege, diversity is comparable to tokenism; it allows for the institutional culture around people to remain hostile through explicit racist or misogynist acts or, what is more likely, implicit biases that impede member retention or full participation at the policy and decision-making level. Diversity is deemed unrepresentative of either the challenges or solutions involved to assure equitable treatment of all. Consequently, it is paired with or, in many cases, replaced by terms such as inclusion, equity, and social justice. “Frontline and inline communities”, or those outside the structures of power and first impacted by inequity and exclusion, also replace the quantifiable category of underrepresented populations. All of these terms and praxis around new forms of social relations and knowledge
production showcase existence at the intersection of people’s modes of agency as well as oppression.

Feminist critiques have underscored how the theories of a gendered division of labor, the strict contrast between the public and private sphere, and the feminization of the workplace overload the binary between the feminine and the masculine and thus reify gendered concepts of woman and man (Gershon 2014; Fisher 2010, 2006; Lane 2009; Adkins 2001). In a new economy where big data collection and the production of software technologies move commensurately with administrative and retail work as the employment frontiers, service is the path through which most deliverables depend (Sweet & Meiksins, 2008 Fisher, 2006). Scholars have demonstrated how the service model has come to re-organize and re-orient the relationship between knowledge-producers and knowledge-seekers in professions and arenas that traditionally depended upon a strict hierarchy. In the post-industrial, service-sector labor force, patriarchy has not been dismantled, but neither are we in the age when the knowledge and word of the doctor, lawyer, and professor—ostensibly male—are unassailable. Maleness and womanhood are potentially masked as a gender-less, performance of service, cooperation, and collaboration. So, what do we make of the ways that the Black professional women, with whom I have talked and shadowed in Portland, have had their voices and expertise called into question by white co-workers? And why should it matter if women have access to privileged capitals, such as higher education, income, and social mobility.
I propose that the industry around “diversity” exists in a multi-nodal dynamic of regulatory power that constrains Black professional women’s ability to exercise the authority of their position, to rally the resources needed to effect systemic change, or to control the imagery that is associated with them. Blackness is made overly-conspicuous for professional women in this interpellation process; one that is dominated by white co-worker’s speech that reflects their inability or unwilling to differentiate women from the content of the work they do. Laquita, for example, is told her diversity training makes co-workers feel as though they are racists. Laquita later heard that staff felt they could not communicate with her because she was angry.

In the ethnographic analysis below, I will demonstrate how racial tasks (Wingfield 2014) and feeling rules (Wingfield 2010) in the workplace doubly bind black professional women in the workplace. Racial tasks can be assigned to regardless of rank and stature and, often, segregate black managers/professionals in positions where they oversee other employees of color or attend to racialized markets. Feeling rules that determine what emotions and how they can be expressed in the workplace prevent black employees from expressing negative emotions because they are perceived as threatening. White co-workers’ assessments of black employees and their unwillingness to differentiate black employees from racialized work is a form of power.

It is the power to both set the criteria for who belongs in the workplace and who does not, but also to muddle the distinctions between professional and personal in a way that is advantageous to white co-workers and white leadership. We will see that
the discomfort that employees express about diversity, equity and inclusion work as carried out by the women in this study rests on both rest on assumptions about where one’s personal/private life ends and the public/professional life begins.

In the first instance, the workplace is construed as public place, capable of a level of commonality among co-workers that is purportedly deracialized space. In this scenario, co-workers who express discomfort with diversity, equity, and inclusion work appear to articulate, also, that black women’s experiences with race, gender, class should have no place alongside the objective delivery of racialized knowledge supposedly consistent training methods. Black women are expected to adjust their language and behaviors in such a way that emplaced knowledge and experience is stripped away (Christensen 2002). However, the expectation that diversity, equity, and inclusion work can and should be delivered in such away as not to arouse emotion, particularly those that would encourage an examination of the personal, hide the relationships of cause and effect in which racism and other forms of exclusion happen (Fields & Fields 2016). The preference is for training methodologies that sidesteps the necessity for white co-workers to seriously consider the question, “What have I done in the workplace to exclude others,” for a subjectively more benign inquisitiveness about relative examples of exclusionary practices.

The bodies of black women are critically implicated in this form of racecraft. The physical attributes that are supposed to be inherent to blackness are transferred not only to women’s language and behavior, but also to my interlocutors’ intent. A black women engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion work may be perceived as
unable to be objective or having a score to settle, in the worst case scenario. However, when some white co-workers and white leadership are unwilling to distinguish between how my interlocutors appear from how race “works” as a socially-mediated process and, then, articulate these beliefs into the workplace, it says nothing about black professional women, their abilities, or their intent. The unwillingness says everything about what coworkers’ stand to gain in their ability to set the conditional criteria for who and what kinds of behaviors belong in the workplace. If leadership does nothing to mediate with equity in mind, then white coworkers’ articulations, arguably another form of emplaced knowledge, function to create and maintain the workplace cultural and organizational status quo.

Black women in this study are held up routinely to examination and critique based on a belief that their race and gender matter intrinsically in some way to their performance in the workplace. At the same time, black professional women in the field of diversity, equity, and inclusion are expected to dispense their expertise in such a way that protects some white professionals’ feelings and does not implicate them in racialized, gendered, or other practices of exclusion. White privilege is shielded as a hierarchy of racialized conduct and thinking when these beliefs and expectations are communicated as objective analysis constituent of the professional sphere itself (Briggs 2005), and the public place of the institution takes on the characteristics of a private space in which white privilege and white comfort are mutually constitutive.
The issue at hand for my research interlocutors is that they may enter a workplace that is not ready to take directions from them as black and as women. They may work in a place that is unreflective about the ways internal approaches to diversity replicate forms and relations of inequity that need to be discarded. In their daily lives, black women are unable to avoid the intersections of race, gender and class oppression. It may be explicit and it may be micro-aggressive. It may show up as structural issue such wage inequity or institutional. For black women who have chosen work that is supposed to lead to equitable, inclusive, and just social relations, there may be no need to distinguish between the purposes of one’s professional and personal life, particularly as white people with unexamined privilege would conceive of it.

To that end, place matters in the racialization and gendering of professional black women. I use thickly descriptive ethnographic material collected with women and, in a few cases, with their ally-coworkers via formal interviews, conversations, and observations made in and outside the workplace. Documenting and analyzing the dialogue between Black women and their white co-workers—evocative by virtue of what is and is not said—as well as their talk about, emplacement in, and mobility through sites of departure, destination, and return contextualize the affective residue that work leaves. The chapter sheds light on blackness and womanhood as reified and historicized through a body that is imagined, narrated, and situated from varying points of literal places.
Never Having Met Someone Like Me Before

Laquita, a diversity director, graciously allowed me to shadow her at work for two days. I was there to observe her workday duties and interaction, and to meet with any adult colleagues that might be interested in participating in a brief, but formal interview. The triangulated effect of watching her interact with students, with peers, and in conversation with her ally-coworker revealed the contradiction between Laquita’s view of her role as a resource for the entire school body and how students and co-workers’ saw her in turn. Students, across racial and gendered differences appeared to respond well to Laquita’s outreach and strategic endeavors to introduce inclusive and equitable practices into the culture and organization of the school. Peers, on the other hand, viewed the work and her behaviors with suspicion.

The Portland-based school is protected from the persistent bustle of traffic by a large, manicured lawn. The vestibule in which I enter is large, carpeted, and framed by glass and dark wood. A staff-person greets me cheerily from the front desk, which is wide and high; meeting me about mid-torso. I must look over it and, thus, downward to talk to her as she sits. I sign in and receive a corded placard that announces me as a visitor. Though instructed where to go via a posted school map, I take a wrong turn into one of the various doorways that pinwheel off the major hallway. I run full-tilt into a stream of students passing between classes. Their raised voices clatter off the banks of lockers that line either wall. The students are white, primarily, but of the students of color, there appear more South and East Asian teenagers than Black and Latino. I stop to let the students go past and slowly make
my way through the outdoor area between buildings. The lawn here is as well-kept as
the front. The stone walkway and small statues lend a subdued air. There is no
spirited chatter from the students walking through this area or those that walk my way
into the carpeted hallways that lead to Laquita’s office. She meets me because I have
called and admitted to being waylaid.

Laquita’s desk faces the office’s open door, so that students, staff, and visitors
encounter her immediately upon entering. She is also able to see and talk to those
going by. Inside, things are arranged so as to be inviting to students. A white board is
propped at the office door listing meeting times for student groups. There are two
chairs in front of her desk, but also two big bean bags on the floor behind them.
Plastic bucket seat chairs dot the perimeter of the room. The walls include a college
board and a white board, to which she has secured photos of her family. What
appears as handmade Black Lives Matter sign shares prominence with a blue sign
announcing, “God’s plans for your life far exceed the circumstances of your day.”

The center of the room is taken up by a conference table where three young
black women work. Their books, phones, and a McDonald’s bag populate the table.
Laquita introduces me and informs them that I will be observing her. She jokily
cautions them to be on their best behavior, and the students look comically amazed
that she would think they would do otherwise. There is laughter among us. Her office
door remains open and two additional students enter the room. A male student comes
in and, at first, collapses on the bean bag in front of Laquita’s desk before joining the
rest at the table. There is a lot of camaraderie between the students and Laquita; and
the exchanges between them toggles, colloquially, between respect and peer-ship. They refer to her as Ms. ___ and seek her engagement constantly, inquiring about her day, showing her photos on their phones, and teasing about leaving their jacket and tees behind in the room. A student interrupts the talk eventually, saying, “I need to study.” Laquita provides support for her by asking everyone to play, “the 5-minute game.” Once settled, the students monitor their own interactions, though Laquita readily responds to the occasional question.

Laquita views her role as Director differently than predecessors. She wants to continue to create safe space for students of color and all others who may be marginalized, but she also wants to be a resource for faculty and administration. To that end, she views the responsibilities that her role incurs holistically. That means helping to create a school culture that is not only tolerant of difference, but instead sees equity and inclusivity as actionable frameworks for making students feel like part of the community. It is also means training faculty on ways to make this possible. She has organized workshops on the vocabulary of race and the many ways that diversity might be represented to help them recognize how implicit bias and micro-aggressive behaviors can, unintentionally, work through mundane encounters. She has encouraged the school leadership to review policies, like the dress code, which may target or emphasize the practices of one of group as normative at the, unwitting, expense of stigmatizing another group.

Laquita says that she has received pushback from the faculty in various ways. She recounts being confronted in her office by a teacher who felt Laquita was
encroaching upon her relationship with the students of color. The teacher was upset because black students went to Laquita to seek her help in putting on a panel presentation. They wanted to create a space in which to share their experiences as students of color with faculty and the administration and talk about what it was like to be in the minority there. Laquita did not feel the teacher’s accusations were warranted. The students had come to her and she had supported what they wanted to do. “I did not tell them what to do or how to present the information. I asked them what they wanted to do and helped them achieve it.” She saw her role as more than “putting on” diversity events, but instead, facilitating sustained dialogues for long-term systemic change. Faculty interpreted this event and many others as divisive for the school community. Some who were welcoming when Laquita was hired, no longer were.

The next day, Laquita’s office is a hub of activity at 9:30 am. During this break period, the room is completely full. Fifteen students sit in little clusters on beanbags, the floor, the couch and at the conference table. Students engage with one another with seemingly little regard to racial or gendered difference. There are five young black women, one who may be biracial, one Latinx young woman, two young white women, and six young males of black, Latinx, or Asian-descent. The atmosphere is jovial and loud. This morning, no one is studying. Prince sings quietly from a radio under students’ talk. Several female students and one male sit across from Laquita at her desk. When Laquita talks with one, another chimes in without asking permission. Information is exchanged about upcoming academic clubs and a
female student teasingly asks Laquita why she is “popping her collar.” Though the deputy director of diversity’s desk is occupied this morning, he works quietly at his laptop. Students sit at a distance. None direct their bodies or conversations toward him. The same student asks Laquita why she is wearing an ankh charm on her necklace. She responds that it belonged to her father. “You’re not Egyptian.” Laquita explains patiently that for African Americans the ankh has symbolized black power.

I ask her if she experiences these types of interactions with white students, particularly males. None have entered her office the two days that I have been shadowing. She tells me that most white students were reluctant, initially, to enter her room. However, she has made a lot of effort to get them to see that the diversity office is a welcoming space for them. One of the many reasons that she co-teaches is to make herself available to students who may not readily come into the office.

I knew in taking—we talked earlier about this—this class that aside from co-teaching, it was ‘what other kinds of responsibility, what other elements of my presence can I bring to this class?’ Part of me wanting to take the position is that it would allow me to get to know more kids that don’t ever come near the diversity office and then create a relation with those students, getting to know me a little bit. Creating a relationship.

The co-taught class is the first time I see Laquita interact with other faculty. Her co-faculty are two white males. The demographic of students in this class differ from those attending study sessions in Laquita’s office. Approximately 20 work, individually, at a desktop computer. There are three male students of color, two young white women, and the rest are white males. Faculty direct their attention to the students, mainly. They check up on student progress, give further explanation, or
respond when a student calls. Laquita gets called for assistance by various students just as the other teachers do. The students seem to make no distinction between her or the white, male faculty when seeking guidance. There is jovial talk amongst everyone when the students are engaged. However, during quieter moments, the two male faculty stand together at one side of the room chatting. Laquita generally returns to the back of the room to monitor from there.

On the part of faculty, I may seem intimidating. I think that it is the initial, ‘What I know of black women. What I don’t know of black women. I have never talked to a black woman. I don’t know what to expect.’

I can feel that sometimes. It’s part of that confusion of interacting with me, not sure of how to do it or what to say, or how to get to know me as a person, a human being.

I am sure it is wanted but, again, it is, ‘I’ve never talked to anybody like you before and you’re saying all kinds of stuff that’s making me uncomfortable. And I really don’t know, is that you creating conflict or trouble, being a rebel or... I don’t know if I want to be around that, telling me your experience and how life is.’

I have found that interesting. That’s not...those are not isolated experience to the school because I have those experiences also outside of, you know, um, school as well.

In this instance of transcription, I have kept “um” and “you know” present in her speech to indicate what I witness as deliberation on her part to choose words that tack carefully between meanings of experience and life that she may not share with some of her co-workers but also an effort not to overemphasize the personal in the workplace. She is actively, but delicately resisting the discursive and affective narratives into which co-worker’s have pulled her.
On one hand, she is speaking about the training and instructive opportunities that she has organized for faculty over the past year. At first, she let the trainings, but faculty complained that her delivery of the content made them feel uncomfortable. The objected to her explanations of white privilege and implicit bias because they felt Laquita was implying they were racist or that they were acting with racist intent. In an effort to mediate their hostility and suspicion, Laquita has taken to inviting a white woman, also experts in diversity training, to present in her stead. Laquita felt that race of the presenter was a necessity for white co-workers to understand the training as a dialogue, rather than a confrontation.

As we saw in the introduction with the work that Kathryn performed in Bend, it is routine to have experts conduct training workshops on this topic. However, Laquita’s invitation to this woman was about more than her recognition of the women’s specific skill set or area of expertise. Initially, Laquita felt that her experience as a black woman in America, who is enmeshed within the racial dynamics of institutional and social oppression, would strengthen her qualifications to conduct training. However, some white faculty co-workers took her instructions as a personal attack, and funneled their critique through barely veiled racial stereotypes. In an interview with one of Laquita’s white “allies” at the school, the co-worker confirmed that “they take that... rocking the boat. Rabble-rouser. Angry black woman. That’s the language that I have heard in some cases and I know that she [Laquita] has heard in some cases, but it is the assumption that I think a lot of my
Laquita’s decided to ask a white woman trainer to lead the conversation with white co-workers to neutralize their discomfort.

The strategic necessity of using a white, female speaker’s as a go-between sheds light on several problematic processes. First, Laquita’s co-workers’ unreceptive stance towards her, versus the white public speaker, actually highlights their need for the training if they want to create a school community that values racial difference, but also learns how to address it not as tokenism, but equity in participation. This is the kind of diversity that Laquita envisions. Second, co-workers who might feel less implicated in racist behaviors if trained by an outside person, as well as an outsider who was white, are still in effect able to police the boundaries around the workplace, and mark them as private and professional. Third, co-workers’ protestations they are capable of racial bias and/or racist acts. Yet, a significant method of protestation is to imbue Laquita with bias and intentionality in acts that they have rejected for themselves. A defensive positioning such as this would never create a playing field for dialogue. Mixing blackness and womanhood into stereotyped behavior that disrupts appears to push Laquita outside of a normative structure of the school community.

Schools have long encoded instructional participation with the language of civil and familial obligation, so that politeness, collegiality, and obedience to generational and gendered hierarchies constitute the stuff of proper middle-class social relations. Those ethical and social values may be operating principles for schools regardless of the demographic make-up of faculty and students. However,
economically-butressed racial segregation may leave urban schools with large communities of color underfunded and, thus, contending daily with structural and social challenges that make those values less apparent. Wealthier schools in white neighborhoods can make claims to those same values with greater ease.

It is not unfair to remind of us this because Portland schools, public, private, and alternative, exemplify these divisions in their loci between east and west quadrants and between city and suburbs. The invectives used to worry over Laquita’s behavior are operative in this place-based division. They collapse the public space of the school and private space of white domesticity around her. She is evaluated and critiqued for incivility and for mismanaging the emotional distress of others. While the question remains open as to whether coworkers assume that as a female she is responsible for managing affective relations; her female-identity appears central to the perception that she has not done it well. And the stigma they associate with blackness only compounds the disruptive impact. Rather than co-workers recognizing the process of transforming the workplace as a difficult one and working with the professional guidance that Laquita provides, some have built a corresponding concert of demands through words and behaviors that, sometimes, leave Laquita feeling isolated doing the work of inclusion and equity.

This bears upon the second facet of “experience” to which she refers. On the other hand, Laquita’s comment that the experiences are not isolated to the school point to the dilemma of self-justification and legitimization as a black woman in white-dominated spaces. It reflects an eking of the personal into the workplace; a
disclosure which seems neither a performance of Laquita’s training or reflective of her comfort. Indeed, she is wary of some of her co-workers’ inability to distinguish between her professional and personal roles, and contests their power to conflate the two as well as expect her to mitigate their misunderstanding with an overly affective response.

*So, it’s sort of like, “You go meet them. You’re the one nobody knows how to relate to you. You need to go mingle. You go extend yourself to make sure that people see that you’re cool, or you’re okay to relate to. Part of me is like, “Fine. Cool.”*

*But another part of me is like, “why is it my job to have to extend myself even more?*

In this moment where some co-workers will not allow Laquita the authority to preface her technical knowledge with the experiential, a recursive loop of racialized subjectivity emerges that emphasizes blackness and womanhood as problematic features that mesh that with stereotypical assumptions. Co-workers bring ideas about an “angry, black woman” into the professional space of diversity training first, and Laquita responds cautiously with ideas about how that kind of characterization could be possible given the fact that black women have to deal with the prevalence of racist and implicit bias inside and outside the workplace. In their contestation of her ability to lead the training at the school, Laquita co-workers have the power to erect the terrain of the private and the public, or the professional and personal in the school— as well as disrupt the space between them.

I asked how she felt learning from her ally-colleague about the talk that follows when she is not in the room.
I really start to realize, ‘I’m not crazy.’ I think that she’s very accurate in the depiction of where my place is, the assumption of where I should be. That’s just going to take time. I can tell that people are not quite sure how to relate to me, I guess. That’s definitely a real thing.

It is instructive that she does not indicate surprise or even anger. Rather than acquiescence, I argue, that Laquita’s expression of relief at not being crazy reflects some mending of the fissure between the interiority and exteriority of blackness initiated by the discomfort with some of her co-workers. In a way, her realization points to the productive use of ventriloquizing vis-à-vis the white female trainer as a way of getting necessary information across to her colleagues. She said, “I love the students and the school. I want to be [here] for a long time”, but she also understands that institutional change will happen incrementally. One can hear that in her oft-repeated phrase, “It will take time.” I view this as a strategic engagement with the temporal aspects of the transformative process that actually reinforces her autonomy and authority.

Last academic year, Laquita was leading efforts to position the diversity program as a resource for the entire school community but encountering push-back from co-workers and some perplexity from white students as to what their particular engagement with her could be. This fall, Laquita has seen an increase in students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds seeking out the diversity office. They are inquiring into the ways that they can contribute to making the school more inclusive. She attributes their engagement to various factors. First, she indicates that making herself available to students as a diversity director, but also as a teacher has been
productive in strengthened her relationship with a wider range of students. Second, Laquita continues to push for the diversity programs to make a mark beyond performative activities to instructional and information sharing program that serves students’ interest. Her office was the site of a workshop on gender equity and affirmative consent. Students have sought her guidance as a result of their own developing political and ethical identities in the wake of summer 2017’s white-supremacist march on the University of Virginia, Charlottesville and Portland-based rallies initiated by pro-white-supremacist groups. With Laquita’s oversight, students have organized in councils of multi-racial, numerically underrepresented, and majority represented students. She reports that “students are making all the difference” in what she is witnessing as a positive shift in her relations with co-workers.

**Not the Other Black Woman**

I meet Jesse at the cute Portland bakery because I want to have a conversation about home and belonging. I know the bakery is in her neighborhood. Also, the functional space of the bakery is conducive to interviewing. It has an open floor seating with lightly laminated, wooden tables and chairs that, perhaps, intentionally mimic the enticing, crusty color of the bread and rolls stacked in the storefront window. You can see quite clearly to the food preparation areas in the back and to the staff moving past one another in cordial industriousness. It is early morning and they appear to be in preparation for the day’s onslaught of customers. But the place is already busy. There are people waiting in line as well as many sitting in small,
murmuring clusters. I am the only black person here from what I can tell. Techno music is playing but, fortunately, not loud enough to prevent lingering over food and conversation. It is 10:30am, cold, and cloudy. No one wants to be outside. I choose seats at the counter with a view of the street, anyway. This will allow me to see when Jesse arrives. It will also provide us with some privacy to talk as our backs will be to the main restaurant.

From Jesse’s perspective, the bakery is convenient in terms of travel. She has made time for our interview after a work meeting and had only minutes to drive between the campus and me. As our interview advances, I learn that this feature of convenience is part of longer place-making effort since moving. Jesse had lived and worked in Tucson, AZ prior to moving to Portland. She was on an executive leadership track in academia, and oversaw programs that addressed student access, development, retention, and inclusion. While she loved the Tucson, Portland offered other things she could not get there.

[I made the] transition to Portland utilizing a professional opportunity because, let’s just be honest, right. Most of us don’t have the resources to just up and quit jobs and move someplace that we like. We have to tether it to something like a professional opportunity. I was at a place professionally where I knew I could probably make a bigger move. I went from an associate director [in Tucson] to an associate dean’s position [in Portland] and overseeing some critical roles.

Jesse makes clear that the move to Portland had to be tied to an employment opportunity that was already in hand. This admission underscores the relatively short-time span in which black women have entered the U.S. professional sphere in any significant numbers. Thus, the gain of middle or upper-class status among
professional Black women may not be indicative of nodal space in a multi-generational history of professional-level employment and/or wealth (Daniel Barnes 2016). For many black women, the gain is actually a leap; meaning that the socio-economic status and earning capacity that separates them from their parents may be great. While this affords professional women like the research informants a certain privilege to seek out work and lifestyles that align with their values, the privilege is both relative and constrained by constellations of economic and historical factors that can leave educated black women, specifically, with little access to parental aid in lightening the burden of student loans, down payments for first homes, and other safety nets from which to launch adulthood.

Obtaining the position in Portland was the first stage in a purposeful commitment to city as place. Like Kathryn and Laquita, Jesse’s work at the college in Portland focused on inclusion as a significant area of institutional redress as part of her professional responsibility and management. Commensurate with her education and the development of her career trajectory, Jesse was to oversee the creation and approval of opportunities, programs, and activities directed at the retention of students of color and other groups with less public representation. Yet, Jesse’s concern for career-making intersecting deeply with praxis for place-making aligned with the sustainable and engaged life available in the city. This was the second stage. She made a choice that her first Portland neighborhood should be near enough to work for a public transit commute, thus creating affective and expedient links between those nodes of belonging
We moved to SW Portland because we have this very strong mantra, like, you don’t spend a lot of time commuting to work. That’s crazy. I mean, if you can manage it. So, it was this thing like, what could we do to feel like we can, in the ethos of Portland, [not] spend more than twenty minutes in the car to get to work. That was the whole idea.

We chose a place; the max line was right outside. We could get to just about any place in twenty minutes. And we could walk just about everywhere. And we did. So that was kind of what I enjoyed about living in goose hollow was that it felt like it represented aspects of old Portland, but it also gave us access to a lot of Portland happenings. And I liked that.

But I knew right away. “[Work] is going to be a challenging space.” I had no idea how challenging it was going to be. Because even where I thought I was going to get support, I was not getting that.

Jesse describes how quickly she felt constrained in her ability to provide leadership for the Portland campus community or advocacy for the students to which her position and personal commitment held her responsible. She was prevented from articulating a new or transformative vision for the program that she oversaw. Professional alliances that she established between the institution and outside organizations in Portland to support access and retention of underserved and underrepresented students, especially those who were full-time residents, received little attention and some pushback from internal gatekeepers. As a result, Jesse felt that her professional reputation in Portland was beginning to suffer and this had negative implications for her personal sense of well-being. Like Kathryn, she demonstrates the racialization and gendered processes that hyper-visibilized, but also invisibilized in the workplace, and the effects of that spillage into her non-work life and sense of belonging.
I walked into many different kinds of spaces and communities, and even when there are discussions happening that affect students of color, first generation, and equity and inclusion, whatever it happens to be, and I am still maybe one of the only people of color in the room!? There is a problem here. It had really become challenging to figure out where I could just be. Like where can I just be and not have to just constantly figure out how to modulate what I am representing in that space.

And so I was experiencing that too in recognizing how do I show up in a space sometimes as the woman at the table with seven other men, most of the white, but not necessarily being given the opportunity to leverage that voice because of my gender.

Or I was constantly being taken for the only other black person that someone happened to know in that same organization. Over and over again. These were experiences that I’d never, never had before. It created a real, like, I was started to experience the craziness.

There are three importance processes happening in the Jesse’s description. First, she points to the consist absence of people of color in the spaces where she conducts work. This might be regarded as a reflection of the demographic disparity that frames the city as a whole and may, from a condensed perspective, demonstrate the spatial dimensions of the Portland’s whiteness. Given Jesse’s visits to the city prior to moving and to the specificity of her professional responsibility, she would not have been unprepared. The problem that she points to, then, works on another level; one that extended beyond what is quantifiable in space. Adding to it, was the consistent lack of people of color and underrepresented persons in leadership positions across multiple professional spaces, especially those spaces existing in order to address the retention of students from underrepresented groups. Thus, the ubiquity of white dominated spaces and predominance of white male voices across them suggests a major organizational feature that tempered Jesse’s expectation and hope to change the outcome of declining student retention, specifically, and to address issues
of diversity, inclusion, and equity on the whole. Finally, that organizational feature took on ideological significance as it got refracted across Jesse’s literal body when white co-workers were persistent in their inability to distinguish her, physically, from another woman who worked on the campus.

Clearly, the spatial, temporal, ideological, and interactive dynamics “in that space” created the challenge that Jesse faced to modulate and represent as a recognizable “self” within the scope and with the weight of authority that should have been afforded her by the position (Wingfield and Alston 2014). There is a sense of loss in her wonderings about where she could just be. The misrecognition is indicative of a way race and gender may intersect in the hands of power to impose forms of modulation and representation upon her. Conflating black persons into interchangeable black bodies forecloses the varied forms of visibility that women feel, desire, perform and work for, and it invisibilizes the structural processes and institutional demands for a fungible labor source. While at this place of employment, Jesse had made decisions about changing how she wore her hair. It was a very important move for her professionally and personally. At the time, we had thoughtful discussions about what it means for us, as black women, to eschew chemical straighteners, to wear our hair in its natural texture, and in styles that did not mimic white women’s hairstyles, especially in the workplace. It can be deployed and perceived as an anti-assimilationist move, but with different meaning for the woman engaging in this black hair politics and the employer witnessing it.
In U.S. racial hierarchies, physical attributes associated with blackness and womanhood in the form of hair texture, skin color, and body shape were maligned as unattractive, undesirable, but also less rationale and with fewer claims to an embodied moral sovereignty. This association could erase black woman, figuratively, as comparable to white women. It also engendered a color and hair texture spectrum along which black women could be competitively compared with one another in their own communities, and lighter skin articulated as preferential. At the same time, the biological determinism of America’s one-drop rule continues to prevail at such socio-cultural intensity that regardless of differentiations in physical attributes, one black parent renders a woman black as well.

Hair is a key signifier of racial identity for both blacks and whites. Perceptions about black women’s hair, linked to their behavior, figure prominently in the value system that undergirds the capitalist system. Chemical straighteners are one way that black women have altered their hair. Doing so acknowledges some submission to conventional beauty standards that indexes texture and length that are associated with whiteness. It is important to note that black women’s stylings have not always replicated white women’s hairstyles, nor they have they meant to. However, the indexical feature of straightened or straighter black hair is important because it reduced some of the friction that black women faced upon entry into white-dominated spaces. This was particularly true in the post-civil rights period, when black women moved in larger numbers into administrative and secretarial positions abandoned by white women (Branch 2011, Wingfield 2009, Lovell Banks 2002).
For women of Jesse and my generation, who grew up in the 1980s and 90s, the decision not to straighten one’s hair could be a complex one. Despite the empowering images received from women participating in the black power movements, those with everyday lives to pursue could appear to reject black cultural and socio-economic concerns as well. To that end, expectations of kin and community could be contingently linked with white employers through perceptions of black women’s hair in its natural state as a biological representation of disorderly behavior. A diasporic-centered counter-narrative to this stigmatization, aided by social media and transmigration patterns, are emergent among women in the U.S., Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Brazil, with the tightly coiled texture that has become emblematic of black identity, a healthful choice, and a reclamation of the female, black body. Black hair politics that resist social conventions is not new. It is treated in both scholarly and everyday discussions, and since the 1980s at least, we can find journalist pieces detailing African American women’s litigation battles with employers over termination from jobs or because they have been asked to cover cornrows, braids, afros, and locs in the workplace.

31 Black men have chemically altered their hair too in style ranging from the conk to the jheri curl. However, it has not been a practice imposed upon them as a condition for engaging in intimate relationships or in obtaining work as it has been for black women.

32 This anthropologist sat on a panel, We Bring It Curly, at Portland Community College in January 2016 with Cuban performance artist, Susana Pilar Delahante Matienzo, among many others, for a discussion of black women’s hair journey as a personal and political identity. For her part, Delahante Matienzo, organized in 2015 the first competition in Havana, Cuba specifically highlighted Afro-Cuban women’s hair in natural, braided, and loc styles. Over 70 Cuban women participated. Information about the competition and Delahante Matienzo can be found at http://susanapilardelahantematienzo.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_3.html.
As a component of methodological conduct, but also as a matter of aesthetic and friendly curiosity, I note Jesse’s hair and sartorial choices when she arrives. Today, her long, thickly twisted locs are bound at the nape of her neck and tucked into a bun. When she recounts during the interview how she was consistently misrecognized for another black woman in her previous job, her aesthetic and hair choices, then, become meaningful because they reflect participation in black hair politics that signals a celebration of personal acts of modulation and representation that, I surmise, are also performed to elicit a professional solemnity from her peers. It follows that in her new place of employment, recognition and the visibility of the body take on new meaning. Below, she describes a campus where the temporal, spatial, ideological, and interactive dynamic is predicated on multiple dialogues intentional in the inclusion of multiple perspectives and experiences, rather than one that functions to reinforce the privileged voices or gaze of white and male voices. Jesse does not experience loss or misrecognition when she becomes part of this broader community of voices. Significantly, she uses the language of fundamental visibility, rebirth, to describe a successful disentanglement from racial, gender, and place-based dynamics that spun her as hyper-visible in blackness and womanhood, but invisible as a professional. Via her new position, there is potential for an embodied recommitment to place, replete with the professional and personal values that she had sought upon arrival in Portland.

Moving from SW Portland to inner SE with the change in employment, it was like I was reborn in every single way. Everything about my experience in Portland was a completely different experience.
Within the first two months of being there, we were having three focused dialogues about race. The dialogues focused around race and its impact on professionals of color, white professionals, and students of color, white students, international students. All of these conversations about, “what does it mean to be in the context of Portland and where we are trying to make an impact.” That was what was exciting about going there. We had the most diverse population. We were the little engine that could, and there were values there that you could articulate.

Advocates and Allies

Confronting, negotiating, or overcoming a sense that black is excessive in Portland has a particular contour in one’s place of work. For Kathryn, who travels locally and nationally to conduct on-site training, work can take on a fractal nature as work/space, which is extended across distance and reconstituted in new time and place by her presence and performance of her company’s training models, tools, and methodology. The peace of mind sought means having say over how she travels in order to show up and present herself well on the job. Laquita balances the autonomy of her position with a strategic sharing of space to make more effective the potential impact of her authority. The present and presence of her workplace always seem to contain some context of futurity, exemplified when she says, “I want to be here a long time.” On the other hand, Jesse found a leadership position elsewhere; in a place where her professional expertise, reputation, and alliances are put behind the transformative work to which she aspires. These efforts showcase determinacy, but also underscores how black women strategize with the commensurate skill to work and the need to work. As Jesse reminded us, few black women have the resources to opt out altogether. Studies show that few ever have, despite encountering structural
and interpersonal forms of discrimination (Branch 2011). To that end, the women in my study reveal not only difficulties with co-workers or a commitment to a politic of inclusion. They also acknowledge the workplace alliances that have helped them expand or achieve their goals.

There is, however, complexity in the talk about the alliances they have at work. First, alliances are identified with co-workers of color and whites in contrast to the seeming racialized specificity of those who resist or are ambivalent about diversity initiatives as processual change. Second, I became aware of an implicit distinction that professional women were making among alliances. Women had peer-allies and advocates (or mentors). Allies tended to join my research interlocutors in the talk of diversity and inclusion as a specific place-making endeavor. Advocates were in position of leadership, were in positions ranked above my interlocutors, or had network connections through which they presented or facilitated opportunities for black women to expand their professional experience. Peer-allies commiserated or provided advice to black professional. Peer-allies did not join black professionals, necessarily, in explicit forms of resistance or strategic actions that countered co-workers use of stereotypes against or expressed discomfort with their black women colleagues.

Professional women attached importance to an advocate’s recognition of their labor expenditure and when they saw the work that black women did as critical to the organization. Advocates were aware that workplace climate could be constraining in more ways than just long work hours and packed schedules. Advocates articulated
varying degrees of awareness about how black professional women’s work and morale may be affected by their underrepresentation in the workplace. Finally, advocates generally occupied positions in the organizational structures that vested them with enough power to take advantage of or change policy in ways that benefited black women’s professional status and, consequently, their emotional well-being.

Kathryn gave thick description of the kind of support that she received from her company’s CEO, who asked after a particularly taxing work period, “what kind of recovery plan I have” and suggested that she take some time off to pursue it. Kathryn said that at first she was thrown by the inquiry but came to appreciate and adopt his perceptiveness.

*I thought, “Why you all up in my business? What do you mean?” [she laughs]*

*He was like, “Seriously, what’s your self-care [routine].” I need to be more intentional about that. He checks up on that stuff. That’s non-business. That’s non-money making things for him even though he is the CEO. I think he does a really good job of that. A really good job of that.*

As a representative of leadership and a person of color, he legitimizes the notions that healthfulness can be in equitable arrangement with professional conduct. His use of terms such as “recovery” and “plans” make space in their dialogic encounters for praxis that can be taken up outside the workplace. This underscores professional expertise and the value to the team. It demonstrates awareness of the historical and social processes that have positioned Black women, literally and figuratively, into pathways of insecurity as well as how those processes strike her body, specifically, as she travels and works in organizations of primarily white
employees. She values him as an advocate of her professional well-being, but also her personal well-being. He encourages opportunity for her to seek a whole and healthy "self" outside the workplace, but displayed confidence that whole self is what was needed to be brought back into the workplace.

*I don’t feel like a white boss would ever say that to me and that’s never happened to me in my life.*

*Kathryn*

Paulette, however, was at the beginning of her professional career when she moved to Portland. She was adamant that the position she took in Portland should promote advancement in the company, but also facilitate a type of lifestyle that she felt represented adulthood.

*So, when I first heard about Portland, I started looking at the city, and started thinking about different places, and like, how I want my lifestyle to be. [Her would-be supervisor] told me that everyone rides bikes here and a lot of people walk. Those are all plusses for me.*

*That’s what I saw of my adulthood being. This is what I want to do with my life. I want to be able to walk to work and have a short commute and, you know, live in the city. A city girl.*

The type of comfort that she currently felt with her boss was rooted in a belief that he was advocating for her from the beginning.

*[He] set up a skype interview. And we were on the skype interview for probably like, 2,3½ hours just chatting about everything. It felt really good, right? I sent him a thank you note, and he replied back and was like, “You know, I really enjoyed talking*
to you as well. I was just talking about you with some people in the office and we’d like you to come out to see Portland.” So, they flew me out.

I could almost tell you… I am almost hundred percent, if you talk to anyone else who just graduated from school, this is not what they do for someone with no experience. So, they wanted me. He courted me. He showed me.

Paulette was confident enough in herself and her relationship with her supervisor to request, as a condition of hire, the firm’s backing while she pursued career-advancing licensure. In her yearly reviews with him, she negotiated hard for the salary that was reflective of her work performance and expertise gained. “Half the time women get into these positions and they accept whatever number is on the table and I’m, what, 27 about to be 28? I got to the point where I refuse to be that woman because I can’t afford it at this age, right? Because any hits that I take right now are going to take me to hits I will receive in the future.” Aware that she would be the only black female in a company of at least 200 people, Paulette’s emphasis on the trajectory of her career and lifestyle followed an understanding of how the company benefited from her productive and social labor, as well as clarity about the returns she expected to receive. As others did, Paulette understood the spectacle of blackness in the workplace. She was the only black person and the only black women in an office of mostly male, white and Asian coworkers. However, she felt capable of mitigating the spectacle with a commitment to a politic of inclusion and the support by her immediate supervisor.

I like my firm and I like the work that we do, but I don’t really see myself working at any of the other firms in Portland.
Because my firm, they support me. I serve on the board of national organization for minorities [in my field]. They support me on that. I fly to board meetings quarterly. I go to conferences and they support me on that.

Are any of these other firms there in Portland? Those are things that matter to me. Could I get them there? Maybe. But I don’t even know if the other firms recruit among minorities in my field. [Those] guys weren’t looking for me. Or [they] weren’t involved in these organizations...not that I can’t get [them] there, but [they] don’t really...they wouldn’t know the first thing about it. So, I appreciate that my firm had that presence at these black places that matter to me.

Advocacy, then, appears as a double articulation of recognition: on one level, the capacity to see and invest in Paulette’s professional potential in the workplace, and on another level, the capacity to see and invest in her service, connections, and her potential influence, which extends outside the workplace. These are investments that the organization could capitalize on as sources for recruitment and hiring. Therefore, the organization’s support is unlikely wholly altruist or necessarily indicative of systemic transformation. Paulette did not indicate that this was an explicit goal on their part, or criteria that she had prior. Yet, she is still caught up in the diversity discourse as it can be manifested in the the Portland workplace. She knows the demographic and communicative power of whiteness has the potential to simultaneously call her in and work against her. Some of the distinctiveness of her professional and personal comfort in Portland is emergent in relation to this particular firm as demonstrated through the advocacy of the supervisor that hired her. However, it is balanced by the resources that undergird a broader affective and spatial sense of belonging with other black professionals in her field that live outside of Portland.
The women I observed identified their allies as operative primarily within workplace settings. In interviews, allies were vocal in their support black women’s work and professionalism. They expressed keener knowledge about what it would take, processually, to move from initiatives that only addressed compositional diversity to inclusive and equity-focused work. Allies articulated a shared commitment with the Black professional women to inclusivity and change in the organizational culture and practice. Allies also appeared to be working out their own relationships to co-workers, administrative leadership, and the dynamics of workplace belonging. So, even in the best of circumstances, their support appeared to be conditional. Support was framed by their own racial and gendered identities and how these intersected with concerns about their professional autonomy.

Laquita recounted a conflict with a black male co-worker, whom she also saw as a peer-ally,

...sometimes we bump heads. After a disagreement, he came into my office and said, ‘you have to remember where you are’ and that we ‘should present a united front’.

Their conflict arose over the violation of a dress-code policy by a student who was a member of one of the underrepresented groups in the school. When Laquita rearticulates the peer-ally’s statement as a caution to “remember her place,” it suggests that it is an assertion of his status as supervisor. In addition, she perceived him as reinforcing his status through his reference to the dominant ideology of the workplace and, thus, was complicit with how white-coworkers’ and administration interpreted the student’s behavior. In addition, the discursive emplacement of Laquita
within that hierarchy appeared to echo and legitimize white co-workers’ concerns with her behavior. She informed the male co-worker “that kind of approach won’t work with her” but she was keen not to foreclose his additional offer of unity.

Laquita situated her flexibility to the rules, in opposition to him “adhering more to the rules,” as a kind of relational approach when in talks with leadership. This allows me to understand how she could see him a peer-ally. In his call for both caution and a united front, he may privilege the dominant discourse, but he is also articulating an awareness of how it disparately affects them as employees of color. He appears to be negotiating his own racialized, gendered, and professional positioning in the workplace and his call for united front suggests a form of agentic, racialized solidarity that is predicated on a shared acknowledgement of that negotiation. His approach also smacks of patriarchal and masculinist norms. Laquita challenged this approach, establishing autonomy over her own position and praxis in the workplace. At the same time, however, she takes up and re-contextualizes his offer of unity. In response to my questions as to why she keeps working with someone with whom she bumps heads, Laquita identifies not his race, but other attributes that he possesses as the basis for ally-ship. She describes his usefulness in discussions with leadership,

*He is very detailed and knows the policies. He keeps notes on everything and he’ll come with support for everything he says.*

What she values in their ability to present as a united front is that the co-worker’s methods of argumentation compliment her own. His adherence to rules may
be the source of some conflict between them; however, Laquita resists over personalizing his conduct or the conflict. She sets it aside for the benefit of longer-term agendas that may come to fruition in that workplace. She does not talk about their interactions as having consequences for professional advancement and he may not be able to provide that. However, there is also no inter-personal comfort that might exceed the workplace as friendship or even an explicit recognition or talk between them about the challenges of what it means to be professionals of color there.

I sat down with Laquita and white female co-worker, Cynthia. Laquita had identified her as an ally also, and I asked Cynthia what she thought this meant.

*Being an ally means somebody who tries to understand the issues and tries to use whatever authority or power they have to advance the agenda and ideas of the person that you are being an ally to.*

*Her mission and her vision are also mine. A lot of the ideas are hers, but the mission, what we want to do is the same. For a long time, I just felt like there weren’t enough people here who cared enough about the work to do it. This is a really busy place and its easy for things you care about not to become a priority.*

*I feel like having this relationship with her. I can support her ideas but also, like, we share ideas. We bounce ideas off of each other. We work through things together. So, it’s really gratifying for me. I’m part of something that really matters to me.*

She also explained the experiences through which she gained knowledge about diversity and forms of structural oppression that unite and differentiate them.

*[My previous workplace in New York] definitely had issues with how it handled diversity, but more people were talking about it. It was racially diverse and the*
dialogue was just open and it was challenging. So, that was a really fertile environment for me. I just started reading a lot of things. Like that was where I first read bell hooks, Audre Lorde, [and] started learning about feminism and intersectionality. I just learned a lot there.

When I arrive here from New York, I was the subject of a lot of teasing and lot of ridicule, a lot of micro-aggressive comments just because I was a woman.

The peer-ally showed support for Laquita by grounding her in the historical knowledge of the organization. During our interview, she offered advice about how Laquita could potentially change her relationship to other co-workers; suggesting that she increase and diversify her participation in the organizations’ sponsored programs. The peer-ally was sincere in her commitment to both the transformative work of equity and inclusion and to the informant’s ability to achieve it.

Certainly, I feel like the [leadership] here knows exactly where I stand on these issues. Because even before she got here, I was pretty clear on what I thought needed to be done. I think the more opportunities we have to talk to the [leadership] together, it just makes it harder for them to compartmentalize each of our concerns.

However, the peer-ally seems less comfortable with confronting other white co-workers, even though she was aware that their behaviors and language felt isolating for Laquita. In an attempt to respond to co-workers’ language and policing behaviors, she had started to test a strategy of gentle confrontation with non-work white friends. She asked them if they wanted to know when they had “stepped in it”—or unwittingly engaged in implicit bias—before explaining what form it took and how it impacted her. Laquita wanted to employ gentle confrontation at work eventually. The peer-ally remarked,
The whole idea of you having to get your game face on to go into a social situation, I have no experience with that. I don’t know what that looks like. I have no idea how to support you in a social situation. I think I would definitely know if somebody was stepping in it. Would you tell me when I step in it? [They laugh, but Laquita doesn’t answer her question]. But I am not hundred percent sure that I would know what to say to one of our friends if they stepped in it.

What is lost on the peer-ally is that Laquita is not talking about friendships, per se, at work. In the scenario where Laquita feels stigmatized and stereotyped, there are mutual friends in the workplace. Even the off-site, social situations that Laquita organized with co-workers were team-building events; designed to change the dynamics of their working relationships. She wanted to reinforce for white co-workers that she was availability as a resource, and that her committed to examining whiteness and privilege did not have to be a barrier. The peer-ally already considered the white co-workers to be her friends. She demonstrated ambivalence about confronting them at just the level of intervention Laquita needed.

There were different temporal and spatial features attendant to the power dynamics that characterized ally relationships as opposed to the advocate relationship. Advocates tend to provide openings or facilitate extra-occupational opportunities for black professional women in ways that were perceived as beneficial to their careers. Advocates had some extra power or status vis-à-vis the Black women and exercised that power, generally, in alignment with policy and guidelines, i.e., for time off or providing funds for conference travel and professional development. Advocates’ status and power buffered them from any institutional fallout for supporting Black
professionals. Interestingly, advocates’ adherence to or ability to set workplace policy and guidelines affect black professional women in specific ways.

Kathryn’s CEO and Paulette’s manager, for example, used the power of their position to incorporate certain emplaced, racialized knowledges into the understanding of what professionalism and professional conduct could look like. Paulette’s manager’s support of her participation in boards and conferences coincides with acceptable workplace strategy for inclusion. There is recognition that Paulette may have personal reasons for supporting professionals of color in her field, but in the end, the firm’s money is geared towards reproducing experts and professionals specific to the industry’s needs.

Kathryn’s CEO encouraged the use of self-care strategies that are personalized and external to the workplace. The hope was that Kathryn would return to the workplace ready to continue, or reproduce, the company’s mission. Perhaps, a traditional capitalistic view would have attributed her use of work-time for personal self-care as a loss of profit. Instead, the CEO extended work-time to cover self-care in ways that resisted collapsing the differential ways that race and gender oppression affect black women versus white women. Intersectionality and equity were emphasized over using Kathryn’s discomfort as either stereotypical of an angry black female, or negatively condemning her white co-worker. He and Kathryn came to an understanding that white privilege, while communicated, accessed, and utilized by white individuals, is also a structural and institutional hierarchy that binds everyone together. The offer to Kathryn to take time off to recuperate from the work inclusion
and equity work entails an examination of where and how people are inserted into the hierarchy and meeting them with the just tools to encourage a more equitable social arrangement. For Kathryn, this means temporarily placing herself outside of relationships, even at work, that might be harmful.

Allies gave important and much needed support to black professional women. The support that allies extended were coupled with deep knowledge of the historical and systemic forms of oppression against which their black female colleagues were working professionally and subjectively. Yet, ally-ship also appeared to be conditional in scope. Informants and allies seemed, simultaneously, to be contending with the construction of professional identities that are raced and gendered, as well as concerns around developing careers and negotiating workplace belonging. For Laquita’s male peer-ally, there was a careful negotiation of his own professional, gendered, and racialized identities as a black man in the workplace. His adherence to rules and acknowledgement of the potential of racial solidarity look strategic and necessary in a workplace where white co-workers’ voices utilized racialized language to police behaviors and the borders of workplace belonging. In the case of Laquita’s white female peer-ally, she had established friendship in the workplace with the same co-workers that troubled Laquita. While she acknowledged her privilege, the peer-ally did not trouble the work-culture too much.

Peer-ally support was valued by black women professionals because it mitigated some of the everyday effects when their expertise and skills were challenged by some white co-workers. They could share both information and
sympathy and could, potentially, stand with Black professional women when bringing an issue before leadership. However, because allies were in lateral position to interlocutors, they weigh the security of their own positions against the risk of confronting leadership or vocal white co-workers.

In the cases presented here, female or black male allies possessed their own knowledge of and experiences with structures of oppression. To some extent, however, peer-allies’ ambivalence or negotiation re-drew the boundaries of workplace business around their comfort with or accommodations to the status-quo. I do not intend to impose too hard of a distinction between allies and advocates. In many every-day and colloquial settings, ally and advocate maybe used interchangeably. However, in discussion with professional Black women, the fleshed out contexts of alliances seemed to point to important differences in the way either advocates or ally impacted the entanglement in which black professionals found themselves.

**Communicable Power and Affective Labor**

Research informants’ words and observations of their workplace interactions have allowed me to demonstrate contradiction and entanglements in their experience as black professional women encountering the needs of the diversity industry in Portland. They are tasked with creating, managing, or communicating changes to and within workplace culture, practice, and potentially, policy. They work within organizations that have made financial and time investments in recruiting, hiring, and
retaining experienced candidates for these position. This reflects some seriousness on the part of organizational leadership to address the lack of compositional diversity; though, legal compliance, notions of effective workplace, and improving representations of and responses to clients, customers or constituent members/community are also critical motivating factors.

That black women are both overrepresented in this diversity work and, yet, underrepresented in workplaces that commit to diversity initiatives emerges as problematic beyond the numerical disparity in the racial or gendered composition of personnel. Despite their expertise, their domains of professional autonomy, and the tasks that are associated with their positions as facilitators, directors, and administrative leadership, each woman encountered white co-workers and other members of leadership who articulate their wants, visions, and perspectives as the normative and appropriate frameworks in which change gets done. These frameworks function instrumentally for everyone in terms of established work hours and hierarchies of positions and associated work tasks and responsibilities.

However, the frameworks are also manifestations of white coworkers to maintain the status quo and to preserve the privilege and power that adheres to that ability. Maintenance of the status quo imposes constraints upon the labor of the Black professional women doing diversity, inclusion, and equity work. Within these frameworks women may be targeted both as sources of tension and managers of its solutions. The targeting takes on racialized, gendered, and affective dimensions through the deployment of stereotypical misrecognitions and a policing of women’s
performative and emotional behavior; all of which position blackness in opposition to whiteness and as a key determinant and communicative artifice through which black women’s’ professionalism, autonomy, and belonging get worked out.

It is key to point out that using blackness as a communicative artifice does not invest it with power for women. Instead, blackness is deployed as a tool of communication that is wielded by white co-workers and members of leadership. In the worst case, this power was used to direct feelings of discomfort and suspicion at Laquita when she was leading diversity training, and equating that discomfort not with the process by which change needed to made, but with a distorted image of her as angry. Even with allies and advocates, it is arguable that any beneficial consequence that support and opportunities for black professional woman is predicated, at least partially, on their distinction of their blackness and their womanhood as an example of underrepresentation in these places. Therefore, “feeling more black” on the job has little to do with an empowering discourse about self. The feeling is emergent in an interstitial space between the power of white desires and the utilization of language, image and behaviors that conjure excess out of black women’s productive and affective labor. At work, “more” does little to describe the black professional women in this chapter as they want and work to be seen.

Craziness

It creeps in on Jesse when she realizes that white co-workers in her first place of employment in Portland have not bothered to distinguish her from another black
woman somewhere else in the organization. It is also the word that Laquita uses when the ally-coworker confirms the suspicion that others describe her as an angry, black woman. Both uses of the expression are in-kind with Kathryn’s incredulity over her co-worker’s insistence that she drive through the potentially unsafe terrain of rural Oregon. The craziness is not a condition, however, but a stage in a process of recognition in which they are attempting to make sense of the image of themselves as black women that are constructed and presented by white co-workers. Kathryn, Laquita, and Jesse are confronted with a mimetic distortion, and it clearly has arms, legs, thinks, and speaks, but more than anything, it is blacker than black. The “craziness” that woman experience is not simply the confrontation with this particular black figure, theorized in scholarship, literature, and song as a stereotype—a sassy, fiery-tempered, and strong black female figure. I am pointing to a specific moment, an aporetic gap, that opens right before the associated characteristics with this exaggeration of blackness assemble themselves into some absurd-coherence. It is in this gap that women experience craziness. It is an expenditure and burden of laboring at work, sometimes alone, to reconcile the dissonance between how they see themselves as professional black women and the figure that is being offered to them as metaphor for white desire. There is work underneath the questions, “Who is that? I know she isn’t me.”

What did you expect?
Black women professionals rarely expressed surprise at the dominance of white employees in the company and organizations in which they work. Job opportunities brought most of them to Portland, Oregon in the first place and served as the impetus for informal investigations of the city’s population and lifestyle opportunities that readied them, nominally at least, for the significant demographic disparity between white people and black people, the latter of whom make up only 6% of the city’s population. Relying on the statistic, however, says nothing about the lives of black people—long-term residents and transplants—who live in affinity communities and as individuals all over the city. Living simultaneously in existence and in absence is the challenge for black women as they become Portlanders, but the workplace concentrates that dynamic in a few square feet relative to the city as a whole.

The workplace then is situated affectively and functionally in black women’s endeavors for place-making and belonging. As we saw in the first chapter, once one added knowledge about Portland’s whiteness, women’s hopefulness became tinged with ambivalence. Professional women wondered how they would navigate the city, should choose where to live, could find and work to build community with other black and people of color. The latter commitment was a consequence of the training, expertise and professional experience they possessed, but also, a reflection of their commitment to racial equity and social justice as inflected by their own racialized subjectivities and hopes for the people with whom they live and work.
The workplace is a site through which black women, for whom professional and personal commitments are linked, expect to live these commitments out. It is one hoped-for pathway to making connections and build knowledge and praxis with other Portlanders in service of those commitments. Women come to Portland aware and ambivalent about working with mostly white co-workers and the narrative of livability, with its promise of a bit of everything good, may serve as a bit of anticipatory balm. What they find, however, are the ways that Portland’s progressive politics and social tolerance link to the commodification of the diversity industry. Co-worker’s gossip that targets Laquita as a rabble-rouser who disrupts the peace of the workplace, and Kathryn’s white co-worker who suggests her form of travel is in the best interest of their organization all lean heavily on discourses of what is considered appropriate or inappropriate to service and teamwork. The burden falls most heavily on black professional women to adjust themselves to behaviors deemed cooperative and nurturing. This forecloses the transformative messiness that is part of diversity, inclusion, and equity work.

Black women have historically been the target and the manager of the emotional and cultural stakes that undergird American racial and gendered divisions of labor. This was the case in their exploitation as reproductive, slave labor, as domestics in newly capitalized, white middle-class homes, as poorly-compensated factory and public-service workers, and even as unrecognized contributors to black radical politics. Contending with and against enduring legacies of the past, Black professional women currently utilize the various capitals they have earned to satisfy a
sense of self that is grounded in the city of Portland through extra-work-based forms of community-making and advocacy and in routinized practices of self-care. In these pursuits, forms of capital, financial, social, and affective, are not just instruments of class distinction or the benefice of New Economy flexibility. They locate blackness in invocation, rather than the provocation that happens in the workplace. This blackness they name, construct, and attempt to live on their own terms in order to make space to be reflective about what they need and how to make it possible.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has been concerned with one facet of the way that black professional women come to their lives in Portland and make sense of a critical aspect of belonging. I have focused on the workplace because it arose consistently in women’s talk with multi-nodal significance for how they thought through and faced some significant social and productive relations. Reviews that focus on workplace climate and the implementation of diversity initiatives provide overviews of how employees may perceive diversity as effective overall (Oberfield 2016, Nishishiba 2012), or how tasks are racialized through their consistent assignment to black and people of color who occupy middle-management (Wingfield and Alston 2014). The lack of representation in the workplace can be experienced, paradoxically, as hypervisibility and invisibility, working simultaneously when presumptions and stereotyping distinguish black women from their colleagues, but also undervalue, ignore, or punish them for their contributions. This can be especially injurious when women’s ethical
commitment and job responsibilities converge around issues of diversity, inclusion and equity. In contrast, when deployed as jargon of neoliberal opportunity, diversity and inclusion masks how change is unproductive in meaning and outcome as they travel up chains of power. Inclusion is characterized as assuring traditionally marginalized voices contribute to change. However, the experience that interlocutors navigate demonstrates that having a seat and a voice do not guarantee that black women will be listened to, so the issue of equity hangs in the balance.

Organizations, businesses and institutions in Portland may be earnest or have good intentions around diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, privilege, patriarchy, and racial hierarchies must be exposed in the practices of everyday discourses, ideas, behaviors that are in and of the workplace. For organizations or institutions that are primarily or only white in Portland, it may be advantageous to do that assessment before attempting to address internal procedural diversity and policy. Another issue to avoid is racializing the tasks of diversity, equity, and inclusion, internally, through their association with the black women (or others) who oversee these programs, while outwardly framing the work as reflective of a socially tolerant and politically progressive whiteness. Institutions should name what they have not done in terms of inclusion and what they have not done in terms of equity, how these are tied up with the histories of place, and then identify—in consultation with the communities who are most affected—what needs to be done to correct each of those failures. This will mean identifying what white people have to give up in terms of claiming spaces.
Despite their access and privileged, Black professional women are still impacted by the persistence of an American racial script that emphasizes blackness in opposition to whiteness, and a complex gendered script in which black female subjectivity is sacrificed for a black female body that is disappeared, in the case of explicit racism, and misrecognized, in the case of a (neo)liberal racialization, into the work that they perform. These professionals are not completely constrained by the tokenized interpolations of others. The social capital that they possess, ironically bolstered by their knowledge of and expertise in articulating how systemic racism, discrimination, and inequity work, provides space for them to talk back to their critics, and look beyond the workplace for confirmation of self.
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