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Haunted Traffic: Blackness, Geography, and Performances of Infrastructural Violence in Ferguson

by

Rashad A Timmons

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

African American Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

New Media

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Brandi Wilkins Catanese, Chair
Professor Abigail De Kosnik
Professor Tianna Paschel
Professor Brandi Summers
Professor Ula Taylor

Spring 2024

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Abstract

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Rashad Aman Timmons

Doctor of Philosophy in African American Studies

and the Designated Emphasis in New Media

University of California, Berkeley

Dr. Brandi Wilkins Catanese, Chair

Haunted Traffic: Blackness, Geography, and Performances of Infrastructural Violence in Ferguson investigates the racial politics of infrastructural violence in Ferguson, Missouri from the antebellum period to the present. The project resituates the tragic 2014 police killing of Michael Brown, Jr. in a broader history of antiblackness and spatial enclosure, demonstrating how transit and media infrastructures bolster violent infrastructural and spatial imaginaries, representational logics, and embodied sensibilities of race that haunt the movement of Black bodies through physical and digital space across time. The study is organized around two overarching concepts: **haunted traffic** and **pedestrian acts**. I introduce "traffic" to name the cumulative social, historical, organizational, and distributional power of physical and media infrastructures to disperse, emplace, endanger, and violate Black life. The qualifier "haunted" signals the palimpsestic and recursive character of this violence, or its spectral persistence across time and geographic scales. "Pedestrian acts" names how everyday Black subjects impede networks of infrastructural violence, or how they stop traffic. These are provisional practices of infrastructural interference, counter-narration, and political insurgency directed at physical and digital infrastructures that effect contraventions of the dominant racial, gendered, and spatial order. I explore these conceptual pillars in three different infrastructural modalities, each receiving its own chapter.

The first, "Rail," is a historical analysis of Ferguson before its formal incorporation (between 1838 and 1894) and investigates how the development of railway infrastructure intersected with the institution of slavery in the region. Interrogating the city's beginning as a train station called "Ferguson Station" on the North Missouri Railroad and a settlement for slaveholding farmers, I examine the material and symbolic links between the local train depot and the plantation of Thomas T. January, a director of the North Missouri Railroad and the wealthiest landowner and slaveholder in the region. A pond on January's plantation, likely constructed with slave labor, was used to provide water to inbound steam locomotives at Ferguson Station, making January's slave-

managed farm indispensable to the fundamental operability of the Ferguson depot that anchored the town. I engage the railroad as a key infrastructural site, examining how the North Missouri Railway system, in particular, mediated local ideas and ambient experiences of modernity, racial subjectivity, mobility, and freedom in antebellum Ferguson and greater St. Louis. I explore how the railroad and the discursive imaginaries around communicated new visions of race, space, and property. Through analyses of photographs, company reports, historical newspapers, contracts, and letters, I demonstrate how the railroad was imagined as a modernizing force that necessitated the transformation and ultimate destruction of Indigenous topographies, as well as the capture of enslaved labor in St. Louis County. Ultimately, the chapter theorizes the concept of "right-of-way," arguing that railroad rights-of-way and other kinds of deeds did not only function as legal instruments to authorize the installation of iron rails across the stolen Indigenous lands of St. Louis County, Missouri. Rights-of-way also function as social prerogatives, or exercises of racial precedence, deployed by municipalities and individual white subjects, to secure white modern sensibility by violating the bodily and spatial sovereignty of Black and Indigenous life. The key argument of this chapter is that the junction between chattel slavery, property, railway infrastructure, and modern mobility—the haunted traffic—at the center of Ferguson's antebellum origins catalyzed enduring social relations between race, geography, and infrastructure that retain a haunting presence in the suburban landscape.

Chapter two, "Street," focuses on roadway infrastructure as the setting for intensive struggles over race, space, and power in Ferguson during the postwar period (1950-1980) and in the immediate aftermath of Michael Brown Jr.'s tragic killing. The section begins by chronicling the necessity of street networks and automobiles to the fashioning of white suburban enclaves following World War II and showcases how suburban roads organized Ferguson's housing stock, cultural centers, civic institutions, and commercial spaces into a coherent geographic formation for mobile, white-nuclear families. Accordingly, the chapter suggests that the regulation and management of streets became key practices to sustain white suburban insularity. These practices manifested most visibly in postwar attempts to curtail Black presence in Ferguson and North St. Louis County through the erection of road barricades, especially in the 1960s and 1970s when federal statutes outlawed various forms of racial discrimination in housing. I engage historical newspaper media from the period to analyze debates over street obstructions and the emergent racial discourse of "traffic safety" that anxious white homeowners often used to support them. I argue that this racial discourse of traffic safety constructed the mobilities of Black motorists and pedestrians as spatial problems and legitimated modes of geographic containment in Ferguson's built environment. I contend further that these postwar spatial and discursive relations, with their adverse and material effects on Black mobility and spatial sovereignty, persisted as specters in the city's gratuitous policing and criminalization of Black physical movement in the years leading up to Michael Brown Jr.'s death. The chapter closes with readings of protest images, namely street and highway demonstrations aimed at objecting to Michael Brown, Jr.'s death. It claims that these provisional and political performances of infrastructural disruption—pedestrian acts—contest illusory discourses of traffic safety, interrupt historical geographies of social marginality, and impede the entrenched cultural mandate throughout the region that Black subjects "yield" (as in defer; as in output or produce capital/value for) to infrastructural violence and municipal power.

The third and final substantive chapter, "Wave and Wire" shifts its focus toward broadcast and digital media infrastructure and examines how Ferguson—both as physical place *and* as mediated environment (#Ferguson)—persistently shapes visual, public, and online political discourses about the racial politics of policing, rebellion, and justice in the United States. The chapter opens with

an exploration of the extant racialized affective landscapes forged in late November 2014 as the country awaited the St. Louis County grand jury's decision on whether to indict officer Darren Wilson for his fatal shooting of Michael Brown, Jr. More pointedly, it reveals the connections a fraught, divided, and anxious national public made between the looming threat of revolt in 2014 Ferguson and the memory of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. Following the controversial announcement that Wilson would not be charged on any count, digitally-coordinated and mediated demonstrations erupted in Ferguson and quickly spread to dozens of major cities across the nation. The chapter suggests that the turbulent visual, social, political, and geographic crises incited by the murder of Michael Brown, Jr. and subsequent nonindictment of Wilson crystallized affective and political geographies online and offline that continue to haunt popular imagery, public debates, and competing understandings of Black radicalism. To explore this claim, the chapter spotlights one image in particular, primarily because of its global reach and recurrence across temporal and political contexts, 2014 and 2020 respectively. The photograph, while not taken in Ferguson proper, was captured at a Ferguson solidarity rally in Portland, Oregon on November 25, 2014, the day after the St. Louis County grand jury declined to indict Darren Wilson. The image was captured by freelance photographer Johnny Nguyen and depicted a brief embrace between a Black child named Devonte Hart and a white police sergeant named Bret Barnum. Like Rodney King's famous televised press conference in 1992, the picture, for many, offered a vision of optimism in a nation beset by racialized struggles between demonstrators and militarized police. The photograph circulated widely through media networks and garnered widespread acclaim, becoming an iconic visual in the mediated environment of #Ferguson. This chapter performs a close reading of the popular image, tracing its rapid spread in late 2014 following the nonindictment of Wilson, the image's disappearance in 2018 after Devonte and his siblings were tragically murdered by his adoptive parents, and the picture's reappearance in social media discourse during the racial uprisings in summer of 2020. I argue that the staying power of the hug photo, perpetually haunted by Michael Brown, Jr.'s death and the ensuing rebellion in Ferguson, is shaped by a persistent political desire for Black political acquiescence in (sub)urban landscapes and recurs over time to ameliorate white angst. The photograph, in short, functions as a visual strategy of racial and spatial containment—a technology of traffic control that seeks to arrest the visibility and practice of Black social movement across physical and digital arenas.

By examining the recursive violence of traffic and the emancipatory potential of pedestrian acts at various sites of infrastructure, *Haunted Traffic* shows where and how Black subjects experience infrastructures as technologies of historical spatial trauma and engage them as vehicles of radical self-determination. While the study is grounded in the historical specificities of Ferguson, its conceptual offerings aim to broaden our understanding of the intimacies between infrastructure and Black subjectivity by clarifying how infrastructures bolster layered economies of violence and unjust spatial arrangements that marginalize Black life across geographic and time scales. Furthermore, the project contributes to scholarship in Black Studies, Critical Infrastructure Studies, Digital Humanities, and Human Geography by theorizing infrastructural violence across physical and digital contexts as essential to the fashioning and effacement of Black subjectivities from the antebellum period to the present. It adds to the academic literature by illustrating how the layering of infrastructure (e.g., city roads built atop an abandoned railway line) in urban environments represents aggregations of social, organizational, and distributional power to disperse and emplace Black life.

For Mike Mike, Renisha, Oscar

and all the stolen lives lost to traffic

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Introduction

At the intersection of January Avenue and North Florissant Road in the suburban town of Ferguson, Missouri lies January-Wabash Memorial Park, one of the municipality's oldest and most coveted public recreational spaces. First established in 1948, the park persists as one of Ferguson's preeminent social, cultural, and historical cornerstones. The park spans 24 acres and flaunts lush forest, pavilion areas, playscapes, and multi-use walking trails. It holds the city's most visited swimming pool and aquatic center (The Splash at Wabash Aquatic Complex), where residents enjoy a multitude of water activities.

At the center of the premises is a 5.5-acre spring-fed lake that has served the recreational, social, and commercial needs of the local community for more than 150 years. Initially constructed in the 1840s by Thomas Thruston January, the park's foremost namesake, the lake once bolstered January's extensive plantation, "January Farm," which comprised more than a thousand acres, including the antecedent lands of the present-day park. January, a prominent slaveholding farmer and railroad executive in mid-nineteenth century St. Louis County, commanded enslaved persons and leveraged the water resources of the lake to cultivate saleable crops and raise livestock. As a director of the North Missouri Railroad (later reconstituted as part of the Wabash Railway system, the park's second namesake), January permitted the railroad company to use water from the lake to service locomotives at the founding Ferguson train depot, which anchored the town's small suburban community of countryside residences. The lake and farmland, harnessed through slave labor, in other words, were vital to the agricultural, industrial, and quintessentially suburban character of early Ferguson. Though the physical landscape and body of water have undergone substantive changes over time, they still carry the January surname. The lake at the center of the current park is still referred to locally as January Lake. Before the opening of the city's public pool in 1950, generations of Ferguson families learned to fish, swim, and ice skate on January Lake. Today, the basin features a lighthouse and fountain. The Missouri Department of Conservation manages the lake, stocking it bi-weekly with varieties of fish for residents interested in recreational fishing. Boasting historic January Lake along with its other amenities, January-Wabash Memorial Park is the privileged site of annual Memorial and Independence Day celebrations, as well city-sponsored gatherings and events throughout the year. January-Wabash Memorial Park survives as a critical geographic space that holds much of the city's storied past, namely its historical debt to railway infrastructure and the institution of slavery. A typical day at the park, nonetheless, promotes a pastoral vision of serenity: children playing with friends, companions engaged in a leisurely stroll, fishermen in solitude or clustered in lively groups, and animal life frolicking through the manicured foliage. The dark history of slavery that defined everyday life on January Farm is completely unremarked in the material space of the park and the collective memory in Ferguson at large. January-Wabash Memorial Park, excised from its plantation past, appears, to the casual observer, a place of tranquil splendor and civic pride within the municipality.

This might explain why the Black Caucus of the American Library Association (BCALA) selected January-Wabash Memorial Park as the site to dedicate a tree in honor of Michael "Mike Mike" Brown, Jr.[1] in April 2015. Five months after a St. Louis County grand jury declined to indict

[1] In her memoir, *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown*, Lezley McSpadden writes:

"When Mike Mike was born, he was adored, doted on, and loved by me and his daddy, my siblings, and his

Ferguson policeman Darren Wilson for fatally shooting Mike Mike, BCALA representatives gathered on lands once toiled by slaves to perform a tree dedication for a slain Black man. The young tree, according to a resolution penned by the group, symbolized a prayer "to grow tall and flourish, a symbol of peace, comfort, and hope for all who gather under its branches." The BCALA's ceremony offered a poetic vision. The tree, a living entity, would exemplify the persistence of Mike Mike's life beyond his violent and premature death. His memory would remain firmly rooted in the soil of the city that arrested his movement and sanctioned his murder for ostensibly being out-of-place.

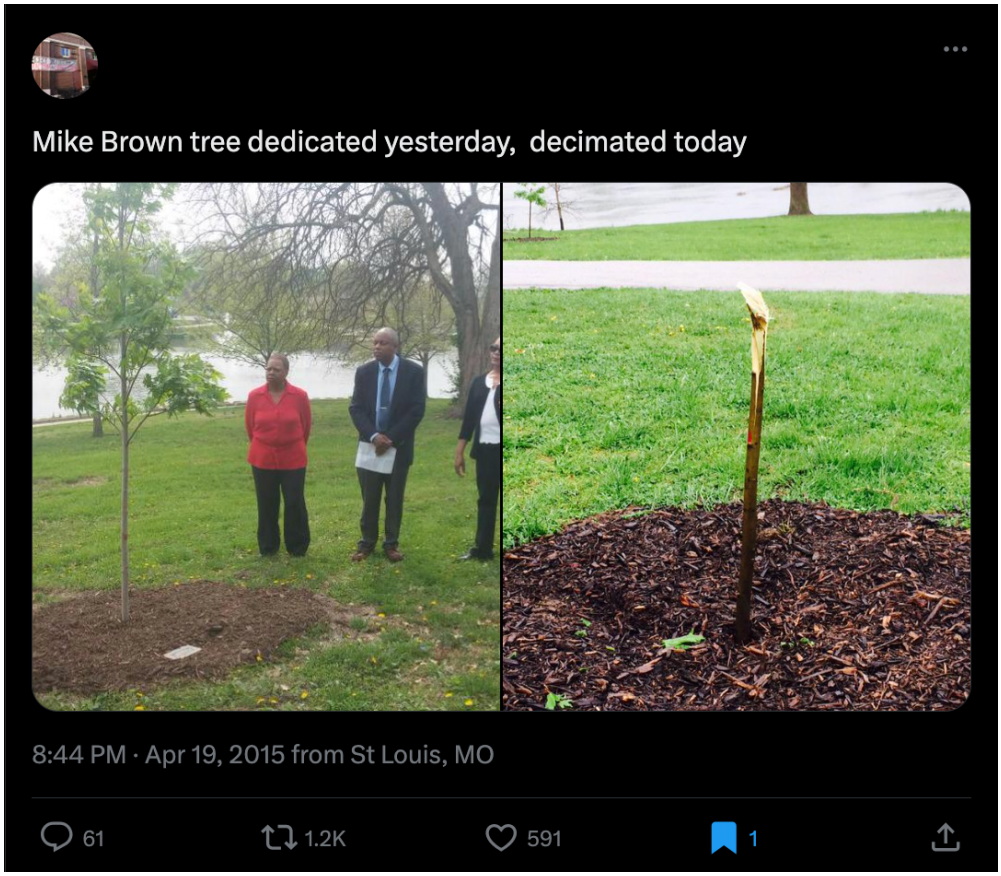


Figure 1. Tweet depicting images of new memorial tree (left) and its vandalization (right).

grandparents on both sides, who helped with his rearing. He was our beautiful, unplanned surprise—my first son, a first grandson, and the first nephew in my family. And then, one day our Mike Mike was shot and killed by a police officer on Canfield Drive in Ferguson, Missouri, and suddenly his name was being spoken everywhere: Mike Brown Jr., Michael Brown, or just Brown…but never Mike Mike, never our family's name for him, the name that marked him as special to us and those who knew him for real" (p.4)

Heeding his mother's words, I use "Mike Mike" throughout this manuscript. This is a deliberate choice to honor the referent used by his family and community to affectionately name, describe, and call on him. I make this descriptive shift to counter the racial hegemonies and politics of naming that attempt to further dislocate victims of lethal police violence from the communal relations and kinship structures in which they are embedded. By using Mike Mike, I hope to reiterate the fullness and expansiveness of his life, to resist discourses that reduce his livingness to the fatal event that punctuated his physical existence, and to amplify the truth that he was and remains beloved and worthy of endearment. See Lezley McSpadden and Lyah Beth LeFlore, *Tell the Truth & Shame the Devil: The Life, Legacy, and Love of My Son Michael Brown* (Regan Arts., 2016).

The next morning, however, an officer patrolling the park grounds discovered an atrocity. The tree devoted to the assassinated teenager had been chopped at the trunk. The accompanying small, concrete and metal plaque bearing the words "In Memory of Michael Brown Jr." had been stolen and forcibly removed. Mourners were alarmed by the violation. Authorities reported the misdeed but failed to locate any perpetrator(s). The sapling, like Mike Mike himself, was struck down with impunity, deprived of the right to bloom and grow into the fullness of its beauty. While the city replaced the tree and commemorative nameplate the following day, the heinous act communicated a clear and urgent message. Black life, symbolically and materially, remained vulnerable and assailable in Ferguson. The defacement of the memorial tree was a disciplinary performance intended to compel adherence to a longstanding racial and spatial order in the St. Louis suburb. It reified the social boundaries of civic belonging by deeming the memory of a murdered, young Black man to be incommensurate with the heritage encompassed in January-Wabash Memorial Park and Ferguson writ large.

The desecration of a memorial to a Black teenager killed by a white police officer, on lands made possible through the ruthless subjection of Black captives by a white master, represented a ghastly convergence of past and present in Ferguson—a haunting. "[H]aunting, explains social theorist Avery Gordon, "is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is denied (as in free labor or national security)."[2] Haunting, in other words, describes an uncanny incursion of past or present harms, or "an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely."[3] In the semiotic outline of the racist act of vandalism, then, was the haunting irruption of a subdued yet attendant history of social terror that bolstered January Farm and inaugurated modern racial life in Ferguson.

Before its formal incorporation as a city in 1894, Ferguson began as a train station ("Ferguson Station") on the North Missouri Railroad (NMRR), around which grew a suburban settlement for small, slaveholding farmers and railroad workers. While the station and eventual town was named for William B. Ferguson who granted part of his land to the railroad company for the purpose of establishing a depot, January was a key actor in bringing the railroad to the region in the mid-1850s. During this period, January controlled more than two dozen slaves and boasted a reputation as one of the contractors for the first railroad in the state of Illinois.[4] January's peers in Missouri's aristocracy valued his experience as both an enslaver and railroad man who understood the exigencies of modernizing the physical substrates of the marketplace and expanding possibilities for commodity exchange in St. Louis. They celebrated his technical expertise in managing wage and unfree labor, coordinating large-scale technical projects, and negotiating shifting terrains of public and private property. Accordingly, January was elected Vice President of the NMRR in April 1854 and appointed to lead the Committee on Location and Construction for the company. He wielded these titles forcefully, campaigning to route the railroad through his expansive tract of

[2] Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xvi.

[3] ibid.

[4] H.J. Stratton, "The Northern Cross Railroad," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1908-1984)*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Jul., 1935).

farmland at the northwestern edge of Ferguson's present city boundaries—the site of the current park. Perhaps most importantly, January permitted the installation of an underground pipe between a spring-fed lake on his property and the nearby Ferguson Station to supply water for steam locomotives.[5] Historian William G. Thomas pointedly observes that "steam-powered railroads in the 1850s required a depot every eight to twelve miles for watering and refueling."[6] Ferguson Station lied approximately nine miles northwest of the line's commencement point in St. Louis. The next station, "Bridgeton," was 14 miles from the originating terminus and, following Thomas's assertion, likely too distant for a nonstop trip.[7] A crucial component of Ferguson's viability as a stop, therefore, hinged on its capacity to service inbound trains for the next leg of their northward journey. Consequently, the provision of water resources from January's slave-managed farm undergirded the fundamental operability of the Ferguson depot. Stated plainly, without January Farm, Ferguson Station, and hence Ferguson, may have never existed.

In addition to producing a wide array of farmed commodities, January and his homestead were largely responsible for attracting the railroad to Ferguson. Railway infrastructure provided slaveholding agriculturalists access to a larger marketplace and significantly expanded the personal mobilities of local white families while exacerbating the pained condition and structural immobility of the enslaved. It is this violent and absented history, preserved in the soil of January-Wabash Memorial Park, that clashed with the disfigurement of the memorial tree in 2015. Mike Mike's death and the wanton destruction of a living monument dedicated in his honor showed the haunting intimacies between his (and our) era and that of the bondspeople whose exploited labor power accumulated in the park grounds. Said differently, Mike Mike's slaying and the defilement of the commemorative tree in January-Wabash Memorial Park were, in the strictest geographical sense, afterlives of slavery, or more pointedly, plantation futures[8] of January Farm.

Haunted Traffic begins with and takes seriously this foundational premise—that the slave past in Ferguson (and greater St. Louis) retains a spectral presence in the suburb's racial and mediatized present. It argues that the spectrality of slavery looms in the constructed and digital environments, racial strictures, representational logics, and infrastructural relations that delimit Black social and physical mobilities in Ferguson across time. Merging scholarship in Black Studies, cultural geography, critical media and infrastructure studies, digital humanities, urban planning, and social history, the study resituates Mike Mike's tragic and widely-mediated 2014 death within a longer regional history of antiblackness and spatial enclosure that reaches back to the city's mid-nineteenth-century beginnings as a train station and settlement for small slaveholding farmers. Moving from the antebellum period to the postwar era to the present, it specifically interrogates

[5] Irene Smith, *Ferguson: A City and Its People* (Ferguson Historical Society, 1976). 113.

[6] William G. Thomas III, "'Swerve Me?': The South, Railroads, and the Rush to Modernity," in *The Old South's Modern Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

[7] Information on distances between stations gathered from "Hurd's Western Advertiser and Business Directory" for North Missouri Railroad

[8] In her article "Plantation Futures," Black Studies scholar and cultural geographer Katherine McKittrick defines plantation futures as " a conceptualization of time-space that tracks the plantation toward the prison and the impoverished and destroyed city sectors and, consequently, brings into sharp focus the ways the plantation is an ongoing locus of antiblack violence and death that can no longer analytically sustain this violence." The spatiotemporal relationship between the legacy of slavery on January Farm and the antiblack violence epitomized by the act of vandalism in January-Wabash Memorial Park represents a striking example of McKittrick's theorization. See Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17, no. 3 (2013): 1–15.

the central role of infrastructures—transportation and communications infrastructure, in particular—in mediating social power relations, uneven spatial realities, asymmetrical mobilities, and differential forms of racial subjectivity that accrete in the Ferguson's physical and digital landscapes.

Haunted Traffic investigates this relationship by analyzing three infrastructural modalities essential to the embodied and virtual sensibilities of race, physical movement, and encounter in Ferguson: railways, roadways, and media networks. These infrastructures, I contend, cohere as palimpsestic sites where material and discursive violences compound across temporal contexts to circumscribe Black subjectivity and spatial sovereignty. Put another way, these infrastructures, and the social relations they engender, represent networks of racial and spatial subjection that marginalize Black life in (sub)urban environments. From the interplay between railroads and chattel slavery that shaped liberal personhood and Ferguson's modern landscape in the nineteenth century to the convergence of street policing, digital politics, and racial subjugation that shaped Mike Mike's life and afterlife, *Haunted Traffic* argues that these infrastructural arrangements overlap, layer, and interact, constituting racial geographies of haunting in Ferguson wherein Black life and Black space are shadowed by enduring legacies of symbolic violence, policing, spatial constraint, and premature death. Following cultural geographers Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods's assertion that "black histories, bodies, and experiences disrupt and underwrite human geographies,"[9] *Haunted Traffic* also attends to the manifold ways Black subjects effect interventions in built and digital environments and cultivate alternative modes of space-making. Through everyday performances of infrastructural appropriation, disruption, and sabotage, in Ferguson, Black subjects interrupt, however ephemerally and non-autonomously, the dominant racial, symbolic, and geographic order that ultimately authorized Mike Mike's death. I argue that these "local assaults and pedestrian challenges," despite their character as "provisional and short-lived," effectively "exploit the cleavages of the social order,"[10] announce radical conceptualizations of space, and rearticulate negative figurations of Black subjectivity.

Accordingly, the study is organized around two overarching concepts: **haunted traffic** and **pedestrian acts**. I introduce "traffic" to name the cumulative social, historical, organizational, and distributional power of physical and media infrastructures to disperse, emplace, endanger, and violate Black life. The qualifier "haunted" signals the palimpsestic and recursive character of this violence, or its spectral persistence across time and geographic scales. "Pedestrian acts" names how everyday Black subjects impede networks of infrastructural violence, or how they stop traffic. These are provisional practices of infrastructural interference, counter-narration, and political insurgency directed at physical and digital infrastructures that effect contraventions of the dominant racial, gendered, and spatial order.

In the following pages, I ground the project in several key problematics that shape the broader intellectual scope of the manuscript and review some of the relevant literature this study builds on. Most notably, I offer an extended section on Ferguson and greater St. Louis to familiarize readers with the historical and geographic specificities of this project's main site of analysis. From there, I share a note about the study's methodology. The introduction culminates with an overview of the three substantive chapters, summarizing their primary arguments.

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[9] Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Toronto, Ont. : Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 2007), 4.

[10] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 62.

Haunted Traffic

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) outlines two valences in which the word *traffic* is generally used: "[s]enses relating to the commercial transportation of goods and commodities" and "[s]enses relating to the passage of vehicles, people, information, etc., to and fro along a route."[11] In the first sense, traffic denotes "[t]he commercial transportation of goods or commodities on a large scale from one nation or community to another for the purpose of buying and selling; commerce," or "more generally: the buying and selling or exchange of goods and commodities for profit; trade, business."[12] At times, this meaning also implies "[t]he activity or business of acquiring, transporting, and selling something which, for legal or moral reasons, should not be treated as a mere commodity."[13] In the second sense, traffic designates "[t]he passage of vehicles, vessels, etc., to and fro along a route; the flow or movement of (motor) vehicles along a road, railway trains along a railway line, vessels along a canal, river, or sea route"[14] and "[t]he messages, signals, data, etc., passing over a telecommunications link or across a computer or information network; the flow or quantity of such messages, signals, data, etc."[15]

Reading across these different meanings, traffic emerges as a capacious and potent term to name what urban theorists Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin pointedly describe as "vast lattices of technological and material connections [that] have been necessary to sustain the ever-expanding demands of contemporary societies for increasing levels of *exchange, movement, and transaction across distance*" (emphasis added).[16] Traffic, in other words, may signify a broad range of sociotechnical assemblies, relations, and phenomena at the core of such as shipped and containerized cargo, the service of a passenger rail or tonnage of a freight train, vehicles moving along a roadway, the organized distribution of utilities such as electricity, gas, or water, the movement of parcels and goods by aircraft, or the networking of electromagnetic signals and digital information underlining the efficacy of technologically-mediated financial transactions, communicative interchanges, and cultural transmissions to name a few. Traffic, in other words, simultaneously describes global circuits of capitalist enterprise and exchange, variegated forms of social intercourse and transformation, and the dynamic and interrelated infrastructures that undergird these modern processes.

A key interlocutor in my engagement with traffic as a concept is film and media scholar Kristen Whissel. Her masterful text *Picturing American Modernity: Traffic, Technology, and the Silent Cinema* exemplifies traffic's explanatory power and utility in comprehending the "profound social, cultural, and political changes associated with modernity and its myriad and oftentimes unpleasurable consequences[.]"[17] Whissel explores the ways early cinema contributed to the

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[11] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "traffic (n.)," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6257539734.

[12] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "traffic (n.), sense I.i.2.a," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3830918200.

[13] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "traffic (n.), sense I.i.2.d," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6763423503.

[14] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "traffic (n.), sense II.7.a," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9878013762.

[15] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "traffic (n.), sense II.9," March 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9920960470.

[16] Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities, and the Urban Condition*, 1st edition (London New York: Routledge, 2001), 10.

[17] Kristen Whissel, *Picturing American Modernity: Traffic, Technology, and the Silent Cinema*, Illustrated edition (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 1.

novelties of experience and vision central to conceptualizations of American modernity between the 1890s and 1910s. As a representational medium that "pictured" American modernity both in its content (e.g. representations of war and masculinist military power) and its form (e.g. the harnessing of newly organized electrical networks to screen films in theaters and other venues), Whissel charts how cinema materialized modernity in the United States through practices of machine-made vision, consumption, and organized urban leisure. She situates cinema within a panoply of technological developments that radically transformed the shape of social, political-economic, and cultural life in the United States. Whissel showcases how the emergence of cinema in the late-nineteenth century coincided with processes of industrialization and urbanization, both of which "demanded a radical expansion of the transportation infrastructure to circulate natural resources and workers to factories, as well as finished commodities and a new class of consumers to department stores and commercial thoroughfares."[18] The development and coordination of "new technologies of production, transportation, and illumination,"[19] such as rail transit, modern steam power, electrification, telegraphy and telephony reinvented economies of production and consumption, facilitated the imperialist expansion of the United States into foreign territories through modernizing force, reorganized urban geographies into complex, integrated spatial formations amenable to capitalist exchange, and buttressed an array of novel social practices enacted through entertainment and commercialized leisure. Along with these immense changes, Whissel asserts, came powerful anxieties about social fragmentation, the elision of feminine virtue, and severe bodily harm resulting from infrastructural malfunction and breakdown. The cinema, she contends, surfaced as a fitting medium for United States citizens to document and negotiate the stunning conceits and harrowing consequences of technological modernity.

Whissel's central theoretical intervention is her concept of "modern traffic." She uses modern traffic to capture late-nineteenth century American cinema's emergent correspondences with broadened networks of commerce and imperial power, the accompanying proliferation and synchronization of transportation, energy, and communications infrastructure, and the array of sociocultural and political practices and anxieties that surfaced in this new capitalist formation at the turn of the twentieth century. Tracing the etymological dexterity of traffic, Whissel showcases how the term evolved over time to incorporate and layer new meanings. She writes:

> The origins of "traffic'" were, of course, commercial, and the meanings of the term multiplied along with the development and diffusion of transportation and communications technologies that accompanied the expansion of industrial capitalism until it eventually came to encompass most forms of modern mobility. The eighteen-page definition found in the [Oxford English Dictionary (OED)] provides numerous meanings of the term. "Traffic" initially identified the circulation of goods between 'distant or distinct communities' and thereby implied the development of new forms of spatial, temporal, economic, and social intercourse around emerging commercial practices. It came to include not only the commodities but also the vehicles, bodies, and disembodied communications that move, in one form or another, through the landscape, as well as the rate charged for such circulation and the profits derived therefrom. Traffic eventually incorporated the various technologies—such as the railway, steamship, telephone, and telegraph—that precipitated the annihilation of space and time and gave rise to new forms of 'panoramic perception' that historians such as Wolfgang Schivelbusch have defined as central to the experience of modernity.[20]

[18] ibid., 3.
[19] ibid., 2.
[20] ibid., 4.

Importantly, Whissel also notes how "traffic" also expanded to connote commerce of an illegitimate or perverse character. She contends that this valence of traffic was preeminently manifest in discourses of so-called white slavery, a gendered crisis in which white working class women impoverished under and vulnerable to new formations of industrial capital were lured into sex work by patriarchal traffickers. The cinema, Whissel depicts, became a key apparatus for the negotiation of the moral panics resulting from modern traffic's expanded mobilities and social excesses, especially those pertaining to feminine piety. She continues further:

> In the examples provided by the OED, the virtue of young women (from 1903: "Fruits of 'the [white slave] traffic' occupy a prominent place in today's Metropolitan police court reports") and "honor" (from 1702: "They make a Traffick of Honor, and pay for it with the wind of fair words") are as easily trafficked as more legitimate, saleable merchandise.[21]

In all, Whissel's stunning reading of the OED's eighteen-page entry on "traffic" reveals how it serves as a rich and appropriate metonym for the relations between political economy, spatial organization, infrastructural development, and social and civic life precipitated by and within modernity. She eloquently synthesizes and distills the OED's entry, detailing the evolution of traffic's many interrelated valences of meaning.

Whissel's explication of traffic, however, is limited in at least one substantive way. By starting her analysis of traffic with its introduction into the English language and grounding traffic in the late-nineteenth century, Whissel elides the ways that the concept crystallized in the commerce of the Mediterranean and Atlantic world, namely in the centuries-long trade in human commodities. Whissel, while attentive to the enmeshment of commercial and imperial traffic in the cinematic production of a distinctly American modernity in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, ultimately overlooks that other unspeakable form of traffic lurking as modernity's ghost. Slavery and its afterlife linger as a haunting presence in some of the sites, objects, and phenomena that Whissel reads (e.g., Spanish-American War, Pan-American Exposition, and white slavery)[22] and persisted in the radically transformed and industrialized cityscapes essential to her analysis. What I am suggesting here is that, though generative and portable, Whissel's conceptualization of modern traffic misses a critical connotation of the term that emerges in the lexical and semantic history of transatlantic slavery. It is the valence of meaning that marks what abolitionist, ex-slave, and political activist Ottobah Cugoano calls "that infamous and iniquitous *traffic* of stealing, kidnapping, buying, selling, and cruelly enslaving men!"[23]

I think across Cugoano's and Whissel's usage of the term to arrive at a theorization that sutures the traffic in Black bodies to the infrastructural traffics (e.g., railways, roads, cables, wires), networked (im)mobilities, and sedimentations of geographic power that, in concert, recuperate

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[21] ibid., 5.

[22] For example, the famous 1841 *United States v. Amistad* case, which held that a group of slaves who revolted aboard a Spanish ship were free and not the property of Spain, represented mounting tensions between the United States and Spain that boiled over in the 1898 Spanish-American War. See The United States v. the Amistad, 40 US 518 (Supreme Court 1841). For more on the enduring significance of slavery at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition, see Amma Y. Ghartey-Tagoe Kootin, "Lessons in Blackbody Minstrelsy: Old Plantation and the Manufacture of Black Authenticity," *TDR: The Drama Review (MIT Press)* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 102–22, https://doi.org/10.1162/DRAM_a_00263. Finally, for a treatment hidden racial logics and histories at the heart of the White Slavery discourse, see Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917*, Illustrated edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

[23] Henry Louis Gates Jr. and William L. Andrews, *Pioneers of The Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives, 1772-1815* (Washington, D.C: Civitas Books, 1998), 163.

conditions of unfreedom and captivity in the lived experience of Blackness. Put simply, traffic in my usage, describes the cumulative social, historical, organizational, and distributional power of physical and media infrastructures to disperse, emplace, endanger, and violate Black life.

My understanding of traffic is shaped by two additional concepts: "infrastructural violence" and "spatialized Blackness." Social anthropologists Dennis Rodgers and Bruce O'Neill offer the concept infrastructural violence to examine how infrastructures produce and mediate violence against vulnerable communities in urban environments. They emphasize infrastructures as material and geographic configurations where "broad and abstract social orderings such as the state, citizenship, criminality, ethnicity, and class play out concretely at the level of everyday practice."[24] In their everyday operability, infrastructures exemplify "relationships of power and hierarchy [that] translate into palpable forms of physical and emotional harm."[25] They explain further that: "[i]nfrastructure is not just a material embodiment of violence (structural or otherwise), but often its instrumental medium, insofar as the material organization and form of a landscape not only reflect but also reinforce social orders, thereby becoming a contributing factor to reoccurring forms of harm."[26] The utility of Rodgers and O'Neil's framework lies not simply in its rigorous clarification of how infrastructures violate at the level of the social. Importantly, it opens a unique pathway to explore how infrastructures, as incarnations and intermediaries of geographic relations, produce the spatiality and corporeality of race—in other words, how they are implicated in the violent ascription of race to places and bodies.

Moreover, "The term 'spatialized blackness,'" Black Studies and geography scholar Rashad Shabazz explains, "underscores how mechanisms of constraint built into architecture, urban planning, and systems of control that functioned through policing and the establishment of borders literally and figuratively created a prison-like environment."[27] Shabazz places the carceral landscapes of places like Black Chicago in a broader history of racialized confinement and surveillance that emerged from chattel slavery. He argues that the peculiar institution "drew its power in part from its ability to contain and incapacitate Black people,[28] and that these strategies were reworked in the spatial realities of racial difference.

Merging these concepts, I heed Shabazz's assertion that "[s]lavery was constituted on multiple practices of geographic violence,"[29] but refine it slightly to speak to the specific geographic scope of this study. I contend that, in Ferguson, slavery was constituted and reconstituted through multiple practices of *infrastructural* violence. Haunting, in this case, is a framework to understand the palimpsestic and recursive character of racialized infrastructural violence, or traffic, and its specific assaults on Black subjectivity and spatial sovereignty across time and at various scales. Put differently, haunted traffic names when, where, and how the spatial subjectivity of the slave—a subject-constitution characterized by a legal and absolute vulnerability to infrastructural violence, confinement, dispersion, and or plunder—announces itself in the lived realities and geographic contexts of postslavery Black subjects.

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[24] Dennis Rodgers and Bruce O'Neill, "Infrastructural Violence: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Ethnography* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 401–12, https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138111435738, 402.

[25] ibid.

[26] ibid., 404.

[27] Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Masculinity in Chicago* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 2.

[28] ibid., 6.

[29] ibid.

Engaging Modernity, Infrastructure, and Cities

Because it explores complex relationships between race, infrastructure, and geography in Ferguson across time, *Haunted Traffic* also lends itself to an engagement with the problematic of modernity, especially as grounded in the context of urban cityscapes. Modernity, in part, can be understood as the inauguration and consolidation of political-economic, juridical, and sociotechnical arrangements pertinent to the fashioning of subjectivity, political democracy, capitalist futurity, and civil society. These hallmarks of modernity (e.g., respectively, the embodied consciousness and expression of an individual self through willful action; a system of governance shaped by the constitutionally-recognized prerogatives of rights-bearing, liberated persons; the convergence of capitalism, technical proficiency, and linear progress; the coherence of a citizenry and its constitutive social mores, codes, and orders) are enunciations of power contested by, elaborated through, and scripted against the Black subject.[30] Because infrastructures comprise the composite technical, social, political, and economic arrangements that buttress the everyday enactment of modern sensibility, social status, civic and political life, this project frames infrastructure (and infrastructural violence) in the terms articulated by the historian and infrastructure theorist Paul N. Edwards. He famously asserts that infrastructures "are the connective tissues and circulatory systems of modernity."[31]

The development and coordination of infrastructural systems, especially between the nineteenth century and early-twentieth centuries, have been central to the theorization and practice of modernity. In addition to understanding modernity as coterminous with emergent forms of industrial capitalist production, linear moral-progressivism, and political rationality, *Haunted Traffic* builds on scholarship that locates the material life of modernity within a nexus of sociotechnical relations that radically transformed human consciousness and reorganized social and political life on a global scale, particularly through increased capacities to compress, govern, and organize people, space, and time. These sociotechnical relations required, produced, and assembled unitary technologies (e.g., lightbulb) into composite infrastructural forms and arrangements (e.g., electricity transmission systems) that buttressed the everyday enactments of modern sensibility, social status, civic and political life, or what anthropologist Brian Larkin calls the "ambient environment of everyday life."[32] Large-scale infrastructures such as rail transit networks, sanitation and water distribution techniques, electrical supply systems, and telegraphic communication technologies (to name a few) were increasingly entwined and spatially distributed, leading to the revolutionization of work, the consolidation of gendered distinctions between public and private life, the expansion of possibilities for travel and leisure, the organization of distant and discrete territories under the singular control of colonial nation-states, and the inauguration of new

[30] This claim has been articulated by a broad range of scholars in African diaspora studies, critical race and ethnic studies, and postcolonial studies who have investigated the varied convergences between modernity and systems of racial-colonial power. My own arguments in this regard have been particularly shaped by scholars in this tradition who foreground analytics of race, infrastructure, and geography in their engagement with modernity as a concept. For a classic example, see W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1998). Also, see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[31] Paul N. Edwards, "Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems," in *Modernity and Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 185–225, 185.

[32] Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," *Annual Review of Anthropology 42:1* (2013), 328.

cultural imaginaries about contact and intermixture, art and aesthetics, being and difference.[33] In all, the intricate and coordinated networks of technological, social, economic, and political systems required to move and manage people, space, time, information, goods, waste, and energy have effected incalculable the transformations of modern society and human experience. To stylize a popular refrain from the late cultural theorist Stuart Hall: *infrastructure is the modality in which modernity is lived*. Accordingly, *Haunted Traffic* locates infrastructure as a critical site to analyze both the endurance and breakdown of modernity's power relations in the lived realities of racial differentiation, namely in urban environments.

This project builds on scholarship that examines urban cities as paradigmatic spatial formations where modern sociotechnical experimentation and developments are greatly concentrated. "Cities," explain infrastructure theorists Robert Herman and Jesse Ausubel, "are the summation and densest expression of infrastructure, or more accurately, a set of infrastructures, working sometimes in harmony, sometimes with frustrating discord, to provide us with shelter, contact, energy, water, and means to meet other human needs. The infrastructure is a reflection of our social and historical evolution."[34] Put another way, infrastructures reflect dynamic, sometimes conflicting accumulations of capital, labor, historical relations, cultural practices, and strata of power entrenched in the fabric of modern cities, and within them, varied infrastructural modalities naturalize uneven patterns of social and spatial organization over time. Despite their centrality to the operability of power in cities, infrastructures tend to be naturalized in our social, political, and cultural geographies to such a degree that we often fail to apprehend their active production and participation in social relations and political economies. In her field-defining essay "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," Susan Leigh Star clarifies this point by demonstrating how infrastructures are generally understood "as hidden mechanisms subtending those processes more familiar to social scientists."[35] Star, however, reorients this mode of thinking by charting how infrastructures, their design, and implementation are vital material forms and processes that encode ideological values, circumscribe social relations, and produce political effects in urban environments. She famously opines:

> Study a city and neglect its sewers and power supplies (as many have), and you miss essential aspects of distributional justice and planning power (Latour & Hermant, 1998). Study an information system and neglect its standards, wires, and settings, and you miss equally essential aspects of aesthetics, justice, and change.[36]

Star offers an understanding of infrastructures that does not reduce them to auxiliary components of social processes. On the contrary, she reads infrastructural systems as embodiments of social relations that structure uneven geographies and resource inequities. Despite being narrativized as "invisible," "part of the background for other kinds of work," or "sunk into and

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[33] For works that engage various aspects of the relationship between infrastructural development and the transformation of society and human consciousness, see Thomas Parke Hughes, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930*, Reprint edition (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Harold A. Innis, *Empire and Communications*, New edition (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 3rd edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012); Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, 1st edition (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1983); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (University of California Press, 2014).

[34] Robert Herman and Jesse H. Ausubel, *Cities and Their Vital Systems: Infrastructure Past, Present, and Future* (Washington, D.C: National Academies Press, 1988), 1.

[35] Susan Leigh Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," *American Behavioral Scientist, 43(3)* (1999), 377.

[36] ibid., 379.

inside of other structures, social arrangements, and technologies," Star asserts that these characterizations of infrastructure fall apart when considered from the vantage of subjects "who are *not* served by a particular infrastructure" (emphasis original).[37] Instead, she depicts infrastructures as shapers of (and radically shaped by) context and complex social realities. Infrastructure, as such, appears as a "relational property, not as a thing stripped of use."[38] In this sense, then, infrastructures are not static and uninvolved technical forms but complex, sociotechnical arrangements that situate social subjects differently and relationally along axes of power in modern cities. *Haunted Traffic* investigates this relationship between infrastructure, subjectivity, and power in the specific context of Ferguson and greater St. Louis. In the following section, I examine some of the historical particularities of this region and provide contextual ground on which the rest of the manuscript builds.

Ferguson and St. Louis: Suburban Desires and the Haunting Specter of The City

At the turn of the twentieth century, white residents in Ferguson and other municipalities across St. Louis County worked vehemently to thwart Black physical mobility and residency in suburban space. De jure and de facto racial segregation became widespread throughout the broader St. Louis metropolitan region during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The spatial politics of race, however, took a dramatic and decisive turn at midcentury. The inter- and postwar periods brought radical shifts to the physical form of greater St. Louis and other major American cities. Beginning in the 1930s, new cultural and scientific approaches to social and spatial organization—exemplified in the federal subsidization of white homeownership, government-sponsored highway research and infrastructure projects, and surges in private real estate development—facilitated the migration of the white middle-class out of central cities and into the urban and suburban peripheries. The Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), a federally-supported corporate entity created in 1933 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, emerged as a key shaper of these demographic and geographic changes. HOLC was established as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal programs and provided citizens with low-interest loans to recover defaulted mortgages or purchase new homes altogether. "Between 1933 and 1936," writes historian and planning scholar Amy Hillier, "HOLC made new low-interest, self-amortizing mortgages to one million homeowners who were in default or had already lost their homes." She continues: "As HOLC was nearing completion of its original lending in 1935, HOLC's parent organization, the Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB), established a program that used HOLC staff and local realtors and lenders to appraise real estate risk levels in 239 cities."[39]

[37] Ibid., 380-381, emphasis original.

[38] Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder, "Steps Toward an Ecology of Infrastructure: Design and Access for Large Information Spaces," *Information Systems Research* 7, no. 1 (1996): 111–34, 113.

[39] Amy E. Hillier, "Redlining and the Home Owners' Loan Corporation," Journal of Urban History, Vol. 29 No. 4, May 2003, 394.



Figure 2. 1937 portrait of HOLC employees at the corporate offices in St. Louis (Missouri Historical Society)

HOLC deployed networks of trained staff, realtors, lenders, and appraisers in each city, tasking them to produce in-depth reports and evaluations of local real estate and urban conditions. "This City Survey Program," Hillier reminds, "produced detailed reports for each city along with a series of now infamous security maps that assigned residential areas a grade from one to four. Areas with African Americans, as well as those with older housing and poorer households, were consistently given a fourth grade, or 'hazardous,' rating and colored red."[40] HOLC's program, thus, overwhelmingly benefited white families by providing them with low-interest loans to purchase homes or recover recently foreclosed properties. Even further, HOLC widened extant racial disparities in homeownership and wealth by designating urban areas with high concentrations of Black dwellers as risky; which in turn, largely precluded Black families from accessing government-sponsored loans. HOLC's security maps and rating system, then, were crucial geographic technologies that codified and reflected decades of formal and informal exclusionary practices.

[40] ibid., 395.

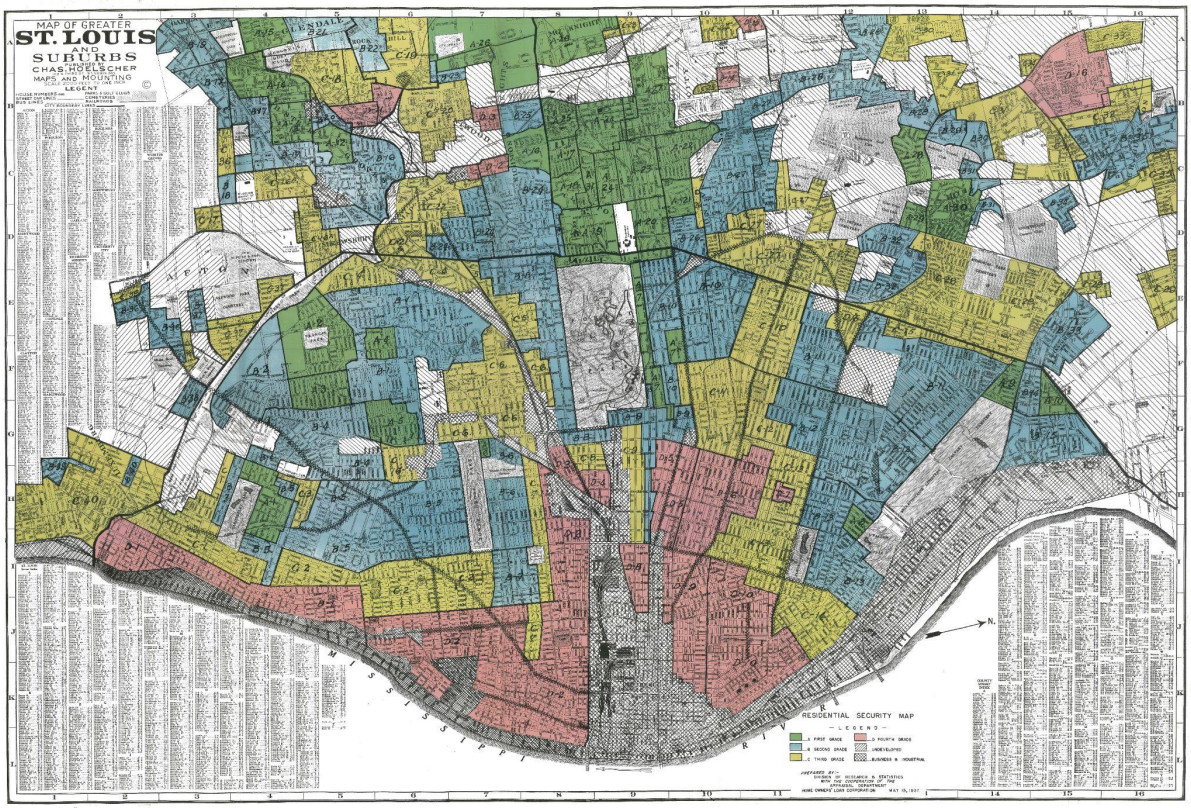


Figure 3. HOLC residential security map of St. Louis and suburbs, published in 1937 (National Archives)

The HOLC residential security map for St. Louis city and its suburbs, published on May 15, 1937, demonstrated the metropolitan region's highly segregated character and further racialized space by marking areas of Black settlement as hazardous and sections of white occupancy as worthy of investment. In the early twentieth century, African American communities were primarily concentrated in the southern and central regions of the city. "During the Great Depression from 1929 to 1936," writes historian John A. Wright, Sr., "a large number of African Americans lived in the nation's largest 'Hooverville,' a squatter colony that stretched along the Mississippi River, south of the MacArthur Bridge."[41] This vast encampment was razed in 1936; its inhabitants were further displaced and dispersed throughout the heavily constrained housing landscape. The sections designated on the security map as precarious and hazardous—colored in bold yellow and red—included the location of this former encampment, locations within the city characterized by high numbers of Black residents (Carondelet, Compton Hill, The Hill, and Rock Spring; bottom center), as well as small clusters of African American presence in St. Louis County (Kinloch; upper right corner). Most of the green and blue areas of the map generally corresponded with established white neighborhoods, many of which were protected by restrictive covenants. Ferguson was represented as the lone blue region in the map's upper right corner. Notably, it was surrounded by several negatively coded zones, particularly one in red which corresponded to the Black enclave of Kinloch. After the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a previously enacted 1916

[41] John A. Wright, Sr., *St. Louis: Disappearing Black Communities* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing 2004), 22.

segregation ordinance in St. Louis, racially restrictive covenants became the primary instrument used to restrict Black families from moving into white communities. "From 1910 to 1945," Wright declares, "378 such covenants were in effect in St. Louis excluding blacks from many neighborhoods."[42] HOLC's maps and appraisals of lending risk enshrined these racial and spatial power relations, extending an already adverse racial ecosystem wherein corporate and government agencies, especially the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), systematically marginalized Black people and spaces.[43]

In the postwar years, state-sponsored mass movement, widespread racial discrimination, and white wealth creation through private lending prompted a series of legal challenges. In 1948, the landmark *Shelley v. Kraemer* case emerged after a white resident, citing a restrictive covenant, attempted to block an African American family from moving into a St. Louis neighborhood. The justices' opinion ultimately declared that racially restrictive covenants were not legally enforceable by the courts. The continuance, however, of covert and overt exclusionary practices, alongside routine escalations of white vigilante violence, ensured that segregation was maintained through extralegal means. The legal ruling, and others like it, failed to disrupt the prevailing racial commonsense that Black occupancy was a detriment to white space and property. Writing about *Shelley v. Kraemer* and other civil rights litigation cases, cultural theorist Gershun Avilez observes, "[r]egardless of whether the covenant under consideration was upheld or not, none of these cases question[ed] the validity of covenants as legal documents; all implicitly recognize[d] the White right to exclude Black people."[44]

This unquestioned white right to exclude Black people reified sharply uneven geographies that worked to naturalize race and class differences in the built environment. In turn, it also served as the foundation for new, hegemonic ideals of family, civil society, citizenship, and social organization, all of which were inflected by the social, cultural, and political-economic changes driven by suburbanization. In their text *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton write about the coherence of the suburban ideal in the mid-twentieth century:

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[42] ibid., 11.

[43] This is a point made by Amy Hillier who argues that HOLC was not the sole entity responsible for institutionalizing redlining, despite being labeled as such in the academic literature. She writes the following:

"FHLBB established its City Survey Program in the middle of all this activity around risk rating, reflecting—rather than infecting—widespread neighborhood appraisal practices and standards. FHA, on the other hand, was a leader in establishing and promoting standards and procedures for neighborhood appraisals. Whether or not it used maps with red lines, FHA did more to institutionalize redlining than any other agency by categorizing mortgages according to their risk level and encouraging private lenders who wanted insurance for their mortgages to do the same. Having completed its lending by the time it finished its first set of maps, HOLC was not in as influential a position as FHA was, with its widely distributed *Underwriting Manual* and long-term involvement in residential mortgage lending. Since the publication of *Crabgrass Frontier*, researchers have blamed HOLC for steering FHA away from central city neighborhoods. But there is no evidence that FHA would have looked on homes in the city any more favorably had it not been for HOLC's maps. On the contrary, FHA's Underwriting Manual, numerous surveys, and own mapmaking reflected an antiurban and racial bias deeper than HOLC's. The written materials that accompanied HOLC's maps consistently stated that loans could still be made profitably in areas considered high risk; FHA's materials did not. So while Jackson and others have put too much emphasis on HOLC's role in redlining, all the evidence suggests that the federal government did, in fact, have a very real impact on private lending. But it was the policies and practices of FHA that seem to have been the primary influence" (p. 414).

[44] GerShun Avilez, "Housing the Black Body," African American Review, Vol. 42, No. 1, Representing Segregation (Spring 2008), 136-137.

> As home construction skyrocketed during the late 1940s and 1950s, men and women began to marry and have babies at remarkable rates. After postponing marriage and childbearing during the hard times of the Depression and through the disruptions of war, American couples sought to make up for lost time: the baby boom was on. The growing families of the 1950s sought large houses on *spacious lots* in areas with good schools and *plenty of room* for supervised play, conditions that were most easily met by constructing new homes on *inexpensive land located outside of central cities*. The suburbanization of America proceeded at a rapid pace and the white middle class deserted inner cities in massive numbers.[45] (emphasis added)

Massey and Denton reveal the emergence of a historically-specific cultural logic and postwar structure of feeling among white Americans wherein *space* and *distance* (e.g., spacious lots, room for supervised play, land outside the central city) were valorized as key requirements for the creation of proper families, gainful homes, good lives, and prosperous communities. The suburbs came to represent and underwrite these desires. Indeed, in his canonical 1985 text *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, Kenneth T. Jackson puts it succinctly: "Suburbia symbolizes the fullest, most unadulterated embodiment of contemporary culture; it is a manifestation of such fundamental characteristics of American society as conspicuous consumption, a reliance upon the private automobile, upward mobility, the separation of the family into nuclear units, the widening division between work and leisure, and a tendency toward racial and economic exclusiveness."[46]

White citizens came to define the suburbs not simply as the favored spatial configuration in society, but as the moral ground of whiteness itself. The urban city, by contrast, was increasingly figured as the congested, fruitless, and unruly locus of Black deviance and cultural pathology. Urban historian Colin Gordon traces how the postwar racial coding of urban and suburban environments manifested in the cultural and spatial politics between St. Louis city and its county suburbs. "Outside the central city," Gordon offers, "the dominant practice (emerging in the mid-twentieth century) was 'exclusionary zoning,' land-use controls that ensured a pattern of predominantly low-density, single-family settlement through a combination of outright prohibitions (no heavy industry, no manufactured housing), effective prohibitions (no land zoned for multifamily housing), and area or density standards (for lot size, setbacks, and building size)."[47] Where restrictive covenants wavered due to their lack of judicial power, "[s]ubsequent policies about land use, development, and taxation sought to protect the cumulative benefits and underlying spatial and racial logics of the outlawed forms of overt discrimination."[48] The curtailment of Black property ownership and occupancy in various parts of St. Louis city and throughout St. Louis County was effectively achieved through the collusion of private realty, federal housing policies, local zoning regulations, and the persistence of racialized metrics of value that designated Black inhabitation as hazardous and unproductive.[49] New, single-family homes and planned subdivisions were rapidly developed and proliferated in largely-white suburbs outside the central city. "Unable

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[45] Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, Later Printing edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 44.

[46] Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, First Edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 4.

[47] Colin Gordon, *Citizen Brown: Race, Democracy, and Inequality in the St. Louis Suburbs* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 123.

[48] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 75.

[49] For more on the ways federal policy and private realty stifled opportunities for Black homeownership from the postwar period onward, see Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

to compete with the suburbs for high-end residential development," Gordon explains, "[St. Louis] ran in the other direction—designating large areas for commercial or industrial use and often 'clearing' low-return residential tracts as part of the bargain."[50] The 1947 St. Louis City Plan, authored by the infamous urban planner Harland Bartholomew (often billed as the architect of exclusionary zoning), conflated blighted and obsolete neighborhoods with majority-Black areas concentrated in the center and downtown. He described these regions as an impediment to the future growth of the city.[51] Bolstered by federal support for urban renewal programs in the 1949 Housing Act and growing public support for redevelopment, the city established the St. Louis Land Clearance for Redevelopment Authority (LCRA) in 1952 to eliminate blight and the conditions that supposedly produced it. In practice, slum clearance, urban renewal, and eliminating blight, while framed as opportunities to encourage growth, attract manufacturing jobs, and create better housing, ultimately resulted in the destruction of maligned locales of Black settlement in service of corporate interests and highway projects. In *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-75*, urban historian Clarence Lang writes that "[b]y the mid-1950s, St. Louis had suffered the loss of more than eleven thousand industrial jobs, due in large part to westward suburban growth and capital flight to the outlying St. Louis County. Under Missouri law, private investors were empowered to form redevelopment corporations to renew blighted sites, supported by generous tax breaks and the public authority of eminent domain. St. Louis's LCRA thus assumed oversight of land acquisition, relocation, demolition, and the sale of cleared inner-city properties to developers. The agency also cooperated with the St. Louis Housing Authority in the planning and construction of federally subsidized housing projects."[52]

[50] Gordon, *Citizen Brown*, 123.

[51] Mark Benton, "The Glorious Future Never Came: An Interpretive Narrative Analysis of the 1947 St. Louis City Plan," Journal of Planning and Education Research 2022 Vol. 42(3) 413-423. See also Mark Abbott, 2007. "The 1947 Comprehensive City Plan and Harland Bartholomew's St. Louis." In *St. Louis Plans: The Real and Ideal St. Louis*, edited by Mark Tranel, 109–49. St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press.

[52] Clarence Lang, *Grassroots at the Gateway: Class Politics and Black Freedom Struggle in St. Louis, 1936-75* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2009), 104.



Figure 4. Aerial view image of the Pruitt-Igoe Homes in the middle ground. The Vaughn Towers housing complex is in the foreground. (Missouri Historical Society)

The most notorious of these projects was the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex, which opened in 1954. Pruitt-Igoe was located on the city's north side and developed on a 57-acre site that had cleared for redevelopment. Comprised of 33 eleven-story, high-rise buildings, each boasting the functionalist principles of modernist design (e.g., non-ornamental concrete and glass structures, skip-stop elevators, and gallery corridors), Pruitt-Igoe was hailed as an architectural triumph over the social and spatial ills at the heart of St. Louis's decline. The complex offered 2,870 units and was planned as a primary residential option for present and future families displaced by slum clearance. "Though originally conceived as two segregated sections (Pruitt for Blacks and Igoe for whites)," writes Katherine G. Bristol, "a Supreme Court decision handed down that same year forced desegregation. Attempts at integration failed, however, and Pruitt-Igoe was an exclusively Black project virtually from inception."[53]

[53] Katherine G. Bristol, "The Pruitt-Igoe Myth," Journal of Architectural Education Vol. 44, No. 3 *May, 1991), 165.



Figure 5. 1960 image of dilapidated housing in St. Louis. The Pruitt-Igoe Housing Project can be seen in the image's background. (Missouri Historical Society)

At the outset, the first residents of Pruitt-Igoe found it to be a noteworthy improvement from the structures and dwellings they had previously called home. "Despite the relatively cheap construction quality," notes Bristol, "the units still represented a higher level of amenity than the dilapidated units they had vacated or been forced to leave."[54] Yet, a fundamental problem quickly emerged. The unforgiving housing landscape and growing Black demand for affordable housing that Pruitt-Igoe attempted to address underwent considerable change, as white families departed neighborhoods that were previously inaccessible to African Americans. In other words, Black households of varying class statuses, as a consequence of white flight and civil rights jurisprudence, now had a broader array of housing choices, including public housing *and* private dwellings in the northern and western parts of the city. Many Black families chose the latter option, and by the end of the 1950s, the occupancy rate of Pruitt-Igoe declined precipitously. As a publicly-funded project, this downturn proved catastrophic and irrevocable for Pruitt-Igoe, ultimately catalyzing the complex's demise. Bristol chronicles the underlying factors causing Pruitt-Igoe's

[54] ibid.

abrupt collapse. I quote her at length here:

> Under the 1949 Housing Act, local housing authorities were expected to fund their operations and maintenance out of rents collected from tenants. In a period of rising costs and declining occupancy, the Housing Authority was placed in a cost-income squeeze that impeded its ability to conduct basic repairs. In addition, average tenant income was declining. The project came increasingly to be inhabited by the poorest segment of the black population: primarily female heads of households dependent on public assistance. These demographic shifts and economic pressures resulted in chronic neglect of maintenance and mechanical breakdowns. Elevators failed to work and vandalism went unrepaired. In a project increasingly inhabited by the poorest and most demoralized segment of the population, the vandalism came also to be accompanied by increasing rates of violent crime. The ongoing problems of vandalism, violence, and fiscal instability prompted a number of efforts to salvage Pruitt-Igoe. In 1965 the first of several federal grants arrived to provide physical rejuvenation and the establishment of social programs to benefit the residents and to combat further rent arrearages. The programs had little effect: Occupancy rates continued to decline, crime rates climbed, and routine management and maintenance were neglected. In 1969 Pruitt-Igoe tenants joined residents of two other St. Louis public housing projects in a massive nine-month rent strike. This further depleted the Housing Authority's limited financial reserves and aggravated the vacancy problem, prompting [the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (H.U.D.)] to consider closing the project. In an effort to determine whether explosion or traditional headache-ball demolition would be cheaper, all the remaining tenants were moved to 11 buildings, and on March 16, 1972 a demolition experiment levelled three buildings in the center of the project. Despite some last-minute rehabilitation plans, in 1973 H.U.D. decided to demolish the rest of the project, and finally finished it off in 1976.[55]

The failure of Pruitt-Igoe, Bristol sharply argues, was not, as many scholars would have it, the result of inept architectural design. The complex, instead, was eroded by the prevalence of systemic racial and class-based oppression that underlined irresponsible public policy and, in part, reified an entrenched indifference to Black social suffering. Yet, despite the [soundness] of Bristol's thesis, the tendency to equate the breakdown of Pruitt-Igoe with its Black tenants endured. The true culprits of Pruitt-Igoe's ruination "would be buried, however, under the weight of a powerful narrative about the cultural dysfunctions of black communities, dysfunctions that rendered them—in this nation's racial imaginary—the antithesis of social life and being."[56]

[55] ibid., 166.

[56] Roderick A. Ferguson, "Michael Brown, Ferguson, and the Ghosts of Pruitt-Igoe," Cultural Critique Vol. 90 (Spring 2015), 141.



Figure 6. Stills from a televised demolition of a Pruitt-Igoe building on April 21, 1972. (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development)

The widely-televised demolition of Pruitt-Igoe provided a visual correlate to this narrative of racial dysfunction and disorganization. The distressed conditions in St. Louis, which Pruitt-Igoe came to symbolize, and though manufactured by decades of racist public policy and private practice, were rearticulated as markers of Black pathology, racial deviance, and disordered living in the minds of white suburban dwellers and municipal leaders. Furthermore, the decline and imminent destruction of the housing project pushed African American families into more densely populated neighborhoods in the northern part of the city. The result was that north St. Louis city and the inner suburbs such as Ferguson, Jennings, and Berkeley in north St. Louis County (colloquially referred to as "North County") became trapped in a contentious dialectic. The migration of white middle-class residents to these North County suburbs, abetted by federally-subsidized homeownership, highways, and private real estate development in the 1940s and 50s, followed by the migration of economically-mobile Black residents a generation later, devastated north St. Louis city and positioned North County as an immediate space of racial contest. "Over the middle years of the 20th century," writes Colin Gordon, "these inner suburbs employed the same tactics—including legal restrictions, systematic discrimination in private realty, and exclusionary zoning—as their neighbors. Over time, however, these tactics failed."[57] Gordon instructs further that the "disinvestment in north St. Louis (and with it the failure of local public goods like schools) and the dislocation caused by urban renewal (shouldered overwhelmingly by African Americans) in the City and St. Louis County created immense pressures on the older, relatively affordable housing stock in the inner suburbs."[58] By the late 1960s, the incremental migration of Black families—some former residents of Pruitt-Igoe—into the inner suburbs of North County incited a racial crisis and suburban panic, as white communities most proximate to the central city were confronted with the prospect of Black presence. "The deliberations of suburban city planning or zoning commissions," Gordon concludes, "were invariably *haunted by the specter of 'the City'*—a ghostly reminder of what might happen if residential density and racial occupancy were not controlled"[59] (emphasis added). This specter of the City—more appropriately, the figure of urban Blackness conflated with "The City"—was wielded as a material and discursive resource to rationalize the maintenance, fortification, and reproduction of exclusionary suburban space. This haunting continues to shape the social, physical, and cultural landscape in Ferguson, despite the municipality's present identity as a majority-Black city.

A Note on Method

Haunted Traffic is an interdisciplinary and place-based project that engages the complex and transhistorical relationship between race, geography, and infrastructure in Ferguson. It employs an array of investigative and analytic tools to examine the uncanny built environments and nonlinear temporalities in which modern racial subjectivities and asymmetrical spatial sovereignties are produced, experienced, and renewed in Ferguson. Because this work foregrounds haunting as a central framework to understand these phenomena, an essential component of its methodology

[57] Colin Gordon, "Making Ferguson: Segregation and Uneven Development in St. Louis and St. Louis County," in *Ferguson's Fault Line: The Race Quake That Rocked A Nation*, ed. Kimberly Jade Norwood (American Bar Association Publishing, 2016), 77.

[58] ibid.

[59] ibid, 80.

pertains to how it approaches time. As previously mentioned, *Haunted Traffic* moves from the antebellum period to the present and examines how palimpsestic geographies are shaped by performances of racialized infrastructural violence (and vice versa) across time.

"Time here," to quote the late Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "is not mere chronological continuity. It is the range of disjointed moments, practices, and symbols that thread the historical relations between events and narrative."[60] This definition of time—as disjointed and not merely chronological—is particularly useful because it allows us to consider how durable structures of power, enactments of racial violence, as well as historical and spatial (dis)continuities complicate the relationship between the past and present. Trouillot asserts this point forcefully, discussing the particular ways racial slavery and its legacies confound conventional understandings of time in the United States. He writes: "[t]hat U.S. slavery has both officially ended, yet continues in many complex forms—most notably institutionalized racism and the cultural denigration of blackness—makes its representation particularly burdensome in the United States. *Slavery here is a ghost, both the past and a living presence; and the problem of historical representation is how to represent that ghost, something that is and yet is not"* (emphasis added).[61]

Trouillot uses the figure of the ghost to describe slavery's complex and unruly temporality. It is, at once, past and present, concluded and ongoing, posing a problem of historical representation. He instructs, however, that a critical element in the effective representation of the ghost of slavery is a rigorous attunement to historical authenticity, which he claims is less about a "fidelity to an alleged past but [rather] an honesty vis-à-vis the present as it re-presents that past."[62] *Haunted Traffic*, thus, engages history, namely the history of slavery, as intimately entangled with contemporary permutations of antiblack violence, captivity, and placemaking. This means that my archival research and interpretation of documentary evidence are not only informed by what Trouillot calls "empirical exactitude"[63] but also the political and geographic realities of our present. In practice, this orientation toward historical authenticity takes numerous forms: reading historical maps alongside their present-day correlates to reveal changes and congruencies in the built environment; using deed records to trace patterns of property ownership; conducting genealogical research to map surviving social relations and lines of descendance; visiting sites of historical social violence to observe their shaping of collective memory and interpretations of the past; and surveying modern discourses of presentism and futurity in archival documents, among others. These strategies enable me to both represent the ghost and locate the sites of its haunting.

Next, I offer explications of my methodological approach to the study of geography and infrastructure, especially as they are inflected by race. Like time, geography and infrastructure are vast and dense problematics. Both independently and in tandem, these social and conceptual schemas have been constructed through power as natural and static, presenting certain epistemological and methodological blind spots in their critical interrogation and analysis. In moving beyond these analytic limitations with respect to geography, I am particularly inspired by the example set by Katherine McKittrick. Her work critiques normative readings of human geography that frame spatial relations as fixed and given processes. For McKittrick, the figuration of geographies as stable and unchanging not only misreads how space is produced but disappears the operations and contestations of power intrinsic to the material places we inhabit. She explains

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[60] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, 20th Anniversary Edition*, 2nd Revised edition (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2015), 146.

[61] ibid., 147.

[62] ibid., 148.

[63] ibid., 149.

that "[g]eography's discursive attachment to stasis and physicality, the idea that space 'just is,' and that space and place are merely containers for human complexities and social relations, is terribly seductive: that which 'just is' not only anchors our selfhood and feet to the ground, it seemingly calibrates and normalizes where, and therefore who, we are."[64] The taken-for-grantedness of space and place, McKittrick demonstrates, also works to reify the supposed givenness of race and racial hierarchy. Consequently, she argues against analyses of race and geography that "fall back on seemingly predetermined stabilities, such as boundaries, color-lines, "proper" places, fixed and settled infrastructures and streets, oceanic containers." She instructs that "[i]f space and place *appear* to be safely secure and unwavering, then what space and place make possible, outside and beyond tangible stabilities, and from the perspective of struggle, can potentially fade away" (emphasis original).[65]

Returning to Susan Leigh Star, she writes in a similar vein, suggests that infrastructures, as relational and dynamic properties, demand methodological versatility and encourage the use of an array of analytic tools to surface how, when, and where infrastructures circumscribe and exemplify social relations. She contends that infrastructures are inscribed with "master narratives" that structure their function and poetics, which make them key sites to examine the workings of discourse and power. As a result, fieldwork that engages infrastructure, Star writes, "transmogrifies to a combination of historical and literary analysis, traditional tools like interviews and observations, systems analysis, and usability studies"[66] Star suggests moving across disciplinary boundaries to engage infrastructure rigorously and responsibly, which means analyzing not just the form and function of infrastructure, but the social relationalities it makes possible, the discursive and political contexts that shape its development and use, and its contingent yet historical evolutions, among other factors.

What I find in both McKittrick's and Star's work is an emphasis on the indeterminate and produced character of both geography and infrastructure. They both urge a methodological orientation that confronts the built environment as in flux and always in a process of becoming. Appropriately, then, my methodology involves a multifaceted approach that employs archival research to historicize infrastructural environments using a multimodal archive that includes conventional primary source materials, historical census data, images, documentary film and other audiovisual media, maps and city plans. I use humanistic textual analysis and criticism to excavate master narratives embedded within cultural, media, and infrastructural objects. These include things such as civic/governmental documents, transcripts of municipal hearings and council meeting minutes, newspaper media, and social media discourse. I conduct ethnographies of infrastructure to evaluate the formal attributes, operations, aesthetics, and lived social realities of (sub)urban spaces. On this latter mode of investigation, I practice what Michel de Certeau calls "walking in the city,"[67] an auto-ethnographic and embodied exercise of reading urban codes and infrastructures through deep and sustained physical engagements with built environments.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *Haunted Traffic* foregrounds a community-centered approach. It does this not only by engaging infrastructure and geography as produced by a variety of social actors but by centering the experiences of those often relegated to the margins of

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[64] Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women And The Cartographies Of Struggle*, First edition (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2006), xi.

[65] ibid.

[66] Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 382.

[67] Michel De Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*, 1st edition (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011), 91.

infrastructure and the urban plan. This project has been enriched by insights and feedback from generous activists, comrades, local educators, historians, civic leaders, and the immediate family members of Mike Mike with whom I have built deep and purposeful community over the last two years. These connections are an ethical necessity for me and have led to a fuller accounting of how Black subjects have experienced and refused geographic marginality the in greater St. Louis region. In concert, these ethical, investigative, and analytic approaches help me conduct rigorous, diligent, and accountable research that strives to nurture racial and spatial justice on and off the page.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter, "Rail," is a historical analysis of Ferguson before its formal incorporation (between 1838 and 1894) and investigates how the development of railway infrastructure intersected with the institution of slavery in the region. Interrogating the city's beginning as a train station called "Ferguson Station" on the North Missouri Railroad and a settlement for slaveholding farmers, I examine the material and symbolic links between the local train depot and the plantation of Thomas T. January, a director of the North Missouri Railroad and the wealthiest landowner and slaveholder in the region. A pond on January's plantation, likely constructed with slave labor, was used to provide water to inbound steam locomotives at Ferguson Station, making January's slave-managed farm indispensable to the fundamental operability of the Ferguson depot that anchored the town. I engage the railroad as a key infrastructural site, examining how the North Missouri Railway system, in particular, mediated local ideas and ambient experiences of modernity, racial subjectivity, mobility, and freedom in antebellum Ferguson and greater St. Louis. I explore how the railroad and the discursive imaginaries around communicated new visions of race, space, and property. Through analyses of photographs, company reports, historical newspapers, contracts, and letters, I demonstrate how the railroad was imagined as a modernizing force that necessitated the transformation and ultimate destruction of Indigenous topographies, as well as the capture of enslaved labor in St. Louis County. Ultimately, the chapter theorizes the concept of **"**right-of-way," arguing that railroad rights-of-way and other kinds of deeds did not only function as legal instruments to authorize the installation of iron rails across the stolen Indigenous lands of St. Louis County, Missouri. Rights-of-way also function as social prerogatives, or exercises of racial precedence, deployed by municipalities and individual white subjects, to secure white modern sensibility by violating the bodily and spatial sovereignty of Black and Indigenous life. The key argument of this chapter is that the junction between chattel slavery, property, railway infrastructure, and modern mobility—the haunted traffic—at the center of Ferguson's antebellum origins catalyzed enduring social relations between race, geography, and infrastructure that retain a haunting presence in the suburban landscape. To substantiate this claim, I draw on a novel collection of previously unexplored documents and correspondences gathered from three years of archival research at various local and state institutions across Missouri, Kentucky, and Illinois. My diligence and proficiency in archival research enables me to depict how the materiality and meanings of urban spaces are produced and reworked over time.

Chapter two, "Street," focuses on roadway infrastructure as the setting for intensive struggles over race, space, and power in Ferguson during the postwar period (1950-1980) and in the immediate aftermath of Michael Brown Jr.'s tragic killing. The section begins by chronicling the necessity of street networks and automobiles to the fashioning of white suburban enclaves

following World War II and showcases how suburban roads organized Ferguson's housing stock, cultural centers, civic institutions, and commercial spaces into a coherent geographic formation for mobile, white-nuclear families. Accordingly, the chapter suggests that the regulation and management of streets became key practices to sustain white suburban insularity. These practices manifested most visibly in postwar attempts to curtail Black presence in Ferguson and North St. Louis County through the erection of road barricades, especially in the 1960s and 1970s when federal statutes outlawed various forms of racial discrimination in housing. I engage historical newspaper media from the period to analyze debates over street obstructions and the emergent racial discourse of "traffic safety" that anxious white homeowners often used to support them. I argue that this racial discourse of traffic safety constructed the mobilities of Black motorists and pedestrians as spatial problems and legitimated modes of geographic containment in Ferguson's built environment. I contend further that these postwar spatial and discursive relations, with their adverse and material effects on Black mobility and spatial sovereignty, persisted as specters in the city's gratuitous policing and criminalization of Black physical movement in the years leading up to Michael Brown Jr.'s death. The chapter closes with readings of protest images, namely street and highway demonstrations aimed at objecting to the Black teenager's murder. It claims that these provisional and political performances of infrastructural disruption—pedestrian acts—contest illusory discourses of traffic safety, interrupt historical geographies of social marginality, and impede the entrenched cultural mandate throughout the region that Black subjects "yield" (as in defer; as in output or produce capital/value for) to infrastructural violence and municipal power.

The third and final substantive chapter, "Wave and Wire" shifts its focus toward broadcast and digital media infrastructure and examines how Ferguson—both as physical place *and* as mediated environment (#Ferguson)—persistently shapes visual, public, and online political discourses about the racial politics of policing, rebellion, and justice in the United States. The chapter opens with an exploration of the extant racialized affective landscapes forged in late November 2014 as the country awaited the St. Louis County grand jury's decision on whether to indict officer Darren Wilson for his fatal shooting of Michael Brown, Jr. More pointedly, it reveals the connections a fraught, divided, and anxious national public made between the looming threat of revolt in 2014 Ferguson and the memory of the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. Following the controversial announcement that Wilson would not be charged on any count, digitally-coordinated and mediated demonstrations erupted in Ferguson and quickly spread to dozens of major cities across the nation. The chapter suggests that the turbulent visual, social, political, and geographic crises incited by the murder of Michael Brown, Jr. and subsequent nonindictment of Wilson crystallized affective and political geographies online and offline that continue to haunt popular imagery, public debates, and competing understandings of Black radicalism. To explore this claim, the chapter spotlights one image in particular, primarily because of its global reach and recurrence across temporal and political contexts, 2014 and 2020 respectively. The photograph, while not taken in Ferguson proper, was captured at a Ferguson solidarity rally in Portland, Oregon on November 25, 2014, the day after the St. Louis County grand jury declined to indict Darren Wilson. The image was captured by freelance photographer Johnny Nguyen and depicted a brief embrace between a Black child named Devonte Hart and a white police sergeant named Bret Barnum. Like Rodney King's famous televised press conference in 1992, the picture, for many, offered a vision of optimism in a nation beset by racialized struggles between demonstrators and militarized police. The photograph circulated widely through media networks and garnered widespread acclaim, becoming an iconic visual in the mediated environment of #Ferguson. This chapter performs a close reading of the popular image, tracing its rapid spread in late 2014 following the

nonindictment of Wilson, the image's disappearance in 2018 after Devonte and his siblings were tragically murdered by his adoptive parents, and the picture's reappearance in social media discourse during the racial uprisings in summer of 2020. I argue that the staying power of the hug photo, perpetually haunted by Michael Brown, Jr.'s death and the ensuing rebellion in Ferguson, is shaped by a persistent political desire for Black political acquiescence in (sub)urban landscapes and recurs over time to ameliorate white angst. The photograph, in short, functions as a visual strategy of racial and spatial containment—a technology of traffic control that seeks to arrest the visibility and practice of Black social movement across physical and digital arenas.

Chapter One: Rail

By 1894, Ferguson's residents believed that the famous mansion on January Farm was haunted. Aside from those with a proclivity for thrill, most completely avoided the vacant homestead. But during the antebellum period, the estate of Thomas Thruston January was a destination of choice for the business and political elite. Full of extravagance and vitality, the residence was a beacon of genteel affluence in St. Louis County, Missouri, an "abode of hospitality" where "all the comforts, if not the luxuries, [were] found."[68] January's place was known widely as a handsome dwelling and one of the finest farms west of the Mississippi. Yet, by the late 1800s, his property was reputed as a gathering place for ghosts.

The notorious mansion had, at one time, anchored January's large estate. The home, flanked by two slave dwellings and a "lake that had been built to the east,"[69] concretized his stature among agriculturalists and industrialists alike. In the years preceding the Civil War, January welcomed guests to his farmstead via newly minted rails of the North Missouri Railroad (NMRR), a line he helped locate and direct. The lake on his property was enlarged and fitted with an underground pipe that supplied water for locomotives at the nearby Ferguson train station just two miles south.[70] Invitees passed through the developing St. Louis cityscape in an enclosed train car and concluded their novel trip at a northward station in the countryside near the January home.[71] January's visitors were greeted by an imposing and opulent structure. One account of the home described

> a large columned entrance leading into a wide hall running to the rear of the house where it flowed into a balcony overlooking the first floor and leading to six or eight bedrooms for family and guests. At the juncture where the head of the stairway met the balcony, was a widened portion protected by an open balustrade probably used by musicians employed for parties and dances. On one side of the hall a formal parlor, a game room and den, across the hall a Library and a Drawing Room, then the Children's Play Room opposite the Dining Room. To the rear and outside was a wide open lean-to porch or gallery as it was called in those days extended from the house to a room-sized building used as the kitchen. Further to the rear was a group of small buildings that had been used as slave quarters.[72]

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[68] *The United States biographical dictionary and portrait gallery of eminent and self-made men: Missouri volume, Part 2* (United States Biographical Publishing Company, 1878), 371-372.

[69] Smith, F*erguson: A City and Its Peopl*e, 113.

[70] ibid.

[71] E.R. Schmidt, "Ferguson…As I Knew It." *Florissant Valley Historical Society Quarterly* (n.d.)

[72] ibid.



Figure 7. January Mansion, date unknown. (Ferguson Historical Society)

The house boasted twelve stately cypress trees, "the finest wine cellar in all the country,"[73] and even a private horse-racing track. January convened and entertained some of the most esteemed regional leaders in politics, agriculture, industry and commerce at his suburban refuge. In July 1857, for example, January Farm was the host site for a reaper and mower competition among regional innovators of agricultural machinery.[74]

Following the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, January's wealth declined precipitously. No longer the controller of personal property in bondspeople, he subdivided his real estate holdings into salable lots and filed the first platted subdivision in the region in 1868. He named the subdivision "Ashland Subdivision of January Farm"—a nod to the famed politician Henry Clay, Sr.'s well-known Ashland plantation in his home state of Kentucky. Over the next decade, January sold his real estate assets and all manner of personal holdings, especially horses and farm animals. After his death in 1886, January's mansion was intermittently occupied by families tasked with maintaining the property; though, some accounts suggest it had been deserted by the time of Ferguson's formal incorporation in 1894.[75]

In its vacancy, the mansion became the subject of supernatural lore in the young, all-white suburb. White residents and passersby recalled that "an aura of hauntedness engulfed [the] derelict and its surroundings." One young Ferguson man expressed that "tones and chords of a violin seemed to waft through the broken panes of the windows." The most pervasive tales from habitants of the nascent town by far, however, featured reports of "clanking chains, mysterious footsteps, moans and groans, and other ghostly noises." A white female caretaker for the house, referenced in an oral account as "Mrs. Warren," testified hearing sounds of "dragging chains" and "moving

[73] Cornelia Coulter, "Being a History of Ferguson." (n.d.)
[74] "Trials of Reapers and Mowers," *The Pantagraph*, July 14, 1857, digitized by Newspapers.com
[75] "St. Louis County Notes," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 18, 1894, digitized by Newspapers.com.

furniture." She confided to her husband that "the house was really haunted."[76] Edward G. Cherbonnier, a respected member of one of Ferguson's early families, recalled that as a child, he and his audacious friends "used to walk through [the mansion's] out-buildings, imagining that the slaves were still there, and speculating as to where they had been tied up when they were bad."[77] "Many small boys firmly believed," one account mentioned, "that [a] tall pole planted in the ground near the slave quarters had been used as a whipping post."[78]



Figure 8. Ruins of January Mansion, date unknown. (Ferguson Historical Society)

A fire destroyed January Mansion in 1909,[79] more than six decades after its original construction. Summoned by whistles of the Wabash Railroad (the organizational successor of the North Missouri Railroad), volunteer firefighters in the city were unsuccessful in their attempts to save the property. Among the ruins of the old "center of aristocratic social life in St. Louis County," emergency responders encountered a striking discovery related to the floorplan: "after the house burned to the ground, two rooms of [the] basement were outlined and four pairs of iron circles were found attached to the walls. They were probably used for the disciplining of slaves."[80] One resident who visited the site speculated that the rooms were holding cells and that "the iron rings were used to hold chains or manacles to restrain recalcitrant persons."[81]

The ghastliness of the vacant farmhouse, as well as the frights and fascinations it aroused in the townspeople of Ferguson found their correlates in the subterranean realities of chattel punishment. Surfaces lined with iron instruments of slave restraint and enclosed rooms designed to confine noncompliant captives constituted the hidden abode of production[82] within January's

[76] Schmidt, "Ferguson…As I Knew It."

[77] Edward G. Cherbonnier, "Ferguson Boyhood." (1975)

[78] Schmidt, "Ferguson…As I Knew It."

[79] "Fire Saves Old Landmark From Becoming An Inn," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 19, 1909, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[80] Smith, *Ferguson: A City and Its People*, 113.

[81] Schmidt, "Ferguson…As I Knew It."

[82] This conceptualization, offered initially by Karl Marx and later expanded by Nancy Fraser, has been mobilized to name the hidden social relations of power that are absented in the process of valorization. For Marx, the hidden abode of production was the factory, wherein portions of workers' labor-time are unremunerated and captured as surplus value. Fraser expands this framework by attending to the elements hidden further behind the hidden abode of the factory—namely, gendered and unwaged domestic labor—which coalesce and fundamental to the social reproduction of the worker. In my usage, I use this term to refer to the hidden administrations of violent slave discipline that underlined the production of commodities on January Farm and the social reproduction of broader structure of white aristocratic life and pleasure in St. Louis County. For more on the hidden abode of

mansion and farm. The cruel expropriation of slave labor not only buttressed January's economic standing in the capitalist arena of St. Louis County, but it underpinned the practice of modern, aristocratic pleasure in antebellum St. Louis County, exemplified in the extravagant indulgences exercised in January Mansion. The discovery of torture devices within the debris of the fallen landmark evinced what Saidiya Hartman describes as the "spectral and spectacular character" of slave suffering and "the shocking and ghostly presence of pain."[83] Hartman is particularly instructive in considering how captive pain and white pleasure were particularly yoked in nineteenth century Ferguson. The robust structures of antebellum racial feeling,[84] pleasure, embodied enjoyment, and modern mobility concretized in and made possible by January Mansion and Farm were inseparable from the command of slave property and the dispensation of grotesque racial discipline. In other words, slave torment was the scaffold that upheld the well-known January estate. The writing was literally on the walls. Beneath the grandeur of January Farm and its infrastructures of white modern sensibility in early Ferguson was the haunting specter of what made it all possible—the violence of American slavery.

Chapter Summary

Why begin a historical exploration of race, geography, and infrastructure in antebellum Ferguson with a tale about a pastoral farm and brick mansion purportedly haunted by slaves? To put it simply, January and his notorious farm were and remain central figures in Ferguson's constitution, racial history, and spatial imagination. January is preserved in Ferguson's contemporary street names (e.g., January Avenue, Thurston Avenue). Ashland Subdivision of January Farm, which he filed and platted in 1868, retains this name today and is one of Ferguson's oldest subdivisions. January-Wabash Memorial Park, situated on the historic lands of January Farm, has been a longstanding center of civic life in the city since its establishment as municipal park in 1948. All of these facts testify to January's enduring imprint on Ferguson's racialized suburban geography.

January and his farm, then, demand historical investigation for their unmistakable importance to the City of Ferguson, the North Missouri Railroad (NMRR), and the wider racial life of modernity in St. Louis County. By engaging the connections between his estate, the institution of slavery, and the railroad, I follow Susan Leigh Star's resonant call to denaturalize the infrastructural relations embedded in social, political, and cultural geographies. In this chapter, titled "Rail," I reveal how railway infrastructure, in this case, exemplified the social and political-economic desires of white settlers like January and produced asymmetrical spatial realities for differently marked racial subjects. By doing so, I showcase how railway development entered and reified an extant regime of property relations founded upon Indigenous dispossession and racial slavery. The railroad buttressed novel experiences of mobility, ambulatory leisure, and self-possession that stabilized dominant ideas of race and space in the mid-19th century. This infrastructure enshrined discourses of property and human subjectivity that valorized white life,

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production, see Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. 1: A Critique of Political Economy* (Penguin Books, 1990) and Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism," in *Critical Theory in Critical Times* (Columbia University Press, 2017), 141–59, https://doi.org/10.7312/deut18150-009.

[83] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 20.

[84] I use "structures of racial feeling" in line with Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*: *Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

undermined Indigenous sovereignty, and devalued Black personhood. The key argument of this chapter is that the junction between chattel slavery, railway infrastructure, and modern mobility—the haunted traffic—at the center of Ferguson's antebellum origins catalyzed enduring social relations between race, geography, and infrastructure that retain a haunting presence in the suburban landscape.

In what follows, I chronicle the social and political-economic context in St. Louis County to help explain why St. Louis' relations of racial power made it a prime location for railroad business during the antebellum period. Thereafter, I consider to the specific history of Ferguson Station and its physical and symbolic relationship to January Farm. I posit that the intimacies between the Ferguson depot and January's land exemplify a larger relationship between slavery, private property, railroads, and the racialization of modern subjectivity in the region. Honing in on the ties between racial violence, infrastructure, and the coherence of white modernity, this chapter introduces and theorizes the concept of *right-of-way*.

Right-of-Way

Cornell University's Legal Information Institute defines right-of-way as "the right to pass over or through real property owned by someone else, usually based upon an easement." It states further that, "[i]n traffic law, right of way is the right to proceed."[85] Said differently, right-of-way describes both the right to establish a public passageway or utility on property belonging to a private person, party, or entity *and* the right to travel about a given path with precedence over others. In the mid-nineteenth-century, private citizens like January or municipal entities such as the city of St. Louis frequently used rights-of-way to grant railroad companies nonpossessory rights to land for the purposes of building railway lines. As emblems of modern capitalist movement in antebellum society, rail cars were afforded preference in the physical landscape and imbued with considerable cultural and spatial power. Significantly, railroad travel at this time was not simply asymmetrical but largely dependent upon legal, political, and cultural understandings of race that afforded white life (human) precedence over Black and Indigenous life (property). My key offering here is a theorization of right-of-way that attends to its explanatory power for understanding, in tandem, the geographic effects of infrastructure and the spatialization of racial hierarchy within infrastructural relations.

Right-of-way, as a juridical concept, remains crucial to the legal and topographic dimensions of infrastructural development and regulation, particularly as it relates to the installation and management of rail systems, roadways, and transmission lines, et cetera. Expanding this concept, I argue, however, that rights-of-way do not *only* function as legal instruments to authorize, in the context of this chapter for instance, the installation of iron rails across the stolen Indigenous land of St. Louis County, Missouri. Rights-of-way also function as social prerogatives, or exercises of racial precedence, deployed by municipalities and individual white subjects, to secure white modern sensibility by violating the bodily and spatial sovereignty of Black and Indigenous peoples.

[85] Cornell University Legal Information Institute, "Right of Way," LII / Legal Information Institute, accessed November 1, 2023.

St. Louis and the Imperial-Settler Imagination

When newlywed farmer William B. Ferguson and his wife Laura relocated from Ohio to Missouri in 1845, they arrived at a fortuitous time. The couple purchased and settled on 177 acres of farmland in the St. Louis County region[86]. Like many other agricultural families from the East and Upper South, the Fergusons' migration to the young slave state was compelled by the growing allure of the American West. While St. Louis was not yet the politically-contentious, transportation, and manufacturing powerhouse it would become in just a few short years, it was already a critical geography that aroused the dreams of settlers and slaveholders.

Following Thomas Jefferson's purchase and acquisition of the vast Louisiana Territory from the French ruler Napoleon in 1803, St. Louis gained notoriety as the embarkation point for the Corps of Discovery Expedition led by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Departing with a cadre of soldiers, traders, and interpreters, Lewis, Clark, and his enslaved servant York journeyed up the Missouri River to index native peoples, document biological life, explore routes, and map natural landscapes. As historian Walter Johnson sharply instructs, Lewis and Clark's quest was a "military reconnaissance operation" imagined by Jefferson to enumerate Indigenous life and land in the West for the purposes of waging war and fashioning U.S. empire.[87] St. Louis, with Clark serving as territorial governor, was figured as the imperial seat of the nascent nation and the preeminent locale from which Indigenous dispossession, slave subjection, and white freedom could be imagined and charted.

After a wave of European immigration and settlement in the area, St. Louis was incorporated as a city in 1823 just three short years after Missouri's admission into the Union as a slave state.[88] By the mid-nineteenth century, the designated gateway to the western territories, situated just south of the confluence of the great Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, had emerged as an urban beacon of capitalist modernity. Political elites viewed St. Louis' social order, geographic location, and economic potential as invaluable assets. In their spatial, racial, and political imaginations, the city was the key to connecting disparate yet burgeoning commodity markets and transcending sectional differences across the growing country. This vision of St. Louis, borne in the desires of slaveholders, agricultural settlers, and industrialists, bolstered local support to bring the nineteenth-century exemplar of American modernity to the region. If St. Louis was figured as the prospective epicenter of modern, imperial power and capitalist possibility in the republic, the railroad was heralded as its necessary instrument. White, Californian settlers' encounter with gold in 1849 made the railroad a priority in St. Louis, and railroad companies descended on the city intent on establishing reliable and profitable transportation to the western coast. A groundbreaking ceremony for Missouri's first and aptly-named line, the Pacific Railroad, was held on July 4, 1851

[86] While it seems clear that William B. Ferguson purchased a tract of land in 1845, a record of such a transaction has not been located by historians. Secondary literature remains divided on who Ferguson may have bought this property from at this time. Most writing concurs that Ferguson purchased land owned by Marshall Brotherton. Some accounts, however, assert that Ferguson acquired this land from Thomas T. January. Both Brotherton and January were two of the foremost landholders in the region. For more on this, see Smith, F*erguson: A City and Its People* (1994).

[87] Walter Johnson, *The Broken Heart of America: St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States*, (Basic Books, 2020), 18.

[88] Missouri State Archives, "Timeline of Historic Missouri 1821-1860," https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/history/timeline/2 (n.d.)

in St. Louis.[89] Other lines followed suit.

St. Louis and the North Missouri Railroad (NMRR)

The NMRR company, which William B. Ferguson would sell land to and help create the city of the same name, was chartered in 1851. Yet, St. Louis city and the broader county were not initially envisioned as part of the line's route. The road was first conceptualized as a connection between St. Charles, Missouri, one of the state's early seats of government, and the state boundary limit to the north. In 1852, however, the incorporators of the NMRR wrote a memorial to the Missouri state legislature asking for amendments to the line's charter. The petitioners emphatically declared that "it was considered expedient that the southern terminus of the road should be at St. Louis instead of St. Charles."[90] The memorialists, therefore, requested additional "power to survey, mark, locate and construct a railroad from the city of St. Louis, in the county of St. Louis, through the town of St. Charles."[91] They suggested this would "improve the character of the road" and, importantly, "[unite] the fertile lands of the Minnesota Territory with the cotton and sugar fields of Louisiana, and thus giving a new outlet to the products of our soil at the Gulf of Mexico."[92]

Put differently, the group of reputable Missourians representing the NMRR's interests felt that leveraging St. Louis' developing prestige in the national landscape was of the utmost importance. In their request, they narrated the city as an essential, transport hub in an emergent racial capitalist ecosystem. The push to connect St. Louis with the western lands of Minnesota and the exchangeable commodities cultivated in Louisiana represented intentions to benefit from widespread practices of indigenous displacement and chattel slavery that undergirded the nation's wealth. Hidden in the references to "the fertile lands of the Minnesota Territory" were the ongoing militarized assaults against Native sovereignty that made the region appear open to cultivation and settlement. The incorporators' mention of "the cotton and sugar fields of Louisiana" were euphemistic elisions of the ruthless command of slave labor on Louisianian plantations. Ultimately, the incorporators of the NMRR believed that both forms of racial violence provided advantages the rail line could exploit.

St. Louis was a premier incubator for the coherence of this vision of the railroad. At the time of the NMMR memorialists' request, white settlers in the region began decimating the extant indigenous topography, flattening sacred earthen mounds of Indigenous Mississippian culture to pave the way for the city's macadamized roads, railways, and structures.[93]

[89] ibid.

[90] North Missouri Railroad Company, *Memorial of the North Missouri Railroad Convention*, (Jefferson City: James Lusk, Public Printer, 1852), 5.

[91] ibid.

[92] ibid.

[93] "Cahokia Mounds Reconnaissance Survey," National Parks Service (December 2016), 13.



Figure 9. Big Mound, at Fifth (Broadway) and Mound Streets, St. Louis. Daguerreotype by Thomas Easterly, 1852. (Missouri Historical Society)

Landowning slaveholders culminated this theft and mastery of native land with discursive violence, changing longstanding place names to reflect new systems of white real estate and private property. Transport infrastructures, built atop unceded Indigenous land toiled by slaves, organized commercial and civic institutions into an integrated marketplace that anchored modern traffic and city life. The movement of new goods such as tobacco, made possible through slave labor, awakened new cultural and spatial sensibilities, and fomented the construction of warehouses and other mercantile architectures along the riverfront. Slaves trafficked along the Mississippi River were contained in pens. Public auctions proceeded regularly from the steps of the city courthouse, signaling the slave's status as property in the court of law and civil society. These performances of racial subjection positioned the captive as "the ground that [made] possible the existence of the bourgeois subject" and the brutalized guarantor of "liberty, citizenship, and the enclosures of the social body."[94] In other words, the plunder and expropriation of Native geographies and Black bodies provided the conditions of possibility for modern white life in the region. These racial regimes and property relations formed the "installed base"[95] of railway development in St. Louis and stimulated violent longings for a nationalist, white supremacy in the western territories.

"As a symbol of Manifest Destiny and of the nation's unity, ingenuity, and vastness," notes cultural theorist Julia H. Lee, "the train exemplifies US exceptionalism." Lee writes further that, "[as] an instrument for dislocating Native populations and 'opening' the West, the Pacific, and Asia to Anglo-American settlement or trade, the train carries (and carries out) the nation's settler and imperial ambitions."[96] The incorporators of the NMRR espoused settler, imperial, and, I would add, *planter* ambitions in their appeal to the state governing body. Conquest and slavery loomed large in their imaginations of the railroad and western frontier. Their request to relocate the southern terminus of the line to St. Louis proved persuasive, and the legislative assembly

[94] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 62.
[95] Star, "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," 382.
[96] Julia H. Lee, *The Racial Railroad* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 2.

consented. The lawmakers amended the charter, specifically adding that

> said company shall also have full power to survey, mark out, locate, construct and continues said railroad from the city of St. Charles to any point in the city of St. Louis; and for that purpose may hold a strip of land not exceeding one hundred feet in width, with as many sets of tracks as the said president and directors may deem necessary; and said company are authorized to extend said width in all cases where it shall be necessary in passing hills or valleys, and where it may be necessary for turnouts, embankments, or excavations, and hold a sufficient width for the preservation of their road; and may also hold sufficient land for the erection and maintenance of depots, landing places, or wharves, engine houses, offices, machine shops, warehouses, and wood and water stations; and the said company may also construct lateral or branch railroads to any points.[97]

This change shifted the scale of the railroad from a state infrastructure project to one that had national implications. Given this, the memorialists were also successful in querying the state government for a grant of two million dollars (approximately $81 million today) in aid to support construction of the line.[98]

With state-sanctioned authority and funding to locate and construct a railroad between St. Louis and St. Charles, the eventual directors, engineers, and superintendents of the road would command substantial power to shape the geography and financial value of land across St. Louis city and the county. The directors of the NMRR company claimed authority to seize and augment the natural landscape, build edifices, and create new arteries of travel in the region's existing transit network. On June 11, 1853, an election was held to select thirteen members to comprise the Board of Directors for the NMRR. Colonel John O'Fallon was named the company's first President. O'Fallon, the nephew and adoptee of William Clark, was a renowned railroad magnate, U.S. military veteran, and "likely the wealthiest man and largest slaveholder"[99] at the time of his election. He earned his fortune "through the machinations of white settler colonialism, first by supplying colonial expeditions hastened in large part by his uncle, William Clark, and later through investments in enslavement, land, banking, and railroads which built on these networks."[100] O'Fallon's selection as the NMRR's inaugural president further demonstrates the railroad's intersection with Indigenous dispossession and racial slavery. W. W. Morris was named the railroad engineer. These men, with the help of the board, began the task of determining a fixed route of passage between St. Louis and the Iowa state boundary. For the purposes of construction, the full length of the line was schematized as three distinct but interrelated divisions. The First Division (most important for my purposes) was to run between St. Louis and St. Charles. The Second Division extended from St. Charles to a connecting point of the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad in Macon County, and the third from the Hannibal and St. Joseph Railroad northward toward Iowa.[101] Morris initiated surveys of three distinct routes—delineated the "Direct," "Middle," and "Ridge" respectively —to be considered. This initial set of directors were mired in

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[97] North Missouri Railroad Company, *Charter and Acts Relating to the North Missouri Railroad Company: Together with the By-Laws of the Corporation, and the Rules of the Board of Directors*, (G. Knapp, 1865), 14.

[98] "An Act to Expedite the Construction of the North Missouri Railroad" in North Missouri Railroad Company, *Charter and Acts Relating to the North Missouri Railroad Company: Together with the By-Laws of the Corporation, and the Rules of the Board of Directors*, (G. Knapp, 1865), 8.

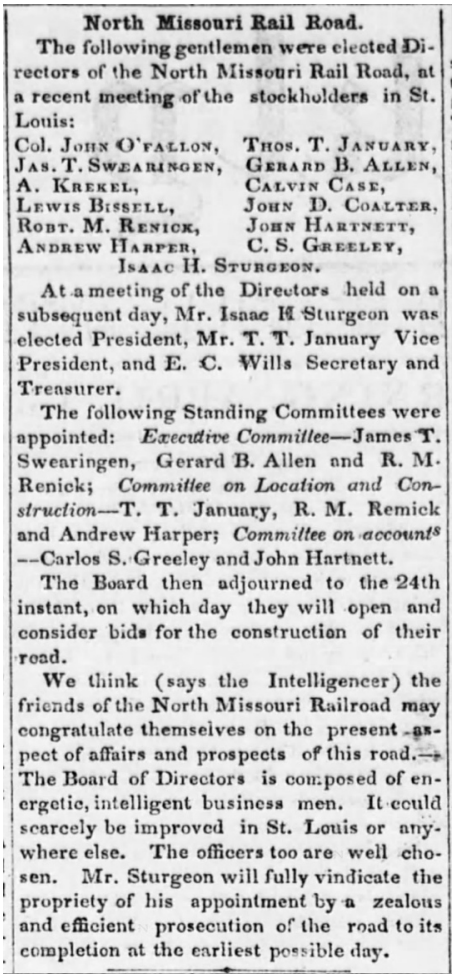
[99] Geoff Ward and Kelly Schmidt, "Remembering John O'Fallon," August 11, 2021, *The Wash U Slavery Project*, https://slavery.wustl.edu/news/remembering-john-ofallon.

[100] ibid.

[101] North Missouri Railroad Company, *Annual Report of the Board of Directors to the Stockholders of the North Missouri Railroad* (1855).

debate and disagreement about which route was best. Ultimately, the thirteen men were unable to agree on a desired route and failed to hire contractors to begin construction of the road. Another election took place on April 3, 1854. This election proved significant, because the selected representatives eventually issued the definitive vote on the railroad's route and furnished a contract for construction.

Right-of-Way in St. Louis City



North Missouri Rail Road.

The following gentlemen were elected Directors of the North Missouri Rail Road, at a recent meeting of the stockholders in St. Louis:

Col. John O'Fallon,	Thos. T. January,
Jas. T. Swearingen,	Gerard B. Allen,
A. Krekel,	Calvin Case,
Lewis Bissell,	John D. Coalter,
Robt. M. Renick,	John Hartnett,
Andrew Harper,	C. S. Greeley,

Isaac H. Sturgeon.

At a meeting of the Directors held on a subsequent day, Mr. Isaac H. Sturgeon was elected President, Mr. T. T. January Vice President, and E. C. Wills Secretary and Treasurer.

The following Standing Committees were appointed: *Executive Committee*—James T. Swearingen, Gerard B. Allen and R. M. Renick; *Committee on Location and Construction*—T. T. January, R. M. Remick and Andrew Harper; *Committee on accounts*—Carlos S. Greeley and John Hartnett.

The Board then adjourned to the 24th instant, on which day they will open and consider bids for the construction of their road.

We think (says the Intelligencer) the friends of the North Missouri Railroad may congratulate themselves on the present aspect of affairs and prospects of this road.—The Board of Directors is composed of energetic, intelligent business men. It could scarcely be improved in St. Louis or anywhere else. The officers too are well chosen. Mr. Sturgeon will fully vindicate the propriety of his appointment by a zealous and efficient prosecution of the road to its completion at the earliest possible day.

Figure 10. Newspaper announcement of elected members to the Board of the North Missouri Railroad Company. Glasgow Weekly Times, April 13, 1854. (Newspapers.com)

A collection of revered businessmen throughout St. Louis and broader Missouri joined the board. Of the thirteen men elected, at least six were slaveholders. Three commanded farms with greater than twenty captives. Slaveholding, however, was not limited to the upper echelon of the industrial elite. William Truesdail, one of the contractors for the NMRR line, enslaved a 30-year-old Black man.[102] Even without explicit evidence that enslaved labor was used in the railroad's construction (e.g., grading, masonry, bridging, superstructure, etc.), it is apparent that slave

[102] "Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants in District 82 in the County of St. Louis State of Missouri" 1850 and 1860 United States Slave Schedules, digitized by Missouri Secretary of State.

ownership was common among the road's many stakeholders—its directors, contractors, stockholders and subscribers. William G. Thomas's timely assertions about the profit-hungry men who directed southern railroads also apply to those elected to govern the NMRR: "Railroad directors and officers also personally held slaves. They pursued new technological opportunities of railroading from within their position in the slaveholding elite."[103] Colonel O'Fallon, perhaps the most representative of this class, was reelected President but staunchly refused the post. The members conceded and selected Missouri politician Isaac H. Sturgeon to serve in his place.[104] Thomas T. January, the key historical figure in this chapter, was named Vice President of the Company. Owing to his experience as a contractor on the first railroad built in Illinois, he was also tapped to serve alongside aristocrats Robert M. Renick and Andrew Harper on the *Committee on Location and Construction*. Altogether, these men moved with expediency to make progress on the line's development.

The first order of business was to determine the railroad's route between St. Louis and St. Charles and to procure the necessary rights-of-way and deeds for the lands the road would travel through. The directors decided to start with securing the originating terminus in St. Louis. On June 16th, 1854, the St. Louis City Board of Aldermen unanimously passed an ordinance (No. 3,178.) to grant the NMRR right-of-way to lay two tracks "from North Market Street, northwardly to the northern limits of the city, using any part of their depot grounds embraced in block two hundred and ninety-eight." The aldermen authorized the NMRR to "erect depot buildings, offices, and such other buildings as may be needful on said depot grounds for the interests and convenience of said company." The governing body charged the railroad company with planning, paving, and maintaining the streets leading up to the rail crossing and depot grounds. [105] This municipal grant afforded the rail company considerable power to alter the character of the land and demonstrated how rail development intersected with other forms of transit (e.g., streets). The train as a modern object garnered widespread support from the municipal government and settler populace. This material and cultural investment imbued railway systems like the NMRR with a power to annihilate the natural landscape. Thus, the legal instrument and pretense of right-of-way, I contend, captured imperial-settler desires and Native plunder as a forms of primitive accumulation that catalyzed the possibility of modern infrastructural development. In fact, this relationship would become undeniably clear in 1869, when the last remnants of one large mound was destroyed and used as fill for the NMRR. Native conquest and dispossession were the vestibules to white modern mobilities.

[103] William G. Thomas III, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 24.

[104] For more on this election, see "North Missouri Railway," *The American Railway Times*, April 27, 1854.

[105] For more on the right-of-way ordinance, see "City Ordinances," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, July 3, 1854, digitized by Newspapers.com; Also, see "St. Louis Board of Aldermen Meeting Minutes, 1854-1855, pages 41-80," Missouri State Archives, Film Number: C12788, 46.



Figure 11. Big Mound during Destruction. The last of the Big Mound. The remaining earthen material of the mound was used as fill dirt for the North Missouri Railroad. Daguerreotype by Thomas Easterly, 1869. (Missouri Historical Society)

Right-of-Way on January Farm: Thomas January, Slavery, and the North Missouri Railroad Route

The path the NMRR would take beyond St. Louis city and into the county was a matter of great controversy. January used his positional authority to influence the railroad's route between St. Louis and St. Charles. Amid clashes and conflicts personal interests and variable interpretations of which routes were in accordance with the charter, January, nonetheless, proved to be a forceful and insistent voice in these conversations, sometimes to the distaste of his peers.

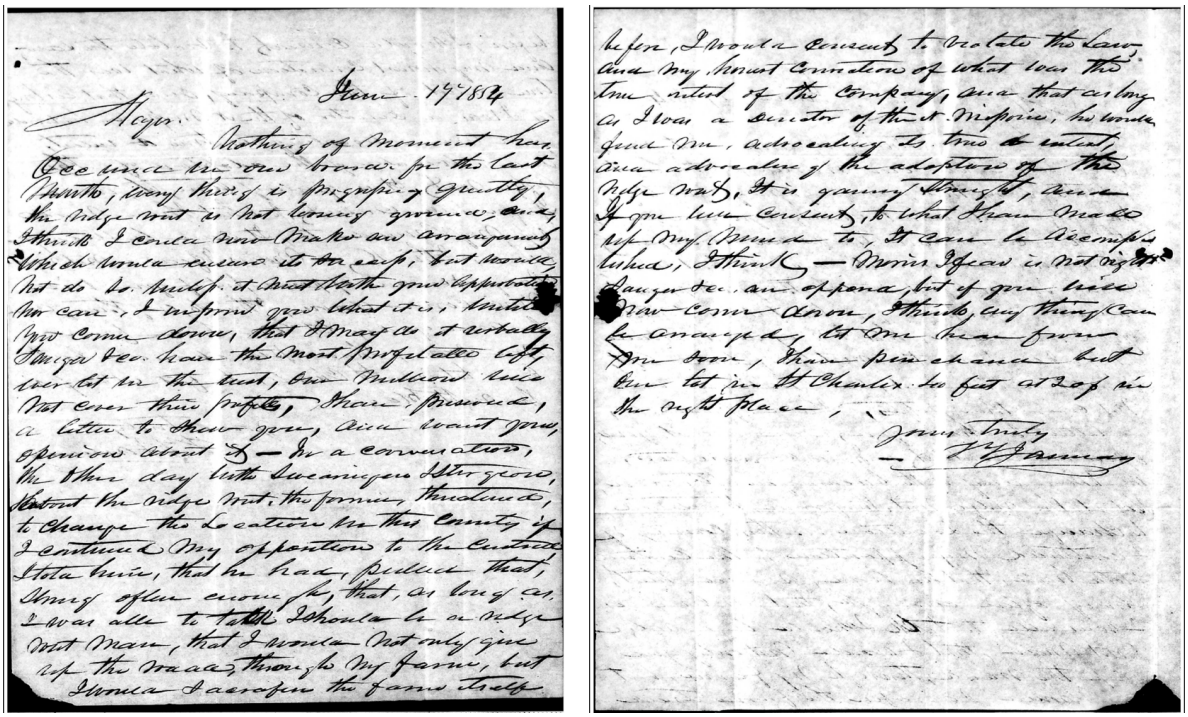


Figure 12. Letter of correspondence penned by Thomas T. January to James S. Rollins discussing the North Missouri Railroad route. June 17, 1854. (The State Historical Society of Missouri)

In one letter of correspondence on June 17, 1854 to James S. Rollins, a prominent Missourian Whig Party politician and early incorporator of the NMRR, January penned:

> In a conversation the other day with [James T.] Swearingen and [Isaac H.] Sturgeon about the ridge route, the former, threatened, to change the location in [St. Louis County] if I continued my opposition to the central [route]. I told him, that he had pulled that string often enough, that as long as I was able to talk I should be a ridge route man, that I would not only give up the road through my farm, but I would sacrifice the farm itself before I would consent to violate the law and my honest connotation of what was the true interest of the Company, and that as long as I was a Director of the N. Missouri, he would find me advocating its true interest and advocating the adoption of the ridge route.[106]

This letter exemplifies January's insistent advocacy for the adoption of the "Ridge" route and supports the claim that he was a formidable actor in locating the road's path. Through allusion, the correspondence also suggests the presence of a predetermined agreement to have the NMRR pass through January's coveted farm in the First Division between St. Louis and St. Charles. Director Swearingen, a proponent of the "Central" route, threatened to campaign against this course through January's property in an attempt to quell the Kentuckian's persistent opposition. In response, January emphatically declared that he "would not only give up the road through [his] farm, but [he] would sacrifice the farm itself" before lending support to the "Central" route, which he believed was in violation of the company charter. Ultimately, January prevailed. The "Ridge" route was formally adopted by the Board of Directors and a contract was made with contractors Sanger,

[106] Thomas T. January to James S. Rollins, June 17, 1854, State Historical Society of Missouri Archives, *James S. Rollins Papers* (Folder 22)

Stewart, and Truesdail for construction in May 1854.[107]

The important matter here, however, is the substance of January's arrangement with the NMRR Board of Directors. It suggests that January exercised some form of influence over the location and granted the NMRR right-of-way to a portion of his property.[108] An 1855 Engineer's Report addressed to the President and Directors of the NMRR described part of the First Division's route as follows:

> Starting from a point in the centre of Second street, where it is intersected by North Market street, the line runs with a level grade through the centre of Second Street, for about 1 1/5 miles; thence, curving to the left, it crosses Main, at the corner of Ferry street, and enters Second street in Lowell; thence, keeping in the centre of Second street, for a distance of about half a mile, being in all about 2⅜ miles from point of beginning, it bears north-westerly, crossing the Bellefontaine road near the Roman Catholic Cemetery, and ascends Herbert's creek with a grade of 44 feet per mile, for a distance of about four miles; thence, keeping on the same general course, it falls into the valley of the Maline creek, at a distance of nine miles from point of commencement, with a grade of 45 feet per mile for 1½ miles; thence, ascends with a grade of 43 feet per mile, for 1 7/10 miles, to *Thomas T. January's house*. (emphasis added)[109]

This description confirmed the physical relationship between the NMRR and January Farm. Just as indigenous dispossession undergirded grants of right-of-way in St. Louis, January's merciless exploitation of slave labor underwrote the NMRR's right-of-way to January Farm. This agreement was not only favorable for January. As specified earlier, the NMRR's use of January Farm was crucial to the development of the Ferguson depot and the eventual city that became its namesake. Before exploring this connection, I will historicize the greater than 1,000-acre slave-managed farm that supported Ferguson Station and the NMRR itself.

Thomas Thruston January was a Kentucky-born farmer, horse breeder, grocer, and railroad executive. Born in 1809 to a modest slaveholding family, chattel slavery was an early fact of his life. At the time of his birth, January's parents held 26 bondspeople, some of whom had been passed down, along with landed property, from his maternal grandfather, Colonel John Thruston. Thus, the peculiar institution was a normative component of quotidian life for January and his predecessors. January would uphold and carry this tradition with him. As a young man, January followed the mercantile interests of his father, entering the merchandising and grocery industries in Cynthiana, Kentucky and Jacksonville, Illinois respectively. Thereafter, he removed to Morgan County, Illinois and, in 1837, began work as a contractor for the "Meredosia & Springfield Railroad—the first railroad built in the state of Illinois."[110]

After the completion of the Illinois railroad, January relocated to Missouri. Though it remains unclear exactly when his move took place, by 1840, January was among the growing population of native southerners who migrated westward. During the antebellum period, slaveholding emigrants from Upper South states such as Tennessee, Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky viewed the American West as a place of entrepreneurial possibility and financial promise. As historian

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[107] North Missouri Railroad Company, *Annual Report of the Board of Directors to the Stockholders of the North Missouri Railroad* (1855)

[108] *Ferguson: A City and Its People*, 113.

[109] North Missouri Railroad Company, *Annual Report of the Board of Directors to the Stockholders of the North Missouri Railroad* (1855), 13.

[110] *The United States biographical dictionary and portrait gallery of eminent and self-made men: Missouri volume, Part 2* (United States Biographical Publishing Company, 1878), 371-372.

Kristen Epps notes:

> Slaveholders' westward migration, like that of their nonslaveholding Southern and Northern counterparts, was motivated in large part by their desire for greater economic opportunities and upward mobility, two concepts that went hand in hand with the availability of cheap, fertile land out west. Slaveholders in the early nineteenth century looked toward land that held the promise of a bountiful harvest, booming business, or other professional and personal accomplishment.[111]

January fixed his sights on St. Louis County, Missouri as the place to exercise his aspirations for superior agricultural and industrial achievement. Historian Diane Mutti Burke instructs that white migrants "hailing from the backcountry of the Upper South flocked to the Mississippi and Missouri River valleys hoping to better their economic and social conditions." In particular, she observes, "Missouri proved a haven for small slaveholders; nearly 90 percent owned ten or fewer slaves."[112] In the 1840 Census for the City of St. Louis, January was listed as the head of small household with several Black captives. Two years earlier, an autographed document signed outlined the terms of his purchase of an expansive 300.4 acre farm in St. Louis County, along with 370 adjoining acres. 100 additional acres lying five miles west of the farm and 17 acres "on the Mississippi River" were also included, altogether totaling 787.4 acres of rich farmland. January furnished this contract with the property owner Henry Clay, Sr., the notorious Kentucky planter, statesmen, and architect of the Missouri Compromise. January agreed to pay $17,590 to Clay for the property. Payments were split into three installments of $5,983 (roughly $200,934 today), paid annually on March 1,1839, March 1, 1840, and March 1, 1841. Joseph Stettinius, a business partner of January's, notarized the document.

[111] Kristen Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery: The Kansas-Missouri Border in the Antebellum and Civil War Eras*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 14.

[112] Dianne Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 9.

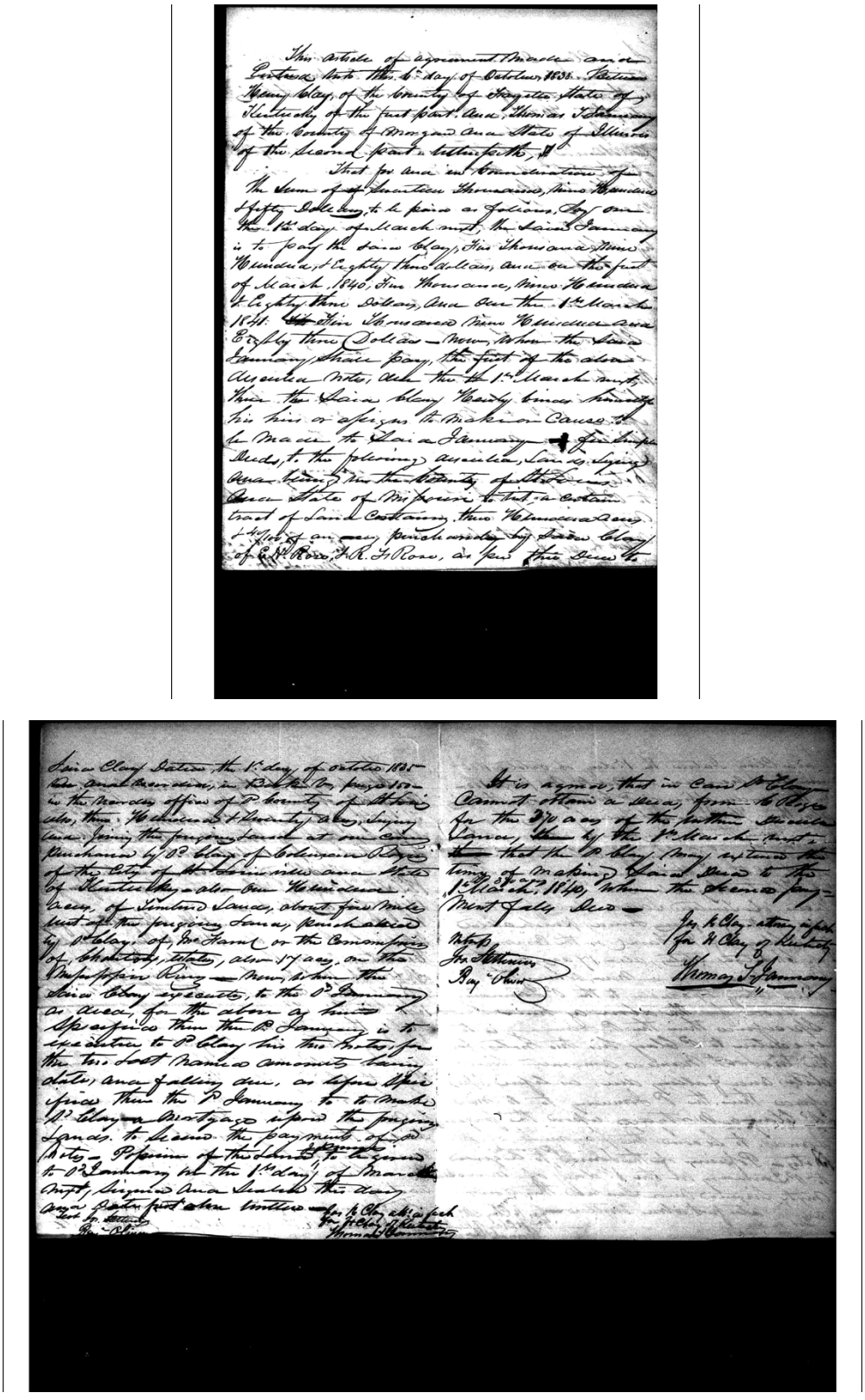


Figure 13. Article of agreement between Thomas T. January and Henry Clay, outlining January's intent to purchase several tracts of farmland in St. Louis County from Clay for a sum of $17,590. October 6, 1838. (Library of Congress)

This purchase represented the genesis of January Farm, and the transaction made January one of the largest owners of real estate in St. Louis County. His land holdings spanned and exceeded the current, northwestern region of Ferguson. His property also encompassed significant portions of present-day Kinloch, which would become Missouri's first all-Black town, and Berkeley, the town established by white citizens who fled Kinloch. On a section of this vast acreage, January established his famed farm and mansion sometime in the early 1840s. January aimed for his farm to be a systematized and profitable agricultural enterprise, and he controlled the requisite human and landed capital to achieve it.

On November 10, 1841, January filed a memorandum of contract to form a business partnership with George Smizer of Monroe County, Missouri. The collaborative venture was established "for the purpose of cultivating the farm now owned by said January, the same bought by him of Henry Clay of Kentucky." The contract stated that the co-partnership between January and Smizer would commence on March 1, 1844 and terminate on March 1, 1852. The agreement installed Smizer as "Chief Manager" of January Farm and granted him authority

> to farm and do business as he may deem most profitable with the advice of said January, and preparing the farm for joint operation, allowing [Smizer] to invest all of the profits of said farm in improvements. […] The term of copartnership [is] to give him control of Farm Negroes and stock upon the following terms, first to value such stock as may be necessary for the successful prosecution of said Farming business, waggons, farming utensils, and to give him the use of the following named slaves for said term. Gabriel, Daniel, Joseph, Allen, Abraham, Emily and Matilda.[113]

The contract also held that, "in case of death, sale or loss of either of said slaves," January would "replace with others as good." It delineated further that

> said Smizer is not to share any loss by death, escape, or sale of any of the within mentioned slaves, nor is he entitled to any of the profits growing out of the increase, nor is Smizer to pay any portions of the Doctor's Bill for attendance to the females in giving birth to children or for medical attendance to the negro children.[114]

Whereas small-scale slaveholding "required less infrastructure" and seldom involved "[o]verseers, detailed schedules, and complicated management techniques,"[115] the joint operation pursued by January mobilized these strategies and followed the blueprint set by southern planters. The contract's declaration of assurances and liabilities in the event of slave loss echoed prevailing notions of slave fungibility that underwrote commercial slavery in the Deep South.[116] The specification of rights and entitlements to "the profits growing out of the increase" evoked the particular violability of female captives on southern plantations and reiterated the brutal "connections between race and forced labor."[117] Furthermore, January's grant to Smizer of a nonpossessory right to use and "control of Farm Negroes" for the purposes of producing

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[113] Memorandum of Contract between Thomas T. January and George Smizer, November 10, 1841, State Historical Society of Missouri Archives, *J. Machir Papers*, Legal Documents, 1830-1860 (Folder 2)

[114] ibid.

[115] Epps, *Slavery on the Periphery*, 16.

[116] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

[117] Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World* Slavery, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 13. For more on the particular condition of female slaves, see also Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Revised edition (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999).

commodities and yielding profit mirrored the rights-of-way extended to railroad companies by city governments and private landowners. Right-of-way, in fact, clarified the distinctions between human subjects and property. The slave subject, to paraphrase the late W. E. B. Du Bois, was legally constructed as more akin to real estate that could be accumulated, traversed, transgressed, and passed.

Over the next decade, January nearly quadrupled his human property, reporting 26 slaves in the 1850 federal slave schedule.[118] According to the same census record, his real estate was valued at $50,000 (approximately $2 million today), placing him among the wealthiest in the county. Furthermore, January lodged and employed an overseer and field laborer, which differentiated his plantation from most agricultural enterprises in Missouri. While the scale and character of slavery tended to be smaller and more domestic on Missouri farms compared to the large-scale operations of the South, January not only became one of the largest holders of slave and landed property in the region. He emerged as one of the few Missouri slaveholders to "[acquire] the trappings of planter gentility."[119]

January Farm and Ferguson Station

With slaves bolstering the productivity of his agricultural operation and the modern pleasures explored in his mansion, it would not have been beyond the realm of possibility for January to compel slave labor in the procurement of resources for Ferguson Station. In addition to bisecting January's property, the rail's route traveled through the land of William B. Ferguson. On September 11, 1854, Ferguson sold the railroad a portion of his land for $200 for the purpose of laying track. The deed outlined the technical specifications of the rails (e.g., their width on the left, center, and right tracks; their directions, their points of commencement and termination) and named neighboring property owners. NMRR Directors Thomas T. January and John Hartnett were mentioned as controllers of adjoining tracts that bordered Ferguson's estate. The deed referred to "January Station" and "Hartnett Station," indicating that the two executives had some form of railroad infrastructure on their properties. Less than a year later, in July 1855, Ferguson deeded two additional parcels of land to the NMRR, 1.87 acres and 8.13 acres respectively. In return, he accepted $1.00 and charged the company to establish a train depot on the land. Ferguson stipulated that stop be called "Ferguson Station."[120]

As mentioned previously, January provided water from a lake on his estate to the Ferguson depot. This relationship—between January Farm and Ferguson Station—is of particular interest because it represents one area where enslaved labor on the plantation directly influenced the operability of the railroad. In *Ferguson: A City and Its People*, the Ferguson Historical Society provides the following:

> Within a short time, the railroad contracted to use and enlarge the lake that had been *built* east of the January home. An underground pipe was laid from the pond to the watertank on the west side of the tracks, and as late as 1883, the railroad company had a perpetual license to flood seven acres of the

[118] "Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants in District 82 in the County of St. Louis State of Missouri" 1850 United States Slave Schedules, digitized by Missouri Secretary of State.

[119] Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 9.

[120] Railroad Deed between William B. Ferguson and the North Missouri Railroad, September 11, 1854, St. Louis City Recorder of Deeds, Book 154, p. 456-457; Railroad Deed between William B. Ferguson and the North Missouri Railroad, July 7, 1855, St. Louis City Recorder of Deeds, Book 164, p. 201-202.

January property. (emphasis added)[121]

Key to this passage is the claim that the lake on January Farm was, in fact, constructed. It begs the interrelated question: *who built the lake on January Farm?* In one oral-historical account of the estate, Horace Wagner, a white citizen of early Ferguson, shared his thoughts on this aspect of the lake with Edward R. Schmidt. Schmidt served as the editor of a series titled "Ferguson…As I Knew It," printed in the quarterly publication of the Florissant Valley History Society. Wagner's reflection, relayed by Schmidt, was recorded in the issue as follows:

> Horace Wagner, an old old friend, now a rancher in Reliance, South Dakota, in reply to a letter inquiring his own recollections of the January House, agrees in the main and adds a few. He states that Charley Prentiss who was mentioned in the 1969 April Issue, Volume II, Number 1, page 8, of this Quarterly as long-time janitor of the four room school on Clark Avenue now the Central School, as a young man had been a January slave. [Wagner] states that he remembers the beautiful view to the south, to the west, to the north, and to the east, the lake where we swam in the summer and skated in the winter - *the lake had been built by slave labor and contained several very cold springs.* Later it was enlarged by the Wabash Railroad to furnish water for the big tank next to the tracks at the Station in Ferguson. (emphasis added)[122]

While no evidence to substantiate or disprove Wagner's claim has been located, his assertion is not unreasonable. In fact, if January used the labor power of his slaves to support his railway interests and the development of water resources, he would have followed a lucrative precedent set by his Southern counterparts.[123] "Southern canals" and other kinds of human-made waterways, writes historian Ryan Derringer, "relied almost exclusively on slave labor."[124] Furthermore, the geographic specificity of Missouri meant that slaves performed a variety of tasks on farms, often spanning combinations of agricultural, domestic, and industrial labors. As Burke reminds, enslaved Missourians were "instrumental in literally building Missouri's towns and farms, in the process adding to the wealth of their owners."[125]

Despite the present unknowability of Wagner's claim,[126] perhaps, in partnership with George Smizer, January employed field hands to fashion the natural springs on his property into a substantive body of water that would support both farming and railroad business. The size of January Farm, especially considering the presence of dozens of livestock and thoroughbred horses, doubtless required ample amounts of water to be sustainable. What does remain undeniable is the fact that January possessed a legal and social right to marshal the labor of his slaves toward any use he deemed worthy. January held an absolute property interest and exercised a right-of-way to

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[121] Smith, *Ferguson: A City and Its People*, 113.

[122] E.R. Schmidt, "Ferguson…As I Knew It." *Florissant Valley Historical Society Quarterly* (n.d.)

[123] For more, see Thomas III, *The Iron Way.*

[124] Ryan Dearinger, *The Filth of Progress: Immigrants, Americans, and the Building of Canals and Railroads in the West* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 3.

[125] Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 51.

[126] There is an extensive body of literature that problematizes the preponderant gaps and silences in the archive of slavery. These absences and inconsistencies are material representations of relations of power, as well as the abject and fungible status imposed onto bondspeople. A key intervention of this scholarship is the use of rigorously informed speculation to fashion historical accounts, even with scant and graphic archival records. While an array of scholars have contributed to this methodological practice, I rely heavily on the work of two authors. See Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008) and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995).

the enslaved body. Wagner's declaration underscores a point made by cultural historian and folklorist Patricia Turner that rumor, beyond the question of its validity, is exceptionally useful insofar as it elucidates hierarchical relations of power.[127] Thus, Wagner's contention that the lake at the center of Ferguson's railroad industry was made possible by slave labor is less about its empirical certainty (which, I reiterate, is not the least beyond reason). Instead, it is more about the wider historical context, racial scripts, and social mores it exemplifies and makes visible.

The (Black) Pain and (White) Pleasure of Modern Mobility

On August 24, 1855, engineer and superintendent W. W. Morris placed an advertisement in *The Missouri Daily Republican* to announce the schedule for the recently opened NMRR line. According to the notice, passenger and freight trains would run daily between St. Louis and the Ferry landing opposite St. Charles, with "[stops] at the intermediate stations." Upon arrival at the northern terminus at Ferry Landing, inbound travelers would be connected to ferry boats, which ran in sync with the trains, to complete their journey into St. Charles.

As the new trains of the NMRR opened for service, the geographic and mercantile possibilities for many in St. Louis County widened almost overnight. Personal movement did not simply become easier and more widely practiced. Cultural understandings of travel and mobility, shaped by prevailing transport technologies (e.g. stagecoach), were radically upended by the rail. As Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes in his canonical text *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth* Century, the railroad introduced altogether new epistemologies of movement, space, time, and embodiment. Train travelers experienced movement at velocities, heretofore, unprecedented and rapidly traversed great lengths in enclosed compartments that alienated them from the natural landscape. Spaces once isolated by physical distance were brought into geographic relation and cultural proximity through the infrastructural technology of the railroad. Schivelbusch writes:

> "The notion that the railroad annihilated space and time was not related to that expansion of space that resulted from the incorporation of new spaces into the transport network. What was experienced as being annihilated was the traditional space-time continuum which characterized the old transport technology. Organically embedded in nature as it was, that technology, in its mimetic relationship to the space traversed, permitted the traveler to perceive that space as a living entity."[128]

In other words, the train, insofar as it supplanted the spatial relations established by previous modes of transport, facilitated new ways of seeing and being that led to new assessments of space. White passengers on the NMRR enjoyed these novel conveniences, spectacles of mastery over the landscape, augmented perceptions, and embodied sensations. These experiences increasingly came to define modern life and personhood in the mid-nineteenth century. Thomas states that "[t]o be modern in the nineteenth century was a way of thinking and acting in the world. Modernity, above all, was a lived experience shaped by its creators in their local surroundings."[129] The emergence of the railway network precipitated the consolidation of a new kind of spatial, temporal, and technical knowledge, which people interpreted and evaluated in concert with other forms of knowing,

[127] Patricia Turner, *I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African American Culture* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1993).

[128] Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey*, 36.

[129] Thomas III, *The Iron Way*, 24.

reading, and seeing. The railroad, Thomas suggests, encompassed many "interfaces," and "slowly alter[ed] how people saw themselves, their futures, and their opportunities."[130]

In Thomas T. January's case, the proliferation of railroads was just another confirmation that iron was "the exemplary material of the nineteenth century."[131] Iron already rested at the center of his world, and he leveraged its properties toward intemperate and clandestine uses. While he campaigned for the laying of iron rails across the slave-populated farms of northern Missouri, he subjected the bondswomen and men he owned to iron instruments of torture and bondage. Thus, the color line in early Ferguson was as entrenched and hard as the metal tracks that brought the modest city into being. White farmers, slaveholding aristocrats, businessmen, and industrialists across St. Louis County all affirmed their liberal subjecthood through rail travel and modern mobility. Black personhood, in contrast, was spatialized and profoundly defined by antebellum "architectures of confinement."[132] Tracing this dialectic, Thomas remarks: "Those who controlled their own bodies, their movements, and their geographic surroundings experienced what they thought was modern. Those who did not or who had their movements curtailed and restricted were placed outside of the modern world."[133]

Many white citizens with social, cultural, and economic capital pursued, tested out, and experimented with these new understandings of themselves at January Mansion on his modern farm. As recounted in the opening section of this chapter, January's home was a cornerstone of nineteenth-century nobility in St. Louis County. Guests of the January Mansion, some of whom might have traveled to the property by rail, enjoyed lavish parties and musical performances, participated in games, ate extravagant meals prepared by slaves, and watched live horse races. Simply put, the entire estate was an antebellum locus of racialized enjoyment and pleasure. With its physical connection to NMRR line and subterranean links to Ferguson Station, the farmstead singlehandedly supported modern mobility for white citizens and radically expanded the practice and geography of white leisure. By contrast and against the legal backdrop of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, captives, whose labor for and racial deference to every white attendee anchored January's farm and mansion, likely found themselves spatially confined across a variety of scales. This paradox—between the modern expansion of white spatial sovereignty and the cruel confinement of Black space—characterized the advent of railway infrastructure. As white rail travelers praised and embodied the locomotive's compression of time and dominion over Indigenous space, Black subjects experienced a compression of opportunities for flight and fugitive escape. In all, the railroad enshrined rights-of-way for white Americans across class and creed. Along these new infrastructures, white citizens pursued the ambient novelties of self-possession, spatial sovereignty, and technically-mediated leisure that increasingly defined modern subjectivity. They also witnessed how earthen property was augmented, controlled, and dominated. The force relations between the railroad and landed property performed a mimesis of the force relations between white citizens and slave property. The proliferation of white social and geographic mobilities inaugurated by rail traffic was expressly defined against matrices of confinement, involuntary dispersal, and unfreedom that marked Black life, enslaved and free.

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[130] ibid., 9-10.
[131] Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," 338.
[132] Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*, 1.
[133] Thomas III, *The Iron Way*, 9.

Ferguson, January Farm, and An All-Black Town

The hard legacies of right-of-way, secured through racial subjugation, infrastructural violence, and spatial enclosure, subsisted in Ferguson after legislative emancipation and extended into the widespread practices of segregation that governed the suburb's spatial organization for much of the twentieth century. Though the state of Missouri never formally passed statutes pertaining to the segregation of public accommodations, the separation of the races was enforced locally through custom and informal social codes. Ferguson, incorporated in 1894, just two years before the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, constrained African American presence and crystallized itself as a virtually all-white suburb. As Black migrants moved to the St. Louis metropolitan region to escape antiblack violence in the U.S. South during and after World War I, racial homogeneity and spatial exclusivity became cultural imperatives among whites in Ferguson and wider St. Louis County. This was exemplified most prominently by the passage of a 1916 racial segregation ordinance in the city of St. Louis, the first of its kind in the nation. "The ordinance," writes Walter Johnson, "was sponsored by a long list of real estate commercial interests and white neighborhood associations that came together as the Universal Welfare Association. It stipulated that no Blacks should move into neighborhoods where either 100 percent of the houses were owned by whites or 75 percent of the residents where white. The ordinance also banned whites from moving to neighborhoods with the opposite set of circumstances."[134] While the ordinance would be deemed unconstitutional after the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Buchanan v. Warley* the following year, its imprint on the geography of St. Louis County was preserved through the pervasive adoption of racially restrictive covenants amid growing fears of Black encroachment.

Racial anxieties about "Negro invasion" in Ferguson were heightened over the three-quarters of the twentieth century due to its proximity to the town of Kinloch Park, which adjoined the suburb at its western edge. Kinloch Park, interestingly, was formerly a part of January's extensive plantation. Yet, after changing ownership several times in postbellum period, the 334-acre tract was sold in 1889,[135] and the development of a segregated white subdivision began on the property several years later. John A. Wright, Sr. instructs that initially "Kinloch Park was developed in the 1890s as a commuter suburb for whites, though a small portion of land was reserved for blacks who came to work as servants."[136] He continues: "This early community boasted of having a golf and country club, an air field, and a horse racing track to serve its residents and visitors. Its developers also touted the fact that the area was served by both the Narrow Gauge Streetcar and the Wabash Railroad."[137] The mostly-white suburban community of Kinloch Park, situated at the nexus of multiple rail lines, flaunted similar characteristics to Ferguson. The two locales were connected, culturally and materially.

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[134] Johnson, *The Broken Heart of America*, 252.

[135] See "The Sale of Kinloch Confirmed," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 11, 1889, digitized by Newspapers.com. Because of its derivation from January Farm, it is likely that the private horse racing track patronized by Kinloch residents in the 1890s is a direct byproduct of the one constructed by January in the 1840s.

[136] John A. Wright, Sr., *Kinloch: Missouri's First All Black Town*, Illustrated edition (Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 9.

[137] ibid.

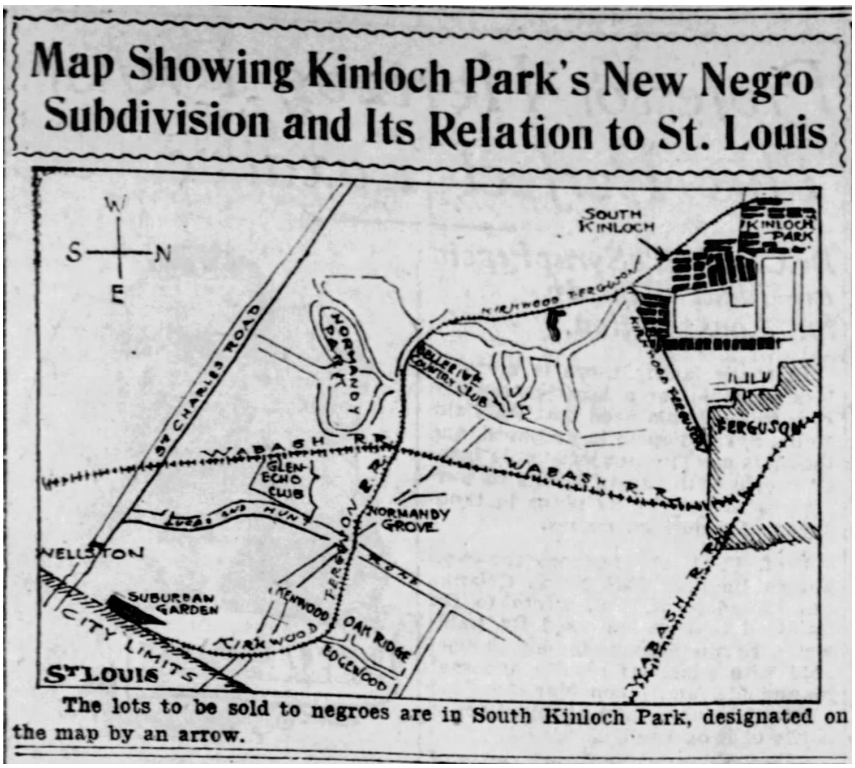


Figure 14. A 1917 printed map showing the location of the new South Kinloch Park Subdivision for Black residents. Ferguson is represented on the rightmost side. (St. Louis Post-Dispatch)

When a Black family, aided by a white friend, purchased a home beyond the section reserved for servants in the southern part of Kinloch Park, however, circumstances changed. Whites fled immediately north and drew stricter racial and spatial boundaries. Black residents were consequently relegated to "five or six blocks in the extreme southeast portion of the area, later to be called South Kinloch Park."[138] In 1917, South Kinloch Park was formally announced as a new subdivision specifically for African Americans by the Olive Street Terrace Realty Company. Due to the prevalent racial discrimination of banks, lots in South Kinloch Park were first sold to white investors and then resold at a profit to Black homebuyers at double the price. [139]

Over the next two decades, whites in Kinloch Park and Blacks in South Kinloch Park struggled intensely over race and the matter of segregated schooling. In 1937, the political battle culminated with the former incorporating as a new city ("Berkeley") and establishing a separate school district, both of which were strategically drawn with municipal boundaries that encircled South Kinloch Park. Wright, Sr. summarizes: "The newly-established community surrounded the black residents on three sides. On one side was a creek, another was a major thoroughfare, and the other a man-made barrier. The fourth side was bordered by Ferguson, Missouri. The black residents at that point were restricted from growth and confined to approximately one square mile, without a tax

[138] ibid.

[139] "Lots White Men Buy Doubled in Price to Negroes," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 24, 1917, digitized by Newspapers.com.

base."[140] As the former white residents of northern Kinloch Park reclassified themselves under the new municipality of Berkeley, South Kinloch Park simply became Kinloch. In 1948, Kinloch was incorporated as the first all-Black town in the state of Missouri.

Though Kinloch was decades removed from its historical ties to January Farm, the location seemed to abide by its plantation roots: it remained a site in which Black spatial sovereignty was acutely constrained and undermined to enrich white power, capital, and mobility. Ferguson, which now sat adjacent to the all-Black city, elongated this order by intensifying its strategies of geographic exclusion and working to control the physical movements of Kinloch's residents. In this effort, the remnants of rail and streetcar infrastructures that underlined the racial geographies of both Ferguson and Kinloch would reappear as powerful specters in struggles over the preeminent bedrock of suburban mobility: auto-oriented streets.

[140] Wright, Sr., *Kinloch: Missouri's First Black City*, 8.

Chapter Two: Street

In 1967, white fears about Black intrusion came to a head at Ferguson's western edge, particularly at its boundary with the neighboring all-Black town of Kinloch. City officials in Kinloch formally appealed to their counterparts in Ferguson for a decisive shift in the spatial relations governing the neighboring locales, namely a shift toward physical connection rather than segregation. The plea called into question entrenched hegemonies of race, space, and sedimented power at the core of Ferguson's suburban ethos. Specifically, leaders in Kinloch requested that Ferguson collaborate to remove an abandoned streetcar right-of-way and a pair of street barricades on Suburban Avenue, the major road connecting the municipalities. Suburban Avenue was one of only two streets directly linking the towns, but due to the deserted tract and street obstructions, it had been "intentionally unusable for decades."[141] The other connective street, Carson Road, though much smaller, permitted movement between Ferguson and Kinloch, albeit with conditions. "Until the mid-1960s," chronicles historian Richard Rothstein, "Ferguson was a 'sundown town' from which African Americans were banned after dark. Ferguson had blocked off [Suburban] from Kinloch with a chain and construction materials but kept [Carson] open during the day so housekeepers and nannies could get from Kinloch to jobs in Ferguson."[142] Black mobility was permissible insofar as it facilitated the enhancement of and modern luxuries afforded to white life.

The blight on Suburban Avenue, spanned one hundred yards across the Ferguson-Kinloch boundary, foreclosing through traffic and effectively restricting movement between the cities. In a 1967 article by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Alderman Leroy Davis of Kinloch remarked that the city wanted to clear the deserted section and "extend Suburban because it would give residents a more direct access to South Florissant boulevard [in Ferguson], where many Kinloch residents shop."[143] He continued on: "[Kinloch] residents now must detour north onto Mable avenue and then east [via Carson Road] to South Florissant."[144] The neglected plot, in other words, impeded Black residents' ability to access crucial retail services and distributed resources, which were largely concentrated on South Florissant Road in Ferguson. Black motorists from Kinloch were forced to use an alternate route (e.g., north on Mable, then east on Carson)into the white suburb to reach the shopping district. We might read this involuntary detour as merely an undignified inconvenience in the everyday lives of Kinloch residents. I contend, however, that the detour, bore exclusively by Blacks in Kinloch, existed as a material embodiment of their marginal position within a larger white suburban ecosystem. This lesser status imposed onto Black life is what Kinloch officials hoped to ameliorate with Ferguson's assistance.

Kinloch's city attorney, Edward T. Wright, explained that most of the overgrown tract "was owned by the Kinloch Land Clearance Authority[;]" however, "a small part on the eastern end belonged to Ferguson."[145] This, Wright declared, made it "necessary to get Ferguson's cooperation in building the extension of Suburban."[146] The vacant parcel, a discarded piece of transit property,

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[141] Jackie Dana, "The Kinloch Barricade," Substack newsletter, Unseen St. Louis (blog), March 3, 2022, https://unseenstlouis.substack.com/p/the-kinloch-barricade.

[142] Richard Rothstein, "The Making of Ferguson: Public Policies at the Root of Its Troubles," October 15, 2014, http://www.epi.org/publication/making-ferguson/, 3.

[143] "Ferguson Expected to Agree to Kinloch Extending Street," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 16, 1967, digitized by Newspapers.com

[144] ibid.

[145] ibid.

[146] ibid.

was a ghostly relic of the rail and streetcar networks that widened the personal mobilities of whites in Ferguson and Kinloch Park. Ferguson's ownership of a portion of this abandoned right-of-way was a vestige of an old streetcar franchise that operated between the city and St. Louis, with a stop in Kinloch. The line, known was the Kirkwood-Ferguson Line, commenced in 1900 and "became the longest in the entire metropolitan area." The streetcar "continued to operate until after World War II when it was replaced by bus service."[147] The legacies of this right-of-way demonstrated how geographic relations are often shaped by the past, namely historical patterns of property ownership. For my purposes, it showcases how the accretive character of infrastructural property—in this case, the layering of roadway and railway infrastructure where a residential street and a terminated streetcar line meet—produced haunting aggregations of white spatial hegemony across time. In other words, Ferguson's prevailing status as a commuter suburb, through which several key transit lines operated, meant that it now retained partial control of a defunct segment of streetcar property. This granted the municipality vital decision-making power over the right-of-way pertaining to Suburban Avenue, and thus, the mobility of Black residents in Kinloch. Rights-of-way, as defined in the previous chapter, appear again not only as a legal instrument to grant entities a nonpossessory property interest in land for the purposes of constructing or augmenting transportation infrastructure. Right-of-way coalesces here as a social prerogative seized, activated, and exploited by white municipalities and deputized subjects to regulate and preside over Black spatial sovereignty.

This point is further clarified by the fact that private residents of Ferguson took matters into their own hands to restrict movement on Suburban Avenue between Ferguson and Kinloch. While the abandoned right-of-way effected one mode of physical disconnection between the two cities, white homeowners along the Ferguson side of Suburban Avenue also placed two steel barriers at the western and eastern ends of the overgrown tract. The barriers were purportedly erected as "safety measures to prevent drivers from running into a ditch midway across the lot,"[148] but residents in Kinloch and many in Ferguson understood the barricades to be physical markers of racial segregation. The barriers literally obstructed Black residents' access to Suburban Avenue and the broader spatial affordances of suburban life.

Ferguson Mayor John G. Brawley, nonetheless, expressed that the city would likely agree to the extension the street on Suburban Avenue, as long as Kinloch assumed the full financial cost of construction. On Tuesday, August 22, 1967, the "Ferguson City Council voted 5 to 2 to discuss the extension of Suburban Avenue from Kinloch to Ferguson with Kinloch city officials."[149] The two opposing votes came from councilmen Carl V. Kersting and Leo T. Makarewicz, both representing the Third Ward in which the street extension plan was proposed. As reported by the *Post-Dispatch*, Kersting remarked that "their opposition was based on a belief that *opening Suburban would create a traffic hazard* and decrease the value of property in the area"[150] (emphasis added). There were a number of residents, Kersting stated further, that "purchased homes on Suburban just because it was a deadend street and expected not to be bothered by traffic."[151]

In the ensuing months, debates about the barricades and street extension continued. The

[147] Ferguson Historical Society, *Ferguson: A City Remembered* (Ferguson Historical Society, 1994), 14.
[148] ibid.
[149] "Ferguson Row Over Kinloch Street Plan," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 25, 1967, digitized by Newspapers.com.
[150] ibid.
[151] ibid.

controversy reached a flashpoint, however, in April 1968, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tribute marches in honor of the slain civil rights icon took place across St. Louis city and county on April 7, 1968.[152] One march, in particular, proceeded from the "all-Negro county community of Kinloch" and culminated at "the Zion Lutheran Church of Ferguson."[153] In addition to "honoring the memory of the Rev. Dr. King," this march provided a forum for Kinloch and Ferguson residents to deliberate the ethics and legality of the barriers on Suburban Avenue. Officers of the Ferguson Ministerial Alliance penned a petition and resolution urging the council to remove the barriers. "[The resolution] said: 'Although we realize that the barricade on Suburban at the city limit was *at first simply a safety factor*, the Ferguson Ministerial Alliance wishes to express its belief that the barrier now has become a symbol of racial separation and thus is spiritually and morally an offense'"[154] (emphasis added). Just two days later, the Ferguson City Council voted 5 to 2 in favor of removing the street barricades and "extend[ing] the pavement of Suburban all the way to the Kinloch boundary."[155] Third Ward councilmen Kersting and Andrew F. Thurmond (the successor of Makarewicz) cast the two dissenting votes. Kersting maintained that the barricades on Suburban Avenue were not about race but about maintaining property values and preserving the sanctity of a quiet and safe suburban environment. "The people on Suburban," he commented, "moved onto what they understood to be a deadend street. They do not want the rumbling of trucks and cars in front of their homes."[156]

Despite Ferguson's affirmative vote granting Kinloch permission to extend Suburban Avenue, a group of white residents organized as the Plaza Heights Neighborhood Association, led by Kersting, continuously pushed for the placement of barricades, fences, and walls at the Kinloch-Ferguson boundary. As late as 1976, eight years after the initial road barricades were removed, the city was considering proposals to erect a 10-feet high fence and a roadblock along Suburban Avenue. White Ferguson residents in the neighborhood equated the opening of through traffic between Kinloch and Ferguson with increases vulnerabilities to theft, vandalism, and other forms of crime. Ultimately, Ferguson nixed all proposals advocating for fences and barricades. Nevertheless, the persistent moral panics related to traffic and public safety raised by white residents, coupled with frequent and sensationalist news coverage, effectively framed the Black residents of Kinloch as problems to immobilized, contained, and segregated.

[152] "Thousands To March Here," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 7, 1968, digitized by Newspapers.com.
[153] ibid.
[154] "Ferguson to Remove Barrier," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 26, 1968, digitized by Newspapers.com.
[155] ibid.
[156] ibid.

Chapter Summary

This 1960s debate over the extension of Suburban Avenue in Ferguson evinced the persistence of what George Lipsitz calls the *white spatial imaginary*, where defensiveness, privatism, and segregation were endemic to the construction and maintenance of everyday suburban life. Lipsitz instructs that "[t]he white spatial imaginary idealizes 'pure' and homogenous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior."[157] The abandoned streetcar right-of-way and the barriers were leveraged as geographic technologies to curtail Black presence, stifle Black movement, and maintain white exclusivity and spatial order. Despite the mayor of Ferguson's own admission in 1967 that there was no legal basis to support the barricades, the obstructions had been able to persist for years because of prevailing fallacies about Black people that underlined the constitution of suburban towns throughout St. Louis County. Even after the blockades were removed and the unkempt lands were cleared in order to extend Suburban Avenue, the longevity of claims to replace them with fencing and other forms of enclosure showcased a pervasive animus toward Black life and a consistent recourse to strategies of geographic containment.

I open with this scenario because it exemplifies several key themes related to the central arguments of this chapter. First, it showcases how white anxieties about Black encroachment and demographic transition specifically materialized in changes to the built environment and the intensive regulation of suburban streets during the postwar period. This is crucial because part of what this chapter, titled "Street," aims to demonstrate is the durable relationship between (sub)urban roadway infrastructure and the discursive production and lived materiality of race. Suburban streets, I demonstrate, organized white civic, cultural, and commercial institutions into a coherent geographic formation, and therefore, represented key sites fundamental to the coherence of white suburban life and defense against increasing Black presence. Second, the debates surrounding the street barricades at the Ferguson-Kinloch border made visible a specific racialized discourse of traffic safety that not only shaped spatial struggles at points of municipal and racial convergence (e.g., borders, city lines) but impacted the entire organization of space within and between cities. This discourse manifested in the actions of municipal governments, private realty companies, and white homeowners that framed Black peoples' movements within the suburban landscape as traffic problems, which is to say an affront to the social mores of orderly and racially homogeneous space. This postwar suburban construction of Black mobility as traffic problem, with its adverse effects on Black spatial sovereignty, continued throughout the twentieth century and was ultimately refashioned in in the city's relentless policing and criminalization of Black drivers and pedestrians in the years leading up to Michael Brown Jr.'s death. My principal contention in the chapter suggests that because streets cohere as vital infrastructures of suburban whiteness, Black movements along these streets are discursively coded and narrated as risk, disorder, encroachment, threats to traffic and public safety. Accordingly, suburban roadway infrastructures become animated with urgent regulatory power—concealed under the auspices of municipal codes, zoning ordinances, property valuations, prescribed patterns of land use, and other modes of civic rationality—that is designed to curtail, criminalize, and extract from Black bodies in suburban space. Ultimately, I argue that these racialized understandings of infrastructure, geography, and mobility create a spatial environment in which Black life is always expected to *yield,* literally and figuratively, to infrastructural violence and municipal power.

[157] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 29.

Yield

Cornell University's Legal Information Institute explains that "[t]o yield is to give something up or surrender control, especially when required by law. For example, to stop in order to allow other vehicles or pedestrians to go past -- the right-of-way." Furthermore, "[t]o yield is also to bring forth a result, as when a search yields criminal evidence or [an] investment yields a profit."[158] Yield, said differently, connotes deference and surrender on one hand and the generation of a desired outcome or object of value on the other. In the context of street traffic, the dual meanings of yield enfold to describe complex relational processes between social actors, roadway infrastructure, and larger spatial systems in which they are embedded. When a motorist, for instance, stops along a road to cede (or surrender) movement precedence to other vehicles or pedestrians, he simultaneously produces a desired outcome (the avoidance of collision) and an object of value (ordered movement). Beginning in the early-twentieth century, yield became a crucial concept to manage the expansion of varying transit modalities on public highways and roads. With the specific proliferation of motorized vehicles and the gradual social and cultural power imputed to automobiles on urban streets, the concept of yield was a foundational element in managing contact and convergence between motorists and pedestrians in (sub)urban geographies. My theorization of yield attends to these new social, cultural, and technical mobilities while considering their inflection by imperatives to manage *racial* contact and convergence in the urban environment. Yield, in my usage then, also coheres as a meaningful framework to describe how Black mobilities, needs, and desires are stifled in yet fiscally and libidinally productive for dominant geographies and varied sites of hegemonic power.

Streets and White Suburban Ecosystems

As the white population made its postwar "transition from urban to suburban life,'" writes Massey and Denton, "whites demanded and got massive federal investments in highway construction that permitted rapid movement to and from central cities by car. The surging demand for automobiles accelerated economic growth and contributed to the emergence of a new, decentralized spatial order."[159] Most notably, The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 represented the federal government's affirmation of white suburban desires by financing expressway construction, which incentivized white and corporate movement out of congested city centers and further devastated the Black urban core.[160] With increases in privately-owned vehicles and federal aid for interstate projects, good roads became linchpins of new white suburban communities. The "properly gendered prosperous suburban home," hailed as "the privileged moral geography of the nation"[161] during the postwar period, coevolved with a growing transcontinental highway and roadway network that, in turn, produced new social and spatial formations. This was most evident in the design of new subdivisions outside central cities, which enabled the manufacture of homes with spacious lots and modern amenities such as garages and driveways. The value of these communities was further enhanced by their proximity to schools, cultural institutions, and state-

[158] Cornell University Legal Information Institute, "Yield," LII / Legal Information Institute, accessed May 3, 2024, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/yield.

[159] Massey and Denton, *American Apartheid*, 44.

[160] Joseph F. C. Dimento and Cliff Ellis, *Changing Lanes: Visions and Histories of Urban Freeways*, First Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012).

[161] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 13.

of-the-art regional shopping centers, all easily and conveniently accessible by motorized traffic.

Shopping centers, in particular, emerged as critical suburban nodes that grew to meet the needs of everyday family life. Made possible by the car and proficient streets, these spaces further transformed the consumptive habits of the postwar family and city design in the suburban context. U.S. historian Lizbeth Cohen states:

> As consumers became dependent on, virtually inseparable from, their cars, traffic congestion and parking problems discouraged commercial expansion in central business districts of cities and smaller market towns, already hindered by a short supply of developable space. Reaching out to suburbanites where they lived, merchandisers at first built stores along the new highways, in commercial "strips" that consumers could easily reach by car. By the mid-1950s, however, commercial developers-many of whom owned department stores-were constructing a new kind of marketplace, the regional shopping center aimed at satisfying suburbanites' consumption *and* community needs. Strategically located at highway intersections or along the busiest thoroughfares, the regional shopping center attracted patrons living within half an hour's drive, who could come by car, park in the abundant lots provided, and then proceed on foot (although there was usually some bus service as well). Here was the "new city" of the postwar era, a vision of how community space should be constructed in an economy and society built on mass consumption. Well-designed regional shopping centers would provide the ideal core for a settlement that grew by adding residential nodes off of major roadways rather than concentric rings from downtown, as in cities and earlier suburban communities.[162]

While Cohen does not mention race in her analysis, the political-economic and infrastructural developments she describes were fundamentally racial in their scope and effects. In North County suburbs such as Ferguson and Jennings, these spatial principles prevailed during the 1950s and became the literal vehicles through which whiteness was produced through suburban modes of community organization and consumption. Newly constructed homes and subdivisions were developed around regional shopping centers and distributed commercial districts. Arterial roads and interconnected highways grew in importance, as families progressively required efficient movement between domestic spaces, civic institutions, and community marketplaces. Streets and expressways, in other words, represented the life force of dynamic and multivalent suburban ecosystems. They organized (white) nuclear family homes, cultural establishments, and assemblies of retail stores into a coherent geographic unit.

[162] Lizabeth Cohen, “From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America,” The American Historical Review, Oct., 1996, Vol. 101, No. 4 (Oct., 1996), 1052-1053.



Figure 15. Image of Northland Shopping Center, located at West Florissant Avenue and Lucas-Hunt Road in Jennings. The photograph was taken in 1958. (Missouri Historical Society)

A closer look at a North County shopping center and its relationship to roadway infrastructure and suburban housing development might elucidate this point more concretely. In 1952, plans for a regional shopping center were announced in a news brief by the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. The mall, valued at ten million dollars, was set to be constructed "on a 62-acre tract at the northwest corner of West Florissant avenue and Lucas-Hunt road in Jennings."[163] The center would also serve residents in the nearby suburban communities of Ferguson and Dellwood. According to the *Post-Dispatch*, "[t]he development, to be known as the Northland shopping center, will provide approximately 1,000,000 square feet of floor space and parking facilities for more than 5000 automobiles."[164] The article continues further:

> The center is to be laid out so that all stores will front on a central mall and shoppers will not have to cross automobile traffic lanes in going from one store to another. The tract is eight and a half miles from downtown St. Louis and close to the proposed Mark Twain expressway [Interstate 70]. It has been

[163] "$10,000,000 Jennings Shop Center Planned," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 9, 1952, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[164] ibid.

> zoned for commercial and industrial use, and the promoters have agreed to set aside a 40-foot strip along Lucas-Hunt road to be given to the municipality of Jennings when widening of the road is undertaken at some future date.[165]

The article depicts how the Northland Shopping Center was not planned to simply accommodate vehicular transport; the space was oriented exclusively around automotive traffic. By locating the center near the developing I-270 and I-70 highways (both were constructed as part of the federal push for a sophisticated interstate highway system; the latter was referred to as the Mark Twain Expressway) and including parking facilities for greater than five thousand cars, the retail developers cemented the automobile user as the key beneficiary of mall's design and services. Furthermore, the planners also retained a considerable amount of influence over the adjacent roads, rights-of-way, and transit networks. In addition to the "40-foot strip along Lucas-Hunt to be given to the municipality of Jennings," the representatives of Northland Shopping Center, Inc. paid $170,000 for the "[c]onstruction of a half-mile section of four-lane divided pavement on West Florissant avenue west of Lucas and Hunt Road."[166] The road, according to the company's president, G. J. Nooney, "will conform to standards of the Missouri State Highway Department and will fit eventually into the proposed improvement of West Florissant avenue under the St. Louis county master plan. When completed the road will be turned over to the county."[167] In other words, while the corporation shouldered the initial cost of constructing and augmenting parts of the arterial roads (e.g., Lucas-Hunt Road, West Florissant Avenue) that carried consumers to its center, Jennings and St. Louis County would assume responsibility for the continued maintenance and stewardship of those streets. Additionally, bus companies extended service lines to meet the needs of patrons and employees traveling to the new shopping center. In 1955, the Public Service Bus Company in St. Louis announced that "four lines will be extended to provide service to the Northland Shopping Center at West Florissant avenue and Lucas-Hunt road, where Famous-Barr Co.'s new branch store is located."[168] All these developments represented the entwinement of regional shopping centers and auto-centric roadway design in the constitution of suburban space.

New single-family housing developments in the region also followed these suburban trends. At the same time that the Northland Shopping Center was being planned, a nearby subdivision named "Forestwood" was under construction in Ferguson. The area, to much fanfare, was planned to include 500 homes. Perhaps even more attractive than the number of dwellings in the subdivision, however, was its location. An article about Forestwood in the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* began this way: "The biggest shopping center in the St. Louis area adjoins Forestwood, the Koedding Developers, Inc., subdivision on Chambers road west of West Florissant avenue. The residential development is immediately west of Northland Shopping Center, $12,000,000 project [up from ten million] to house 50 stores including Famous-Barr Company's North Side branch."[169]

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[165] ibid.

[166] "Work Starts On Half-Mile 4-Lane Roadway In Jennings," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 14, 1954, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[167] ibid.

[168] "Bus Line Extensions to Shopping Centers," S*t. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 28, 1955, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[169] "500 Homes to Be Built in Forestwood Subdivision," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 19, 1954, digitized by Newspapers.com.

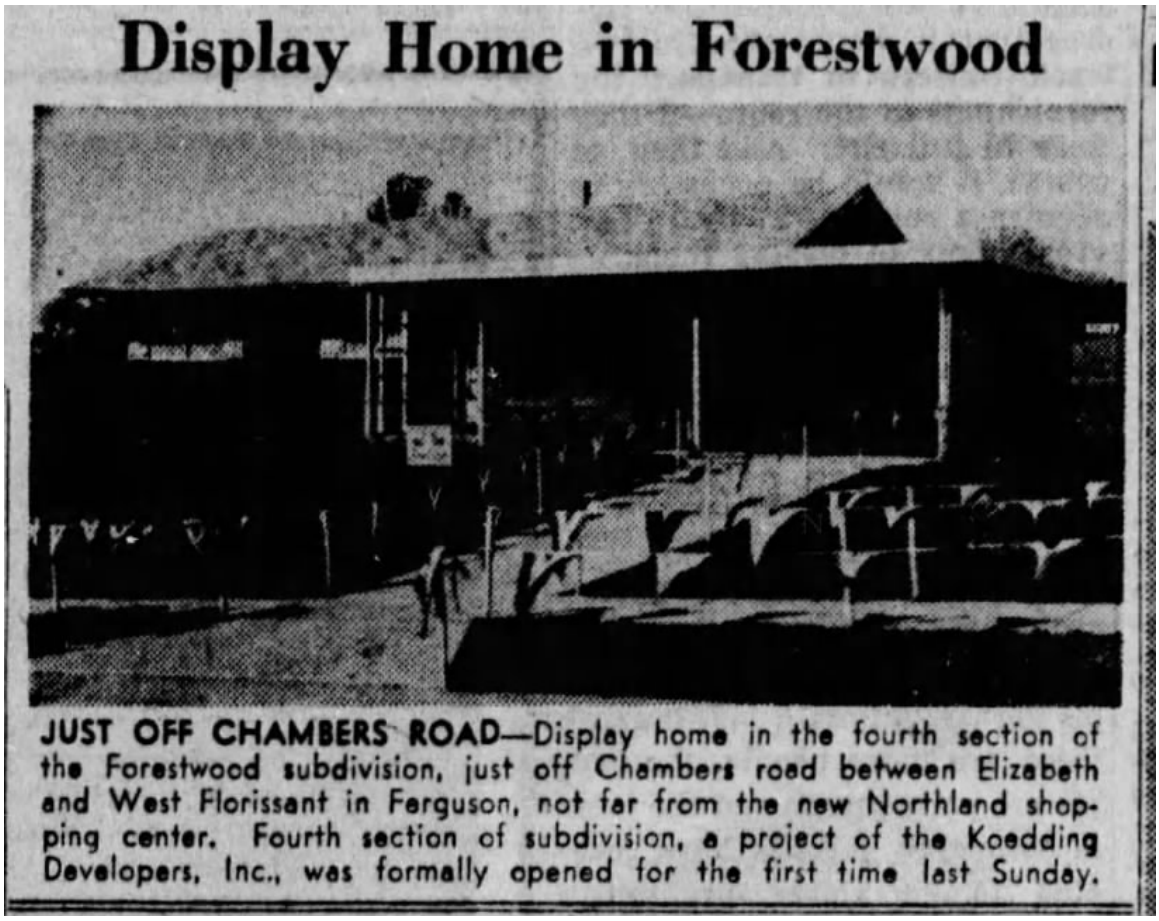


Figure 16. Advertisement for homes in the Forestwood Subdivision in Ferguson. The ad appeared in the St. Louis-Post Dispatch on September 26, 1954. (Newspapers.com)

A 1954 advertisement for homes in a section of Forestwood extends this point further. In the bulletin, an image of a uniform-lot, single-family dwelling is prominently featured. The house boasts a modest front yard, as well as a carport and driveway, signaling the importance of the automobile to the everyday rhythms of suburban living. The image's caption enhances this implicit relationship by framing the home in relation to streets and shopping. In bold, capitalized lettering, the description alerts the reader that the residence is "JUST OFF CHAMBERS ROAD," and more specifically, "Chambers road between Elizabeth and West Florissant in Ferguson, not far from the new Northland Shopping Center."[170] The emphasis placed on the house's favorable position relative to major roads (Chambers Road, Elizabeth Avenue, and especially West Florissant Avenue) and highways (located near I-270 and I-70) and its closeness, by motorized vehicle, to the Northland Shopping Center demonstrates the centrality of automotive traffic to a multi-sited and distributed suburban environment.

I emphasize this point about the relationship between streets, cars, homes, and consumer marketplaces to assert that white suburban communities were not simply constituted and reproduced at the level of the domestic space, census tract, neighborhood, or subdivision. As the

[170] "Display Home in Forestwood," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 26, 1954, digitized by Newspapers.com.

images of Northland Shopping Center and the Forestwood home advertisements reflect, whiteness was performed and reiterated within the nuclear household and residential community, the storefront and larger shopping mall, the motor vehicle and daily commute, and in the constructed infrastructural environments that organized these disparate spaces and cultural practices into a suburban ecosystem. This is an important claim because I want to suggest that the suburban anxieties about Black encroachment in North County that intensified during the 1960s and 1970s extended beyond the singular need to protect against African American presence in white neighborhoods. In the white suburban imagination, north St. Louis, and all spaces occupied by Black people for that matter, became synonymous with urban depravity. The Black body itself was viewed as a carrier of congestion, cultural backwardness, and disorder—the very attributes against which the entire suburban geography was conceptualized and designed. Accordingly, white suburbanites made concerted efforts to constrain Black mobility and access to all fixtures within the wider suburban ecosystem including but not limited to equity-generating houses, public amenities such as parks, effective schools, religious institutions, and ultramodern shopping centers. Crucially, the control and regulation of suburban roadways emerged as key spatial strategies to sustain suburban insularity and social exclusivity.

This discursive and cultural regime largely shaped the racial and spatial relations in Ferguson between 1940 and 1970, which held firmly to the "conviction that county homes and neighborhoods were (and were meant to be) a haven from the racial threat represented by the city."[171] From the postbellum period onward, the town had been particularly hostile to African American occupancy and was described as a sundown town in the early- to mid-twentieth century.[172] "Ferguson," however, "was not a conventional suburb."[173] As one of the oldest municipalities in St. Louis County, its residential character differed considerably from some of the newer suburban cities in the region, especially those to the south and west. As Gordon instructs, "the infrastructure and residential development of Ferguson came earlier, the lots and houses were generally smaller, and the land use was less restrictive than in the County's more conventional suburban development."[174] In other municipalities in St. Louis County, many of which were established in the middle decades of the twentieth century, formal incorporation and annexation often followed private suburban development. Aided by lax municipal incorporation laws,[175] small localities often pursued incorporation to draw municipal boundaries that enshrined and protected patterns of segregated housing, favorable configurations of tax revenues, and, by extension, reliable provisions of local services and well-resourced public goods such as schools and roads. These communities were insulated further by spatial codes and regulations that valued single-family dwellings as the privileged and exclusive form of suburban residence.

Ferguson lacked many of these same hallmarks. Though the town, as the previous section demonstrates, was not wholly sidestepped by private realty and commercial development, it was still distinctive because of its age and proximity to African American enclaves in north St. Louis City and North County. Ferguson's contiguity with areas of Black occupancy, its relative affordability compared to other areas of the County, and the less prohibitive character of its land use meant that demographic transition was on its horizon. The haunting specter of "the City"—a

[171] Gordon, *Citizen Brown*, 8.
[172] John A Wright, Sr., *Kinloch: Missouri's First Black City* (Arcadia Publishing Charleston, 2000).
[173] Gordon, "Making Ferguson: Segregation and Uneven Development in St. Louis and St. Louis County," 83.
[174] ibid, 84.
[175] For more on the municipal incorporation laws, the legacy of home rule, and their relationship to the divorce between St. Louis city and St. Louis County in 1876, see Colin Gordon, *Citizen Brown: Race, Democracy, and Inequality in the St. Louis Suburbs* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

racist apparition expressly shaped by Pruitt-Igoe's gradual collapse and televised demolition—manifested in the defensive actions of white private citizens and municipalities.

Making Canfield Green Apartments

Social, cultural, and political-economic shifts in the housing landscape[176] brought multifamily housing to the city of Ferguson in the 1960s. In 1961, the St. Louis County planning commission proposed a land use plan to encourage further growth in municipalities across North County. Importantly, among its proposals was a recommendation that Ferguson establish "high-density residential facilities near major shopping points."[177] More specifically, the plan stated: "[m]ulti-family residential buildings are proposed north of the [Northland Shopping Center] along West Florissant Avenue."[178] This area had been recently annexed by Ferguson and presented an opportunity for targeted development. Ferguson followed suit, and several housing projects opened across the city between 1961 and 1970.

The developments, however, were not the high-rise complexes, like the Pruitt-Igoe Homes or Vaughn Towers, that came to symbolize racial tumult and decay in white suburban imagination. These multi-unit dwellings were "garden apartments"—low-rise, moderate-density, apartment communities oriented around greenery, shared amenities, and communal courtyards.[179] Distinctive and more affordable than the single-family homes that predominated most of Ferguson's residential stock, these residences were mostly concentrated in southeastern region of the city away from the older, wealthier districts in the northwest. Nevertheless, developers marketed garden apartments to white adults and families as a viable, and perhaps more favorable, option in the cultivation of a good suburban life. One 1965 advertisement for the 440-unit Northwinds Apartments in Ferguson promised prospective renters "a new adventure in suburban living," and "[a]ll the advantages of owning your own home—WITHOUT the expense."[180]

[176] Most notably, the landmark decision in Jones v. Alfred H. Mayer Company, 379 F. 2d 33 (Court of Appeals, 8th Circuit 1967) and shifts in the affordability of housing after the initial postwar boom.

[177] "More-Compact Business Areas in Ferguson, Jennings Urged," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 3, 1961, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[178] ibid.

[179] Because of the centrality of natural landscapes to the design of garden apartments as a residential form, they were most ideally located in suburban environments. For more on this, see Paul Hess, "Rediscovering the Logic of Garden Apartments," *Places Journal* 17, no. 2 (April 15, 2005).

[180] "A new adventure in suburban living," Northwinds Apartments advertisement. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 11, 1965, digitized by Newspapers.com.



The first section of The Village apartments is being opened today by Bill L. Bruce and Lawrence Cribbin. The project is on Canfield Drive off West Florissant Avenue three blocks north of Northland Shopping Center.

138 Garden Apartments Opening In The Village

Six buildings containing 138 garden apartments will be opened formally today in The Village, a new apartment project of Bill L. Bruce and Lawrence Cribbin. The 72-acre site is on Canfield Drive off West Florissant Avenue, three blocks north of Northland Shopping Center.

When the project is completed there are to be 18 buildings with 414 apartments.

Apartments at The Village are available with one or two bedrooms. Kitchen appliances include dishwasher, disposer, electric range and refrigerator. Each unit has individual heating and air-conditioning controls. The apartments are carpeted and have a patio or a balcony. There is a paneled entertainment bar in each unit.

A coin-operated laundry is provided in each building.

Recreational facilities under construction include lighted tennis courts, golf and tennis pro shop, clubhouse, swimming pool, barbecue area and volleyball courts. There is a nine-hole golf course on the grounds.

The clubhouse is to have a conversation area with fireplace, cocktail lounge and dance area on the first floor. There is to be a television room and billiard and table tennis room on the second floor. The building is being constructed of brick.

Group activities such as dances, sports tournaments and barbecues will be planned by the full-time social director. A 24-hour security patrol will be maintained, and there will be a resident manager.

FHA Official Will Address

Figure 17. Newspaper article on the opening of 138 garden apartments in a multifamily housing complex called "The Village" in Ferguson. The article was published by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch on February 15, 1970. (Newspapers.com)

On February 15, 1970, the first section of a 72-acre garden apartment community called “The Village” opened in Ferguson “on Canfield Drive off West Florissant Avenue, three blocks north of Northland Shopping Center.”[181] Helmed by developers Bill L. Bruce and Lawrence Cribben, The Village consisted of six buildings with 138 individual units for rent. Upon the complex’s full completion, it was slated to have 414 total apartments available for rent, distributed across 18 individual buildings. Yet, the group of one and two-bedroom units was not marketed toward families. It was billed, instead, as a luxury garden apartment complex exclusively for single, young adults without children. This target demographic was prioritized in the design of the complex and the cultural practices it encouraged. The living units, which included “a patio or balcony and a paneled entertainment bar,”[182] were further accentuated by shared luxury amenities such as an

[181] “138 Garden Apartments Opening In The Village,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 15, 1970, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[182] ibid.

entertainment and cocktail lounge, outdoor sporting areas, coin-operated laundry, and optional maid and valet services. The property employed a full-time social director tasked with organizing social activities, sports tournaments, hobby groups, trips and excursions, live entertainment, and general events for adult residents. The major I-270 and I-70 highways were easily accessible from the complex and consequently notated on the provided maps in the advertisement. The Northland Shopping Center, located just a short drive away, provided an additional network of retail options and attractions. The Village, in other words, was imagined and designed as an exclusive, utopian living community that would meet the social, cultural, recreational, and libidinal needs of young, mobile white professionals "with a special kind of excitement."[183]



Figure 18. Early 1970 advertisement for The Village. The apartment complex was initially marketed as community "for singles only." The ad was placed in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch on February 22, 1970. (Newspapers.com)

By the middle of the decade, The Village gradually expanded its residential stock to "young marrieds" and eventually families. This latter shift also coincided with a rapid increase of Black tenants, some of whom were families displaced by the successive demolitions of the Pruitt-Igoe Homes in St. Louis between 1972 and 1976. With sudden racial demographic shifts and a decisive transition toward more conventional multifamily housing, The Village became burdened by

[183] "The Village For 'Singles Only'," Advertisement, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 22, 1970, digitized by Newspapers.com.

absentee property managers and mounting issues caused by infrastructural neglect, rising rents, and overcrowding. By 1975, an article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* had described The Village as "an apartment complex on the city's north side that is experiencing an abrupt racial change and recently has been the scene of frequent police action."[184]

As The Village transitioned into a Black multifamily housing project, the quality of amenity in the complex changed drastically. The interior and exterior infrastructures of the apartment buildings plummeted. Residents complained of "'deplorable conditions' in the 400 garden apartments," citing roach infestations, potholes in the parking lots, poor landscaping, aging paint, faulty plumbing, overcrowding, and inconsistent access to shared facilities such as the clubhouse.[185] The project's recreational spaces (e.g., tennis and volleyball courts, golf courses, private clubhouse, and swimming pool), once a key component of its initial fanfare, waned as demographic change hastened. Apartment occupants formed a representative body called the Village Tenant Association to bolster resident advocacy. The group considered withholding rents to apply pressure to Arlen Realty, Inc., the management company responsible for the complex.[186] The association also organized daily pickets of The Village's management office to protest the company's negligence and mistreatment of Black tenants.

[184] "Ferguson Delays Annexation Action," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 17, 1975, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[185] "Ferguson Apartment Residents Claim Complex Is Deteriorating," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 16, 1976, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[186] D. D. Obika, "Tenants in Ferguson May Withhold Rents," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 23, 1976, digitized by Newspapers.com.



north/west

20

ST LOUIS POST-DISPATCH
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1976
ONE OF TWO SECTIONS 1-2N/W

Housing Standards Approved After Changes In Ferguson

The Ferguson City Council has given final approval to a minimum housing standards code including many revisions suggested by Councilman Carl Kersting.

City Manager James D. Arnold said Kersting had given him a list of some 45 points on which Kersting felt that there should be some change.

The code, which will require owners to put property in good condition before it is sold or rented, has been on the council's agenda for about three years.

An occupancy permit will be required for those buying or renting homes or apartments.

Mayor Charles Grimm explained that this would help eliminate such problems as those being experienced by the residents of The Village, an apartment complex near the Northland Shopping Center.

Residents have complained of poor maintenance conditions kept by the project's absentee landlord, a Florida management firm.

City standards would have to be met before the apartments could be rented.

The changes most frequently suggested by Kersting involved the use of the words "adequate and appropriate". In several instances the council agreed to remove these words.

Many residents who attended the meeting Tuesday night spoke in favor of the ordinance suggesting that it was the only way to curb blight in the city.

After the insistance of Kersting and fellow councilmen Andrew F. Thurmond and Douglas Mussell, the ordinance will be on the ballot for a popular vote on November 2.

Mayor Charles Grimm said that he has no doubt that the minimun housing standards ordinance will be unanimously approved by Ferguson voters who have come to see the need for such legislation.

Produce Stand Zoning Cleared

John and Patsy Smith's Produce Market, at 16577 Lackland Road in north St. Louis County, should be back in business soon. The St. Louis County Planning Commission has recommended approval of the Smiths' request to rezone the property for combined residential and commercial use.

The Smiths bought the half-acre commercial tract last June, planning to build a home on part of it and operate a seasonal produce stand on the other half. After operating the stand for two months, they were forced to shut down because the tract was zoned for highway service types of business, not retail commercial use.

The Smiths will be required to donate additional easement for the eventual widening and improvement of Lackland Road by the County Highway Department, but will not be required to pay any part of the widening cost. The commission's recommendation will be sent to the County Council for final action.

The commission voted to deny a request for planned commercial zoning for a small tract on the west side of Lindbergh Boulevard, south of Inverness Lane. Ed Tweston, the property owner, had proposed combining a first floor office equipment sales and service office with two apartments on the second floor. The tract, presently zoned residential, is in a subdivision.

Residents of the subdivision had opposed the rezoning on the ground that the trust indentures of the subdivision prohibited any such commercial operations. Planning director John R. Baggs said that although the county is not legally bound to honor such private restrictions, the development as presented was too intense a use for the tract in question. He said, however, that he thought the tract was not suitable for single-family housing.

The commission approved a permit for the Mars Oil Co. to remodel its present station at 9884 Halls Ferry Road and convert it to a self-service operation.

MISMANAGEMENT PROBLEM: Mrs. Joann Richard, a tenant at the Village Apartments in Ferguson, picketing the manager's office to draw attention to what she called "deplorable conditions" in the 400-unit complex. (Post-Dispatch Photo)

Ferguson Apartment Residents Claim Complex Is Deteriorating

Some tenants at the Village Apartments in Ferguson have begun daily picketing of the manager's office in an effort to dramatize what they called "deplorable conditions" in the 400 garden apartments.

The 72-acre complex, containing 18 buildings, is on Canfield Drive off West Florissant Avenue, three blocks north of Northland Shopping Center. In a move to better represent themselves before the owners of the complex, the protesters have formed a group called the Village Tennant Association.

The group, headed by Lavoy Reed, charges that the management has failed to keep up the complex because more blacks have moved into it.

The group says some of the apartments are infested with roaches and that the management has failed to do anything about it.

The group alleges that the holes in the parking lots have not been repaired, that the lawns have not been maintained properly, that the clubhouse has not been kept open year round, that some of the apartments have not been painted since the opening of the complex and that the stairways have not been painted for quite some time.

In a list of demands presented to Arlen Realty Management, Inc., owner of the complex, the group says the number of residents in each apartment should be limited. There are one- and two-bedroom apartments.

Reed said that the management has

See VILLAGE, Page 2N-W

community

towns

FLORISSANT Mayor James J. Eagan has come out in strong support of the proposed state amendment to eliminate the sales tax on food and drugs, which will be on the Nov. 2 ballot.

THE ST. JOHN CITY COUNCIL has postponed action on a five per cent across-the-board pay

schools

THE RITENOUR SCHOOL BOARD has agreed to sell the school district's warehouse at 2700 Woodson Road for $32,500. The district will convert the high school garage into a new warehouse at an estimated cost of $20,500. By selling the old warehouse, the district expects to save $7500 a year in operating costs.

Figure 19. Article discussing conditions at The Village. A resident of the complex is pictured holding a sign that says: "The Village Ferguson's Pruitt-Igoe." The story appeared in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch on September 16, 1976. (Newspapers.com)

As this page from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* demonstrates, residents drew on the visual and political discourse evoked by Pruitt-Igoe's failure to make appeals for municipal intervention. An image on the right side of the page shows a Black woman protestor, a Mrs. Joann Richard, standing outside the manager's office and holding a sign. The placard reads, "The Village Ferguson's Pruitt-Igoe" in large block lettering. Richard was a former tenant in the under-maintained Vaughn Towers high-rise complex located near Pruitt-Igoe but moved to The Village for a better residential experience. She disclosed, however, that "the apartments [in The Village] were well kept when the population was predominantly white," but "'[n]ow that they have more blacks…they are going to let it go down.'"[187] In her protest and commentary, Richard critiqued an extant discursive regime that marked (and marks) white subjects as deserving of amenity and abundant life and Black subjects as deserving of disrepair and premature death. She articulated this indictment through an intentional engagement with the figure of Pruitt-Igoe. As Roderick Ferguson pointedly argues, "Pruitt-Igoe is the symbol of an affective history in which blackness is always and already understood as a candidate for social and actual death, a history in which whiteness is socialized to maintain its independence at whatever cost."[188] Richard's picket levied an indictment against this history and staged a political performance against the "deplorable conditions" that circumscribed Black tenancy across metropolitan space. By situating The Village within the representational and

[187] "Ferguson Apartment Residents Claim Complex Is Deteriorating" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 16, 1976.

[188] Ferguson, "Michael Brown, Ferguson, and the Ghosts of Pruitt-Igoe," 141-142.

affective history of Pruitt-Igoe, Richard indirectly disrupted racist myths that framed Pruitt-Igoe's downfall as a consequence of Black cultural deficit and pathology. Her sign functioned as a narrative device, merging the story of Pruitt-Igoe with the current predicament and concerns of Black residents in The Village. This pedestrian act, I contend, effected an important counter to the prevailing cultural traffic pertaining to race, space, and power in the region. Richard's political statements rearticulated degeneration in The Village *and* Pruitt-Igoe as byproducts of racial abandonment, public failure, and private mismanagement, rather than the fallacious and given explanation of Black lowliness. In this way, Richard indicted geographies of domination and exclusion throughout greater St. Louis and their reproduction of Black suffering as necessary, expected, and socially tolerable. Although demonstrators in the Village Tenant Association, an *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article noted, "have been [protesting] peacefully for the last three weeks," law enforcement remained present at the complex. In particular, "Ferguson police officers have been seeing [the property manager] Mrs. Downing and the other employees off to their automobiles after 5 p.m. when the association has begun picketing."[189] In other words, the city's response to the aggrieved tenants' pleas was increased surveillance and policing. The complex was effectively constructed as racial problem; its population a nuisance to be managed.

In January 1977, owners of The Village, in an attempt at rebranding, changed the name of the living community. The complex's new moniker, "Canfield Green Apartments," was an effort to return to the suburban garden apartment principles that first guided its construction seven years earlier. But, to quote Black Studies scholar Jodi Rios, "[t]he spatial dissonance that resulted from the intersection of opposing spatial meanings—space that requires protection and space where suffering is expected—produced [a] double bind of living as Black in the historically white suburbs of St. Louis."[190] Said differently, the presence of Black residents in the suburban landscape confounded the discriminatory and absolutist distinctions between urban and suburban space. The Black body, rendered as always already out of place in North County, remained a maligned figure in the white suburban ecosystem.

Containing Canfield Green Apartments

As Canfield Green Apartments (formerly The Village) developed a reputation as a controversial space of Black dwelling, white residents in the adjacent Northland Hills II subdivision attempted to fortify themselves against the perceived threat of encroachment. The subdivision, located on Ellison and Clarion Drives just south of Canfield Drive, consisted of two- and three-bedroom, single-family brick ranch houses with garages and concrete driveways. The neighborhood spanned across Ferguson and Jennings and included parcels in each municipality. The dividing line between the two suburban cities occurred in the center of the subdivision. This meant that along Ellison and Clarion Drives, some of the residences were governed by Ferguson whereas others were managed by Jennings. The presence of this municipal boundary within Northland Hills II undergirded an intensive political and legal struggle between Ferguson and Jennings. At the heart of the issue were competing strategies about how to manage the mobility of Black tenants in Canfield Green Apartments.

In February 1977, Jennings announced its "intention to blockade Clarion and Ellison Drives at

[189] "Ferguson Apartment Residents Claim Complex Is Deteriorating" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 16, 1976.

[190] Jodi Rios, *Black Lives and Spatial Matters: Policing Blackness and Practicing Freedom in Suburban St. Louis* (Ithaca London: Cornell University Press, 2020), 7.

the dividing line between the two cities" after homeowners on the Jennings side of the Northland Hills II subdivision expressed concerns about excessive traffic in the area.[191] The municipality swiftly passed an ordinance, stating that "the residents of an apartment complex north of the City of Jennings as well as others are using [Ellison Drive] to avoid the signalized intersections along West Florissant Avenue and thus creating a nuisance on said street by overloading the neighborhood street with through traffic and littering the street and the yards with trash, debris, beer bottles, wine bottles and soft drink cans and bottles and polluting the residential area with noise and foul odors."[192] The document alluded to the Canfield Green Apartments and framed the multifamily project's Black residents as the alleged progenitors of nuisance, congestion, and pollution in Northland Hills II.

The following month, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* published a news story about the barricade controversy with the headline, "Jennings Barriers: To Bar Autos Or Outsiders?"[193] The article chronicled Jennings's recent placement of road barriers on several of its streets nearest to north St. Louis city. These barricades were installed to prevent motorists in the predominantly-Black central city from driving through Jennings as a shortcut to the River Roads Shopping Center, one of two regional shopping centers (the other being Northland Shopping Center) located in Jennings. The white suburb could not preclude Black city dwellers from patronizing the commercial plaza, but it could regulate their access through traffic devices. Because the municipality passed an ordinance to deploy additional roadblocks at its boundary with Ferguson, a mere block away from Canfield Green, the article queried whether Jennings's pursuit of traffic control measures at its borders with St. Louis and Ferguson exemplified a strategy of racial exclusion. The story highlighted perspectives from residents and city officials in Ferguson, St. Louis, and Jennings, revealing how street infrastructure mediated local ideas of race and space.

In the article, Jennings's residents in the Northland Hills II subdivision stated that "*outside traffic* has congested their street and endangered their children"[194] (emphasis added), and that "most of the traffic [came] from the Canfield Green Apartments in Ferguson" where "90 per cent of the residents were black."[195] But most householders disavowed race as a motivating factor in the effort to barricade Ellison and Clarion Drives. It was, instead, a matter of *traffic safety*. One Jennings homeowner on Ellison Drive cited a need to curb reckless driving and excessive speeding as the sole impetus for the barriers, not race: "I don't think this has to do with the blacks…It's a *traffic problem*"[196] (emphasis added). Couching the impediments in the terms of a "traffic problem" was a subtle rhetorical maneuver aimed at narrating the crisis as infrastructural rather than social. Another Jennings resident however, who asked to remain anonymous, offered a candid reflection that showed the *conjunction* of infrastructural and social thinking in the minds of Jennings residents: "It has to do with the blacks. You know, that's subsidized housing up there. Ferguson didn't provide a good way out for them, so they come flying through here like living's going out of style."[197] This commenter demonstrated whites' projection of cultural dysfunction onto the Black inhabitants of Canfield Green Apartments ("You know, that's subsidized housing

[191] "Ferguson Council Assails Blockade," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, February 10, 1977, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[192] Jones v. City of Jennings, 595 SW 2d 1 (Court of Appeals, Eastern Dist., 3rd Div. 40646).

[193] David Fink, "Jennings Barriers: To Bar Autos Or Outsiders?" *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 7, 1977, digitized by Newspapers.com.

[194] ibid.

[195] ibid.

[196] ibid.

[197] ibid.

up there.") and the utility of that projection in rationalizing racial and spatial exclusivity. Importantly, their remarks also revealed the structural disadvantages imposed onto the multifamily residential form in a suburban ecosystem oriented around single-family dwellings.[198] Particularly, this interviewee observed Canfield Green's disconnectedness from the local street network ("Ferguson didn't provide a good way out for them"). In the end, though, their brief attentiveness to irresponsible design was supplanted by a cultural narrative about Black deviance, racial nihilism, and improper driving behavior ("so they come flying through here like living's out of style.")

Over the next year, Ferguson and Jennings battled over the barricades. After a number of failed compromises and rejected proposals, Ferguson took legal action against Jennings. After a St. Louis County Circuit Court ruled in favor of the Jennings ordinance, the Ferguson City Council elevated the case to the Missouri Court of Appeals.[199] On December 11, 1979, the appellate court ultimately ruled in favor of Jennings and affirmed the municipality's right to erect the barriers through ordinance. The judge's opinion determined that:

> The barricade proposed by Jennings does not prevent [Ferguson motorists] from reaching the general system of public streets and highways, rather, it merely imposes some inconvenience on them in terms of a route to reach the highway system. A barricade erected as a traffic control device which merely imposes some circuity of route is not a prohibited obstruction within [Missouri state law]. […] It is apparent that at least a significant portion of the traffic congestion was caused by residents of Ferguson who used Ellison to avoid the traffic signals on West Florissant, and particularly that part of the congestion was caused by the development of a 414 unit apartment complex in Ferguson. […] A community may in the exercise of its police powers restrict the flow of traffic into a residential area in order to reduce noise, traffic hazards and litter. […] While the residents of the 9000 and 9100 blocks of Ellison may benefit more directly from the ordinance than other members of the public, this fact alone does not minimize its overall purpose as a traffic control device designed to restrict the flow of traffic into this residential area and thereby to protect the public.[200]

The barricade dispute between Ferguson and Jennings illustrates how discourses of "traffic safety" were used to enact racialized infrastructural violence, perpetuate racist pathologies about Black presence, and legislate the curtailment of the Black movement. Under the guise of calming traffic congestion and protecting children, Jennings was able to control Black mobility and dictate its course. Here, we see an operative logic similar to the story about barricades that opened the chapter. As I suggested earlier, the racialized imposition of involuntary reroutings and detours did not merely constitute trivial difficulties and inconveniences in the everyday lives of Black

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[198] This commenter's observation is substantiated by the literature on suburban garden apartments. Urban planning and geography scholar Paul Mitchell Hess writes: "In the first wave of post-World War II suburbanization, developers of single-family subdivisions gravitated toward land that was slightly removed from established roadways, places they could achieve economies of scale and create large, protected 'communities' of detached houses. Soon after, new retail zones were built along nearby main roads, where they were exposed to mounting flows of traffic. Apartment complexes only began to emerge in this landscape starting around 1960. Prototypically, they were developed one by one on leftover parcels, too small to be optimal for subdivision, yet too removed from large roadways to be useful for commercial purposes. With no public streets, few connections to arterial roadways, no public improvements such as sidewalks, and landscaping and fencing that prohibited movement between properties, these environments evolved in ways that in many respects were the opposite of older, well-designed neighborhoods." See Paul Hess, "Rediscovering the Logic of Garden Apartments," *Places Journal* 17, no. 2 (April 15, 2005), https://placesjournal.org/article/rediscovering-the-logic-of-garden-apartments/, 30.

[199] "Metro Report," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 26, 1978, digitized by Newspapers.com.

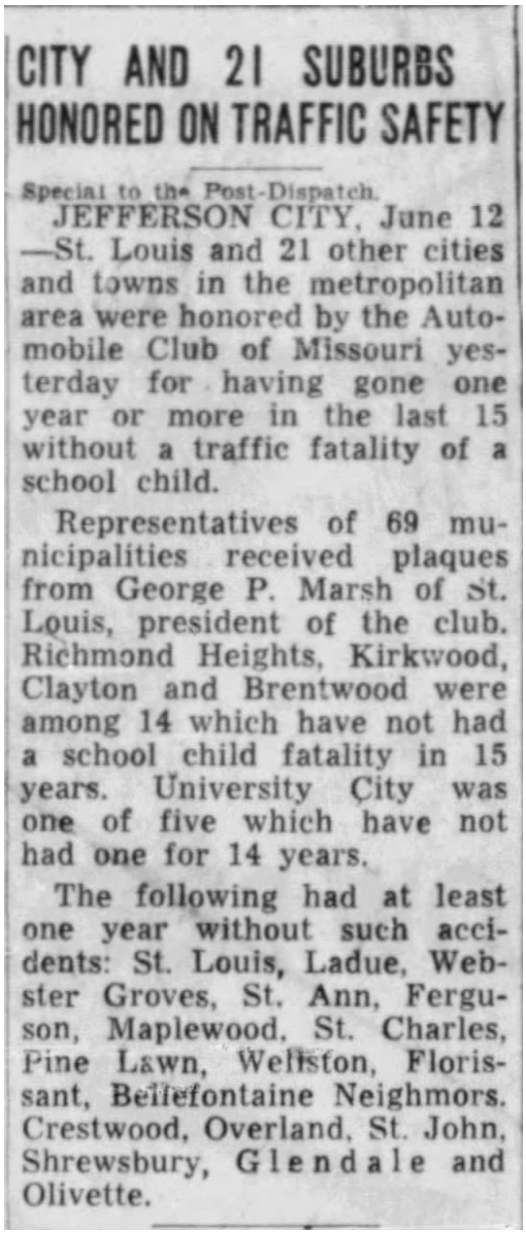
[200] Jones v. City of Jennings, 595 SW 2d 1 (Court of Appeals, Eastern Dist., 3rd Div. 40646).

Ferguson motorists in the area. These diversions, and their disproportionate impact on Black residents in Canfield Green Apartments (in this case), existed as a material embodiments of their spatial marginality within the larger white suburban ecosystem. Put differently, if the integrity of the suburban landscape was predicated on navigable streets, efficient movement, and unadulterated access to dispersed marketplaces, the imposition of an inconvenience "in terms of a route to reach the highway system" represented one strategy to position Blackness as incommensurate with suburban space. It also signaled the agential capacities of white municipal governments and citizens—deputized with police powers to restrict traffic flow—to subjugate Black life through the circumscription of time and resource geographies.

Traffic Safety and the White Spatial Imagination

Ferguson's segregation of Black residents in Kinloch and Jennings's policing of Black movement coming from Canfield Green Apartments enlivened a broader traffic safety discourse that evolved as a central operating logic of suburban communities. In *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship*, media scholar Jeremy Packer writes that the immediate decade following World War II "saw not only numerous changes in the cultural landscape which made automobile driving a necessity in the daily lives of new and growing suburban populations, but also the massive expansion of the highway system. This period witnessed the greatest growth in automobile production and consumption in U.S. history. It was a time when the automobile came to be problematized according to experts' evaluations of specific populations, and governmental and nongovernmental measures were created to address them specifically."[201] In the text, Packer explores the federal government's 1954 *Crusade for Traffic Safety*. He uncovers the government's multifaceted media campaign to construct the discourse of traffic safety and fashion a public commonsense about imminent danger on the road and the related necessity of policing and local regulation of highways and suburban streets. Enlisting "numerous types of experts, including, though not limited to, economists, social and physical scientists, governmental bureaucrats, industrial managers, insurance actuaries, urban planners, and media specialists," the *Crusade for Traffic Safety*, Packer argues, effectively reorganized public opinion and crafted traffic safety as a public problem.[202] Packer explains that "[the] formation of such a campaign sets the stage for governmental and nongovernmental intervention in ways that are directly involved in altering not just minds, but conduct."[203] In other words, the federal government's coordinated movement to naturalize traffic safety as a matter of public concern was not only about shaping public opinion but prescribing a new mode of social citizenship and civic responsibility premised on driving and walking behavior. This manifested in local contexts such as St. Louis County through the new value placed on municipal safety awards, often conferred by automobile clubs and safety councils.

[201] Jeremy Packer, *Mobility without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 28.
[202] ibid., 32.
[203] ibid.



CITY AND 21 SUBURBS HONORED ON TRAFFIC SAFETY

Special to the Post-Dispatch.

JEFFERSON CITY, June 12 —St. Louis and 21 other cities and towns in the metropolitan area were honored by the Automobile Club of Missouri yesterday for having gone one year or more in the last 15 without a traffic fatality of a school child.

Representatives of 69 municipalities received plaques from George P. Marsh of St. Louis, president of the club. Richmond Heights, Kirkwood, Clayton and Brentwood were among 14 which have not had a school child fatality in 15 years. University City was one of five which have not had one for 14 years.

The following had at least one year without such accidents: St. Louis, Ladue, Webster Groves, St. Ann, Ferguson, Maplewood, St. Charles, Pine Lawn, Wellston, Florissant, Bellefontaine Neighmors. Crestwood, Overland, St. John, Shrewsbury, Glendale and Olivette.

Figure 20. A 1958 newspaper article showing St. Louis and other suburbs receiving recognition for traffic safety. (Newspapers.com))

Packer states that this crusade "begins in nascent form what [would], over the next fifty years, become an increasingly neoliberal approach to traffic safety, ultimately arguing for a personal responsibility approach."[204] Put a different way, the government acculturated a growing driving public to a model of traffic safety that emphasized welfare as an individual burden. It encouraged each citizen to view and "[join] the crusade [for traffic safety] first and foremost to protect his or her own life. The appeal to save the lives of others is secondary."[205] Packer concludes: "Thus, the

[204] ibid.
[205] ibid.

crusade ultimately orients itself around personal investment and responsibility through an appeal to the immediate danger posed to the self, as the motivation for joining is said to be a desire to 'protect my life.'"[206]

The desire to protect to one's life (and family) from an immediate danger is perhaps one way to describe the structures of feeling underpinning the historically-white suburb's emergence in the mid-twentieth century. In fact, Packer notes that "[w]hen it came to traffic safety in the 1950s, it was the idealized imaginary suburb and the neighbors who populated it that served as the benchmark against which all others were to be compared. The media representations of this suburban never-never land were filled with a typological array of malady-laden drivers who were the main culprits against whom the crusade would be aimed."[207] Packer's analysis here is useful to explain how discourses of traffic safety became yoked to the racialization of suburban citizenship. As automobiles grew in number on city and suburban streets, differing perspectives on street use and concerns about mobile threats became more urgent.[208] Traffic safety emerged as a social and cultural imperative to protect the presumed sanctity of suburban life and was wielded to mediate suburban citizenship and spatial belonging. Framed here, as Packer notes, in terms of personal investment and responsibility, the discourse of traffic safety found its greatest elaboration in the context of suburban space, which was increasingly shaped by the white spatial imaginary. Within the white spatial imaginary, then, safety is articulated as an achievement produced through purity, homogeneity, predictability, and control. As the paradigmatic site of this spatial logic, "the suburb is not only an engine of self-interest, but also a place that has come to be imbued with a particular moral value consistent with deeply rooted historical ideals and illusions."[209]

[206] ibid.

[207] ibid., 33.

[208] For a longer historical explication of this point, see Peter D. Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (Cambridge, Mass. London: MIT Press, 2011).

[209] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 29.



Figure 21. A 1955 advertisement for the Northland Hills Subdivision. The ad invokes the Oklahoma Land Run of 1889 to appeal to prospective homebuyers. The 1970s barricade controversary takes place in this neighborhood.

This 1955 advertisement for the Northland Hills II Subdivision instantiates Lipsitz's assertion. Drawing on the historical and discursive context of the Oklahoma Land Run of 1889,[210] the developers provocatively suggest: "The famed 'Oklahoma Land Run' took place in 1888…[t]his time it's to Schuermann's Northland Hills." The ad supplements this statement by highlighting the "outstanding features" and "locational advantages" that make Northland Hills the premier place to make one's home. As Lipsitz reminds, the "hostile privatism and defensive localism"[211] of white suburban environments exists on a broad trajectory of white settler violence, along which subaltern

[210] The Oklahoma Land Run of 1889 resulted in the federally-sanctioned capture of nearly two million acres of Indigenous land by predominantly-white settlers in the western territory of present-day Oklahoma. Commencing on April 2, 1889, prospective homesteaders gathered around the perimeter of a region of unassigned lands. At noon, announced by the firing of a gun by a U.S. soldier, Americans rushed to stake claims to 160-acre farm to town plots. White settlement and industrial development in the area led to the formation of the state of Oklahoma in 1907. For more on the land run, the larger boomer movement, and industrialization in early Oklahoma, see Michael J. Hightower, *1889: The Boomer Movement, the Land Run, and Early Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018).

[211] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 13.

life and land are plundered in the quest for white refuge. He declares that "the properly ordered and prosperous domestic dwelling eclipsed the frontier as the privileged moral geography of U.S. society, as the nation's key symbol of freedom, harmony, and virtue."[212] By invoking a history of white homesteading and Native land theft, I argue that this advertisement of the Northland Hills II Subdivision demonstrates the symbolic and cultural persistence of the frontier, social relations of private property, and insularity in white spatial imaginaries of suburban settlement.

Reading Packer and Lipsitz's work in concert, we are able to see how discourses of traffic safety merge with white spatial imaginaries to promote racial exclusivity and police Black mobility. The barricade example is telling. Ferguson and Jennings mutually approved the plat for the Northland Hills II Subdivision in 1955. Both cities agreed that the streets therein—especially Ellison Drive, Clarion Drive, and Solway Avenue—would be "dedicated to public use forever."[213] Nevertheless, as the population in the nearby Canfield Green apartment complex (formerly The Village) rapidly changed from white to Black, the white residents in Jennings materialized their anxieties about demographic transition by barricading those same streets. To protect the white, nuclear suburban home, practices of "surveillance, regulation, and incarceration [could] become justified as forms of frontier defense" against, by contrast, disorderly Black people and spaces.[214] The commitment to the public, implicitly read as white, gave way to social, civic, and infrastructural enclosure. *Blackness was codified as a traffic problem in suburban space.*

In the decades following the barricade controversy, demographic change accelerated in North County suburbs such as Ferguson, Jennings, Dellwood, Normandy, and Pagedale. "In response," cultural theorist Roderick A. Ferguson opines, "whites flew further north but retained control of law enforcement and municipal government within those areas. This convergence of white authority and myths of Black inferiority produced the conditions whereby administering Black life (in municipal governments and on police forces) meant supervising its worthlessness."[215] While the insular white communities that once comprised Northland Hills Subdivision and the surrounding suburban enclaves dissipated, the blockades on Ellison and Clarion Drives persisted as the haunted presence of a spatial discourse of antiblackness in the racial geographies of Ferguson and other inner suburbs such as Jennings. Furthermore, the racialized discourse of traffic safety that marked Blackness as a traffic problem in the middle- to late-twentieth century was transmuted into a program of racial expropriation in the new millennium. Canfield Green Apartments (formerly The Village), the disparaged object of racist discourse, neglect, geographic containment and policing in the 1970s, was the primary training ground of this revised strategy, which intensified to its most destructive between 2011 and 2014. In August 2014, it would underwrite the tragic death of a Black teenager walking in the complex where his grandmother lived. Both his name and Canfield Drive would become known to the world.

[212] ibid., 30.
[213] Jones v. City of Jennings, 595 SW 2d 1 (Court of Appeals, Eastern Dist., 3rd Div. 40646).
[214] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 13.
[215] Ferguson, "Michael Brown, Ferguson, and the Ghosts of Pruitt-Igoe," 141.

Michael Brown, Manner of Walking, and the Ghosts of Traffic Safety



Figure 22. Barricades on Ellison Drive in the Northland Hills II Subdivision at the Jennings city line. Originally placed in 1979. Photograph taken by author on January 8, 2024.

During their fateful journey from Ferguson Market and Liquor on West Florissant Avenue back to the Canfield Green Apartment complex on August 9, 2014, Mike Mike and his friend Dorian Johnson had to walk past Ellison and Clarion Drives. But I doubt they pondered how the sanctioned actions of white homeowners and municipal powers on those two streets, 35 years prior, were largely responsible for constructing Canfield Drive and Canfield Green Apartments as geographies of racialized risk.[216] "[I]n their bluntness and ordinariness," writes planning scholar Chat Travieso, "such race barriers or segregation walls tend to hide in plain sight."[217] Owning to their simultaneous banality and spectacularity, "the paradoxical effect of such structures is to simultaneously highlight and trivialize the historical oppressions they represent, and the injustices they continue to enact."[218] Mike Mike and his companion were walking and living a racial present shaped decisively by a spectral past.

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[216] Rios writes that "[t]he historical and material production of blackness-as-risk is foundational to the historical and material construction of modern society and, as a critical component of antiblackness, it provides fundamental systems that order contemporary metropolitan space" (18). This antiblack ordering of metropolitan space, Rios suggests, frames spaces occupied by Black people as those wherein suffering is expected, tolerated, and cyclically produced.

[217] Chat Travieso, "A Nation of Walls," *Places Journal*, September 22, 2020.

[218] ibid.

When Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson commanded the 18-year-old Mike Mike and 22-year-old Dorian to "get the fuck on the sidewalk," it was an irruption of that haunted history. Wilson's utterance was one bound by notions of race, space, and power sedimented in the landscape for more than century. While brief and markedly vulgar, the exchange encapsulated longstanding discourses about racial containment, capital, space, and street infrastructure entrenched in the local built environment. Wilson figured Mike Mike and his companion as structural impediments to the spatial force of police authority and the municipal code, and he expected his voice to yield spatial effects. He expected his voice to put the Black pedestrians in their literal and figurative place—to restore suburban order by relegating them to the infrastructural margins.

The problem was that the sidewalks on Canfield Drive were not conducive to walking. The paths were bordered on both sides by variably maintained green areas that encroached into pedestrian space. They were the code minimum of four-feet in width,[219] which discouraged any form of meaningful sociality. The walkways were discontinuous, divided by curving streets and driveways. Canfield was wholly absent of useable crosswalks, amenities, or any elements that encouraged pedestrian safety, visibility, or sociality. This, in part, was another vestige of exclusionary suburban design. Constrained by their placement within the more culturally desirable auto-oriented, single-family residential pattern, "most suburban apartment zones," Paul Mitchell Hess contends, "are currently extremely hostile to pedestrian use."[220] Hess's characterization of the constrained pedestrian navigability often associated with garden apartments reads as an apt description of the pedestrian condition on Canfield Green Apartments in 2014: "[b]isected by traffic arterials, dominated by parking lots, and lacking such basic public infrastructure as sidewalks and local streets, [these areas] could benefit immediately, and substantially, from the attention of planners, designers and local officials."[221] The inadequacy of street and sidewalk design, nevertheless, had already captured the attention of city officials in Ferguson for at least several years before 2014. In an October 2011 *Draft Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan*, the municipality offered the following summary of the chief issues with its transport network:

> Ferguson is divided by major arterial roads including Florissant Road, Elizabeth Avenue, West Florissant Avenue, and the Chambers Corridor (Airport Road, Hereford Avenue, and Chambers Road). These arterial roads are the only continuous roads through the City; alternative routes to these arterials do not exist. Cyclists and pedestrians are therefore forced to use these arterials, which pose negative perceptions of safety and comfort due to greater volumes and speed of traffic. […] Many of Ferguson's streets also lack sidewalks, pedestrian amenities, and sufficient right-of-ways.[222]

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[219] Section 40-31(c) of the Ferguson Code of Ordinances (version: March 19, 2014) provides the following specifications for sidewalk widths: "All concrete sidewalks constructed in the city shall be not less than four (4) feet wide, unless in the opinion of the council, unnecessary and undue hardship will result to the abutting property owner by reason of such requirement. In such instances the council may authorize the construction of concrete sidewalks of a lesser width but not less than three (3) feet." While these specifications conform to design conventions, some planners, scholars, and governmental bodies have argued that these width minimums are incommensurate with pedestrian-safe and socially viable walkways. See American Society of Planning Officials, "Sidewalks in the Suburbs," American Planning Association, February 1957, https://www.planning.org/pas/reports/report95.htm.; For a more recent example, see National Association of City Transportation Officials, *Urban Street Design Guide* (Island Press, 2013).

[220] Hess, "Rediscovering the Logic of Garden Apartments," 30.

[221] ibid.

[222] "Draft Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan," City of Ferguson, October 2011, 7-8.

The *margins* here, then, denote not only that sidewalks are literally the marginal zones of street systems, often forming the outlying boundaries of roadways. However, the term also suggests sidewalks as spaces of social and spatial marginality in suburban ecosystems defined (and designed) expressly by motorized traffic. This is primarily gleaned through severe disparities in space allocations for motorists and pedestrians throughout the suburban roadway network. Part of my argument here is that the infrastructural relations on streets become ciphers for race and power. Wilson's attempt to force Mike Mike and Dorian onto the sidewalk, in my reading, is an attempt to *marginalize* them within the suburban landscape. Reading Wilson's directive as a consignment to marginality, we might better understand the two friends' refusal of his order. Mike Mike and Dorian continued defiantly down Canfield Drive. Perhaps they felt that the sidewalk foreclosed something. Maybe they felt that the designated path Wilson ushered them toward was unnavigable, too rugged, or in disrepair. Perhaps Mike Mike, in his gentle largeness, felt the sidewalk too narrow to accommodate him and his friend; and rather than walk behind one another, the road offered the possibility to walk *beside*. Put another way, maybe Canfield Drive's relative wideness afforded the young men what the sidewalk could not—the space to practice social relation: to stand beside, to listen and be listened to, to see and be seen by each other. From this spatial and infrastructural imagination, maybe the roadway, designated through law, sedimented custom, and design as an apportionment for cars, seemed more befitting of Mike Mike and Dorian's intramural performance. Perhaps the comrades held a greater claim to the road than any vehicle could. Maybe, from their vantage, the pedestrian act of Black fraternal intimacy was more important than maintaining the flow traffic.

From Wilson's point of view, Mike Mike and Dorian were *traffic problems* to be corrected, controlled, or neutralized. Because of its prevalent use as a citation against Black pedestrians throughout the city, Wilson likely read the young men in violation of a code regulation titled *Manner of Walking in Roadway*. Defined in section 44-344(a) of Ferguson's code of ordinances, the statute declares that "[w]here sidewalks are provided, it shall be unlawful for any pedestrian to walk along and upon an adjacent roadway." This law in particular obscured inequities in sidewalk design and, instead, shifted the burden of the city's admitted planning failures onto purportedly contemptible and blameworthy individuals who lack regard for traffic safety and authority. The viability of this rhetorical maneuver, I argue, is predicated on the fact that its historical antecedent inheres in the still-barricaded streets and ghosts of traffic safety that fixed Black subjects and their movements—especially from Canfield Green Apartments—as durable objects of gratuitous policing and scrutiny, as traffic problems to be managed through incarceration, expropriation, and premature death. With the force of this law, as well as his badge, Wilson attempted to resolve the traffic problems through an activation of *right-of-way*—as a vehicle operator with movement precedence on a residential street and, crucially, as a white citizen, officer, and historical subject deputized to preside over the spatial sovereignty of Black life. Wilson's expletive-laden "pronouncement was not designed to elicit a response, it was fashioned to keep [them] in [their] place."[223] *It was fashioned to compel acquiescence.* But when Mike Mike and Dorian responded with noncompliance, when they refused the terms of his historical grammar, they "offered [Wilson] an alternative model—a refraction rather than a reflection of [his] own situatedness."[224] This communicative exchange, in space and time, *across* space and time, disfigured the genealogies of racialized relation Wilson deployed to make sense of himself in regard to the two pedestrians. This disfigurement gave way to a crisis for Wilson, as Mike Mike and Dorian's

[223] Sharon Patricia Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Duke University Press, 2012), 5.
[224] ibid.

"inability to serve therefore represented an intrusion upon the [officer's] daily activities." The Black companions, indeed, "became an affront to the order of things."[225] More specifically, they breached "an order of things in which [the] *black (radical) yields to white (liberal)*"[226] (emphasis added).

The details of what followed have been written about, debated, probed, and dissected innumerably, but the simple truths remain: Wilson used his police vehicle as a barricade to restrict the Black men's movements. Several moments later, he murdered Mike Mike—a beloved son, brother, and friend—for refusing to walk in a space not designed for walking; for refusing to *yield* to him as the guarantor of a racist spatial order. The violent longevity of that order, founded in the brutality of slavery, revealed itself even more when Mike Mike's punctured body was left unprotected on the pavement for more than four hours.

Mike Mike's death, his subsequent neglect, and the *Manner of Walking in Roadway* charge that presumably influenced Wilson's initial contact with the Black companions represented the larger racial and class antagonisms undergirding the policing and spatial subjection of Black residents in Ferguson. This is reflected most immediately in the City's adoption a covert policy of immobilizing and extracting revenue from Black residents. Ferguson police forces, in collusion with the municipal court, relentlessly policed Black movement by levying traffic citations and encircling vulnerable residents in a cycle of surveillance and indebtedness. The United States Department of Justice's (DOJ) Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department (FPD) in 2015 revealed the following:

> Ferguson's law enforcement practices overwhelmingly impact African Americans. Data collected by the Ferguson Police Department from 2012 to 2014 shows that African Americans account for 85% of vehicle stops, 90% of citations, and 93% of arrests made by FPD officers, despite comprising only 67% of Ferguson's population. African Americans are more than twice as likely as white drivers to be searched during vehicle stops even after controlling for non-race based variables such as the reason the vehicle stop was initiated, but are found in possession of contraband 26% less often than white drivers, suggesting officers are impermissibly considering race as a factor when determining whether to search. African Americans are more likely to be cited and arrested following a stop regardless of why the stop was initiated and are more likely to receive multiple citations during a single incident. From 2012 to 2014, FPD issued four or more citations to African Americans on 73 occasions, but issued four or more citations to non-African Americans only twice. FPD appears to bring certain offenses almost exclusively against African Americans. For example, from 2011 to 2013, African Americans accounted for 95% of Manner of Walking in Roadway charges, and 94% of all Failure to Comply charges.[227]

What is striking here is not only the ways policing produces an equivalence between Blackness and criminality, but also how street infrastructure—the principal arterial roads, local streets, sidewalks, traffic devices, and municipal codes—become infused with the regulatory power of police and contribute to a total environment wherein Black life is severely circumscribed. Beyond an empirical observation of racial and spatial constraint, the report's findings rendered visible an expansive municipal prerogative, enacted by its deputized agents, to move and emplace the Black body at will and with impunity. This translated, I suggest, into a geographic plane in which *Black movement was incessantly arrested and forced into structural position of deference (denied*

[225] ibid., 10.
[226] ibid., 19.
[227] U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, "Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department," March 4, 2015, 4-5.

precedence) within suburban space. Moreover, the report signals these racialized practices by the Ferguson Police Department were licensed by the city's municipal courts "as a means to compel the payment of fines and fees that advance the City's financial interests."[228] The DOJ concludes: "Partly as a consequence of City and FPD priorities, many officers appear to see some residents, especially those who live in Ferguson's predominantly African-American neighborhoods, less as constituents to be protected than *as potential offenders and sources of revenue*"[229] (emphasis added). In other words, Black residents in Ferguson were computed as markers of revenue and risk, enlivening a long history of racist speculation and accumulation that produced *the Black body as an object of exploitable property*. I introduce the concept of yield to describe this exercise of commanding the raced body to submit, defer, and delay its desire or movement (e.g. yield as in forced deference) as a function of producing value (e.g. yield as in output, generating value or capital) for various sites of hegemonic power. If right of way is a social prerogative of whiteness—what Hartman might call an incorporeal hereditament or Cheryl Harris might describe as one of its properties—to claim precedence over racial others in geographic space, then yield is a relational concept that attends to how spaces are produced and sustained through expectations of the Black body's deference and extractability.

[228] ibid., 3.
[229] ibid., 2.

Pedestrian Acts and A Black Sense of Place



Figure 23. Lezley McSpadden (center), the mother of Michael Brown, Jr., places rose petals in the street where his body lied on Canfield Drive. Photograph captured on August 9, 2014.

After lying in the August sun for over four hours, Mike Mike's body was taken away from Canfield Drive. The police had prevented his mother, Lezley McSpadden, from comforting her deceased son. When the caution tape cleared, she went to the spot where Mike Mike perished and scattered rose petals across the pavement. Others added to the floral display, crafting a makeshift tribute of flowers, mementos, signage, candles, stuffed animals, and traffic cones on the blood-stained street. Together, the collection of items bloomed into a living monument to memory and mourning, an assemblage of small and soft things to contend with the unbearable hardness of the asphalt where Mike Mike perished. Barred from protecting Mike Mike's physical body, the street memorial enabled loved ones to tend to him posthumously. Thus, when the altar was defiled by multiple acts of vandalism, arson, and deliberate vehicular collision,[230] Black residents registered it as an unbearable violation. After each destruction, community members rebuilt the memorial larger, extending it into both lanes of traffic. This was *their* space. The community's defense of the impromptu monument became a spatial and political act of refusal in honor of Mike Mike's memory. Contestations over traffic wrought by the memorial on Canfield Drive soon catalyzed racial struggles over space across Ferguson's suburban geography. Black residents seized roadways to disrupt the historical white spatial imaginaries that authorized Mike Mike's death and constrained Black life altogether. *They would not yield*.

[230] Joseph A. DelReal, "Michael Brown Memorial Destroyed Overnight," *Washington Post*, December 26, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/12/26/auto-draft/.

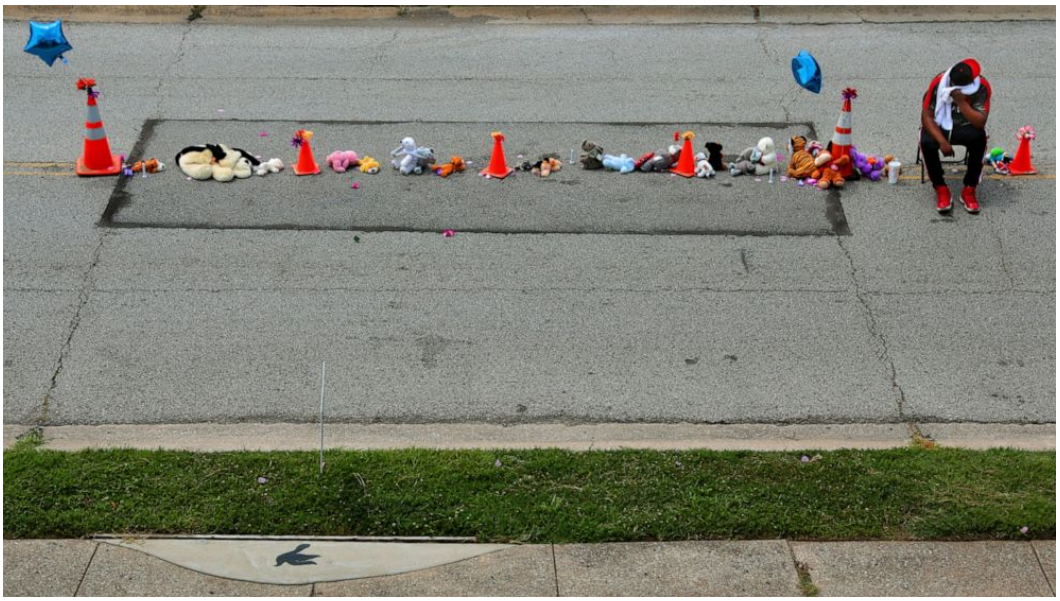


Figure 24. A community member keeps watch over the street memorial for Michael Brown, Jr. on Canfield Drive.

The memorial projected an oppositional social relationship to space, and crucially, instantiated a rearticulation of Black social subjectivity. A counterpoint to the haunting late seventies street barricades that spatially constrained Black residents of Canfield Green Apartments and enduringly heightened vehicular traffic on Canfield Drive, the memorial was a material representation of Black spatial sovereignty. Darren Wilson and the Ferguson Police Department enunciated a right of way to Mike Mike's body; they exercised a social, politico-legal, and historical prerogative to steal and commandeer his body, to disallow his family to touch, hold, console, and protect him. The street memorial, in return, observed conception of public or private right-of-way, as defined by local statute. It held no regard for the exigencies of traffic or vehicular flow. The memorial, its maintainers, and defenders did not think in the terms traffic safety and social order codified in the municipal code and sedimented in the local environment. The memorial was an exemplar of what Lipsitz terms the *Black spatial imaginary*. Lipsitz writes:

> African Americans and members of other aggrieved communities of color have been largely unable to control the exchange value of their neighborhoods because of the power of the white spatial imaginary and the policies that flow from it. Yet, they have developed innovative ways of augmenting the use values of the spaces they inhabit. They pool resources, exchange services, and appropriate private and public spaces for novel purposes.[231]

Through the erection and defense of the memorial, local Black Ferguson residents fashioned a different use value for the street. They opened a spatial imaginary where the primary function of the roadway was less about facilitating motorized traffic than providing a place for Black grief to be called righteously, remembered, tended to, held, and acknowledged. Black community members used the memorial to reshape Canfield Drive into a space of congregation, melancholia, and mourning. The significance and efficacy of the memorial "lie[d] not in [its] ability to overcome

[231] Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 56.

this condition or provide remedy but in creating a context for the collective enunciation of this pain[.]"[232] The memorial then, in a stunning reversal, occasioned the appropriation of the public right-of-way on Canfield Drive and established a subaltern geography that compelled traffic—vehicular, racist-discursive, and otherwise—to yield to needs and prerogatives of the *pedestrian*.

Pedestrian, in its noun (e.g., as in a person walking along a roadway) and adjective (e.g., as in mundane, everyday) forms, emerges as another key analytic to understand historical, racial, and spatial struggles in Ferguson. In his profound 1984 text *The Practice of Everyday Life*, French theorist Michel de Certeau defines pedestrians as "ordinary practitioners of the city [that] live 'down below,'" those individuals whose bodies remain "clasped by the streets that turn and return [them] according to an anonymous law," and finally, those who "write [the city] without being able to read it."[233] De Certeau articulates the pedestrian as a structural standpoint within the larger context of the city. While this position is marginal relative to that of an urban planner, for instance, de Certeau asserts that geographic space is actualized through quotidian practices such as walking. In other words, a planner may design, organize, and set the operating codes of a given cityscape, but it is the pedestrian who writes and brings those forms into being through everyday practice. De Certeau's conceptualization is tremendously generative for how it clarifies the relationship between individual actors (agency) and the prescribed social and cultural orders in which they are embedded (structure).

Importantly, de Certeau suggests that through everyday practice, "users make (bricolent) innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules."[234] He calls these performances *pedestrian acts*. De Certeau argues that "[t]he act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or the statements uttered."[235] In this statement, he draws a parallel between the qualitative and produced character of both spatial and speech acts insofar as they both constitute, appropriate, and stylize ordered systems (e.g., geographic and linguistic systems respectively). This relationship that de Certeau draws between spatial acts, "walking" in this case, and speech is crucial because it demonstrates that space, like language, is acted-out and performed within the parameters of a given schema. This acting-out, whether singular or plural, occasions the emergence of ordered systems. He instructs further: "First, if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, he makes them exist as well as emerge."[236] Spatial practices and speech acts enunciate, or materialize, geography and language respectively. Importantly, the performed character of geography and language signals indeterminacy, meaning that the prescribed routes and syntaxes, though coerced and enforced, are often appropriated, refused, reinvented, and defied in everyday life. In this way, de Certeau contends that pedestrians manifest dominant spatial logics infused in the urban planning of streets but also "[move] them about" and "invent others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform, or abandon spatial elements."[237] If, as I have argued, Black subjectivity and mobility have been undermined and policed in urban and suburban space through myriad forms of infrastructural violence, law, and traffic over time,

[232] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 51.
[233] De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92-93.
[234] ibid., xiii-xiv.
[235] ibid., 97.
[236] ibid., 98.
[237] ibid.

then pedestrian represents an apt concept to delineate the structural position of Black subjects marginalized by yet integral to (sub)urban geographies. Moreover, the widespread practice of restored, proliferating, and provisional modes of demonstration and refusal—seizing roads and highways, restricting flow, blocking entry, destroying property—that found traction in Ferguson and many other places across the world in the wake of Mike Mike's death constitute pedestrian acts. Pedestrian acts incite forms of infrastructural breakdown as an intentional objective. In Ferguson, these tactics of spatial and infrastructural intervention, organized principally through online communications, literally worked against traffic.



Figure 25. A group of protestors block Interstate 270 at West Florissant Avenue on September 1, 2014. Image captured by the Missouri Department of Transportation (St. Louis Post-Dispatch)

The pedestrian acts that began on Canfield Drive quickly expanded to other locations throughout Ferguson. Demonstrators, holding the memory of Mike Mike *and* the haunting legacies of spatial violence in the suburban landscape, launched direct actions at principal arterial roads and major highways with the intent of stopping traffic. "Blocking traffic and occupying space maintained by tax dollars," opines historian Jessica D. Klanderud, "is a clear nonviolent, direct-action strategy focusing on disrupting movement and commerce in a city."[238] Black pedestrians intentionally defied the *Manner of Walking in Roadway* statute that placed many nonwhite residents in a cycle of indebtedness, immobility, and criminality, all while enhancing the city's general revenue and operating budget. Protestors placed their bodies in front of moving cars to challenge the regimes of racialized mobility, infrastructural violence, and capitalist expropriation that haunted the suburban geography from the antebellum period to the present. As Ferguson activist, David Whitt, put it candidly: "we was occupying the streets that we paid for."[239]

The image above, captured in September 2014 by a closed-circuit live traffic camera operated

[238] Jessica D. Klanderud, *Struggle for the Street: Social Networks and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Pittsburgh* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2023), 183.

[239] Sabaah Folayan and Damon Davis, *Whose Streets?*, Documentary (Magnolia Pictures, 2017).

by the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT),[240] shows group of Black men overtaking and stopping three lanes of vehicular traffic on the I-270 highway at West Florissant Avenue. Excepting one man with his fist raised in a symbol of Black power, most of the pedestrian have their hands up—a political and performative gesture derived from Dorian Johnson's testimony that Mike Mike had both of his hands raised when officer Wilson shot him down. Dorian's account of events was delegitimized in subsequent investigations of the shooting, and the widespread use of the "hands up, don't shoot" pose in nationwide political protests subject to persistent criticism.[241] Still, by adopting this posture, the demonstrators not only dramatized the fact that Mike Mike was unarmed; they made visible their own vulnerabilities to the suburban palimpsests of spatial confinement, infrastructural encroachment, and police terror.

The location of this ephemeral and provisional action extends this point further. That the protest unfolds on I-270 highway at West Florissant Avenue is tremendously significant. As the earlier sections of the chapter showcase, both West Florissant Avenue and the I-270 expressway were critical components of the local transit network that underpinned postwar, auto-centric white suburban ecosystems in North County, and especially in Ferguson. For decades, these roadway infrastructures paved the way for white nuclear families to create, settle in, fortify, and move freely within resourced communities made possible through underdevelopment and plunder of Black spaces. Thus, part of my argument here is also that the specific locations where pedestrian acts take place—Canfield Drive, West Florissant Avenue, and the I-270 highway—indicate Black Ferguson residents' attentiveness to the ways suburban roadway infrastructure, beginning at midcentury, have haunted and buttressed historical geographies of racial exclusion and containment. Black pedestrian acts, in other words, are not only a refusal of the expectation to yield in the present but in the past as well.

By using protest and performances of Black grief to impede histories of infrastructural violence, police terror, and municipal power sedimented in Ferguson's landscape, Black subjects fashioned what Black studies scholar and cultural geographer Katherine McKittrick calls "a black sense of place." McKittrick posits that "[a] black sense of place draws attention to the longstanding links between blackness and geography. It brings into focus the ways in which racial violences (concrete and epistemic actions and structural patterns intended harm, kill, or coerce a grouping of

[240] MoDOT's web entry on its camera systems states: "MoDOT has cameras installed along interstate highways and state routes in the St. Louis area. The video from these cameras is live, not recorded, and they help MoDOT's Transportation Management Center operators monitor traffic flow. The operators can use the cameras to identify potential congestion-creating incidents, such as crashes and stalled vehicles, and are able to direct the appropriate emergency response forces to those incidents. The cameras are also used to monitor the backup from road work zones. Operators use this information to convey messages to the public to detour motorists away or around these congestion points. Video and photos from the cameras are only available in real time and are not stored. During crashes or incidents, cameras may not remain pointed at recovery efforts as operators continue to monitor the flow of traffic behind the incident. Since traffic is slow or stopped, the potential for additional crashes is increased during major incidents, and operators need to watch for those crashes and direct emergency response forces there, as well. Camera views and videos are provided on MoDOT's Gateway Guide to offer drivers the opportunity to review and evaluate the flow of traffic on their projected route, and determine if they need to use an alternate route. Camera views are also provided to the local media through agreements to provide additional information in media traffic reporting efforts."

[241] For example, art historian Dora Apel writes: "While the performance of non-resistance expressed by the "hands up, don't shoot" gesture of defenseless surrender is meant to advance black interests by exposing the violation of basic civil rights and due process, it also is meant to pressure and shame the racist establishment into effective reform. But for the racists in charge, the cops are just "doing their job" when they humiliate, brutalize, and kill black people on the street." For a full analysis and treatment of her argument here, see Dora Apel, "'Hands Up, Don't Shoot': Surrendering to Liberal Illusions," *Theory & Event* 17, no. 3 (2014).

people) shape, but do not wholly define black worlds."[242] McKittrick argues that while the afterlives of slavery and colonialism attempt to foreclose the material emergence of a Black sense of place, these systems do not annihilate Black spatial sovereignty. As such, she suggests, our analyses of racial violence, often preoccupied with elucidating the magnitude of Black suffering, must be careful to not "reify racial-colonial categories, and, consequently, discursively overtax the suffering black body."[243] Such analyses preclude the apprehension of critical Black spatial practices and efface the innumerable ways Black subjects have made and continually make interventions in everyday geographies. Alternatively, she calls for the relationship between Blackness, place, and racial violence to be explored as produced and contested, rather than static and natural. Instead of framing transatlantic slavery, colonial order, segregation, ghettoization, incarceration, and other contemporary practices of modern social terror as totalizing systems that obliterated the possibility of a Black sense of place altogether, McKittrick urges that they are properly engaged as brutal spatial arrangements that produce extreme harm and, by necessity, alternative modes of Black place-making and fugitive mapping. She concludes: "a black sense of place might not be read as an authentication of blackness, or a truth-telling conceptual device, or an offering of a 'better' place; rather a black sense of place locates the ways in which anti-black violences in the Americas evidence protean planation futures *as* spaces of encounter that hold in them useful anti-colonial practices and narratives."[244]

The pedestrian acts of infrastructural appropriation, disruption, and sabotage constituted Black senses of place that revealed the ghosts of slavery and its geographic permutations in Ferguson's suburban landscape. The crowds gathered on Canfield Drive and the assemblies of pedestrian mourners on roads and highways throughout the city evinced an oppositional geographic consciousness that challenged the operating logic of (sub)urban space altogether. These provisional performances, though grounded in the specificities of place, were nonetheless routed into another domain of traffic, aided by the affordances of digital media infrastructures. The protests, demonstrations, and riots that overtook Ferguson in August 2014 circulated widely online, prompting mass mobilizations across the nation and countries around the world. The racial and spatial struggles catalyzed by Mike Mike's death, in other words, occurred at the interstices of street and digital traffic. Pedestrian acts, therefore, became essential practices of political refusal that moved between physical and digital geographies.

[242] Katherine McKittrick, "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place," *Social & Cultural Geography* 12, no. 8 (December 1, 2011): 947–63, , 947.

[243] ibid., 948.

[244] ibid., 950.

Chapter Three: Wave and Wire

As jurors in St. Louis County, Missouri debated whether to indict Darren Wilson for fatally shooting Michael Brown Jr., many across the country worried that history was repeating itself. In particular, the suspense framing the impending decision led people to recall the Rodney King trial more than 20 years prior. In March 1991, four white policemen from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) were captured on video brutally beating King, a 25-year-old Black motorist. Despite the recording and the collective outrage it prompted across racial groups, the officers were acquitted by a 13-person, majority-white jury. The verdict provoked national crisis as widespread disruption consumed Los Angeles (LA). In a span of six days, roughly 1,100 buildings were defaced or destroyed, resulting in more than 50 casualties, 2,300 persons injured, and approximately $1 billion in damages.[245] Live news broadcasts showed angry, Black dissenters attacking white motorists in city intersections throughout the city, pursuing physical retribution where due process had failed. President George H. W. Bush deployed federal troops to quell disturbances throughout the metropolitan area. In all, the unrest between April 29th and May 4th, 1992, notoriously denominated as the LA Riots, left a decisive imprint on the national psyche and created a haunting image of the destructive capacity of Black rage.

The circumstances in Ferguson felt eerily similar to those in Los Angeles, causing 1990s racial anxieties to resurface in 2014. During the initial weeks of demonstrations, at least one news organization began highlighting parallels between 2014 Ferguson and 1992 LA. *NBC News* correspondent Monica Alba published an online article on September 8, 2014, with the headline, "What Ferguson Cops Can Learn from LAPD Response to Rodney King Riots." The news story, appearing less than a month after Mike Mike's tragic death, chronicled policing experts' thoughts on how the LAPD's process of rehabilitation following the LA Riots might "provide a blueprint for what happens in the coming months and years in Ferguson." While the two cities' law enforcement agencies differed greatly, it was undeniable that a still-unfolding narrative of antiblack policing yoked them together. Alba commented: "Though the 53-member Ferguson police force and the 10,000-officer LAPD are in some ways as different as two departments can be, after high profile incidents both came to symbolize racial division."[246] In both contexts, violent policing ignited longstanding racial animosity and agony over rampant police terror. The viral video documenting King's injury lurked as a spectral presence in the grainy image of uniformed officers standing over Michael Brown Jr.'s bloodied frame in the street. Both records catalogued the vulnerability of the Black male body and the compounding of Black pain. The scenes of havoc and urban ruin representative of the LA riots looked primed to be repeated in Ferguson.

Feelings of collective panic moved across the suburban geography of Ferguson and St. Louis County at large. In Ferguson, namely in the city's historic, whiter, and more affluent western region,[247] affective signifiers of fear and angst accumulated in the built environment. One *New*

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[245] Jeff Wallenfeldt, "Los Angeles Riots of 1992 | Summary, Deaths, & Facts | Britannica," April 27, 2012, https://www.britannica.com/event/Los-Angeles-Riots-of-1992.

[246] Monica Alba, "What Ferguson Cops Can Learn From LAPD Response to Rodney King Riots," NBC News, September 8, 2014, https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/michael-brown-shooting/what-ferguson-cops-can-learn-lapd-response-rodney-king-riots-n197071.

[247] For more on the distinctions between Old Ferguson and southeast Ferguson, see Fitzgerald, Mike (2019). "A Tale of Two Neighborhoods in Ferguson." July 24, 2019. https://www.stlmag.com/api/content/70c011f4-a281-11e9-

York Times report observed "boarded-up shops, police barricades, and eerily quiet streets."[248] In nearby Clayton, the predominantly-white county seat and meeting location for the trial's jurors, the erection of barricades commenced alongside a measure to "temporarily restrict traffic in the area of the St. Louis County Justice Center."[249] Throughout the region, elected officials, police departments, business owners, and residents prepared to fortify themselves against an eruption of racial anger should the jury decide to let Wilson walk free. The alterations of everyday space, public infrastructure, and private property in advance of the decision represented a palimpsest of racial phobias about the looming threat of Black encroachment and fury.

While an indictment would not remedy the tragic theft of Michael Brown Jr.'s life, it mattered to Black communities that a jury would rule an unarmed, Black 18-year-old's death by police a crime. Thus, when Prosecuting Attorney Robert McCulloch announced on a tense November evening that Darren Wilson would not be indicted on any count,[250] resentments flared. The grand jury's conclusion deepened the wound of August 9, 2014 and clarified the "afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment."[251] Said differently, the ruling made clear, yet again, that Black life remained imperiled and without protection. On Canfield Drive and beyond, Black flesh remained assailable without yield or penalty.

President Barack Obama delivered a press conference immediately after the verdict to allay the U.S. public. He urged calm, peacefulness, and adherence to law and order. He counseled demonstrators on the importance of "channeling [their] concerns constructively" rather than "destructively."[252] His address, both a request and warning, encouraged Black people to transform their extraordinary and incalculable grief into a legible grievance that could move through the protocols of government and jurisprudence. He threatened punishment if this course was abandoned. But the legal apparatus, as it did in the case of Rodney King 22 years earlier, proved itself terminally untrustworthy and unreliable. The Black President's address to the aggrieved in Ferguson and across the country symbolized what Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman term *fugitive justice*, or "the mutual imbrication of pragmatic political advance with a long history of failure."[253] Faced with the elusiveness of legal remedy and the impossibility of redress, Black folks made their grief and fury known. Michael Brown Jr.'s stepfather addressed an ailing crowd gathered at the Ferguson Police Station just after the jury's verdict and exclaimed, "Burn this bitch down."[254]

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b4f9-12f1225286c6/. Also, see: Johnson, Walter (2016). "What Do We Mean When We Say, 'Structural Racism'? A Walk down West Florissant Avenue, Ferguson, Missouri." Kalfou 3 (1). https://doi.org/10.15367/kf.v3i1.86.

[248] Manny Fernandez and Alan Blinder, "Uncertainty Upends Lives as Ferguson Awaits Grand Jury Decision," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2014, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/24/us/in-ferguson-lives-upended-by-uncertainty.html.

[249] The text of the county measure can be retrieved at: https://web.archive.org/web/20141123082506/https://www.claytonmo.gov/Government/News/Clayton_Update__November_22__2014_s2_p2647.htm

[250] Ferguson Grand Jury Does Not Indict Officer Darren Wilson (2014). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYOBtZ__eQk.

[251] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 6

[252] "President Obama Delivers a Statement on the Ferguson Grand Jury's Decision" (2014). Whitehouse.Gov. November 24, 2014. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2014/11/24/president-obama-delivers-statement-ferguson-grand-jurys-decision.

[253] Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, "Fugitive Justice," *Representations* 92, no. 1 (2005): 1–15, 3.https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2005.92.1.1.

[254] Monica Davey and Manny Fernandez, "Security in Ferguson Is Tightened After Night of Unrest," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2014, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/26/us/ferguson-missouri-violence.html.

Ferguson went up in flames. Black residents endeavored to bring the nation to a halt, force it to wade in the carnage exacted, and witness the irreparable damage done. They repeated the pedestrian acts of their counterparts who overtook LA two decades earlier: overturning and dancing atop police cars, seizing city infrastructures, raiding and destroying buildings with a tenacity that aimed to rival the state's ferocious looting of Black life. The sight of businesses ablaze, shattered glass, smoky streetscapes, and riotous Black masses in pain and reverie conjured the memory of the LA Riots[255] and enlivened the political and visual resonances between Ferguson and Los Angeles. Crucially, however, solidarity protests using similar tactics sprung up across the nation. Mass demonstrations in response to the grand jury decision unfolded in more than a dozen cities, including Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Detroit, Boston, Washington D.C., Baltimore, Houston, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Oakland, Seattle, and Portland.[256] "These demonstrations," write anthropologists Yarimar Bonilla and Johnathan Rosa, "led social media users to claim that '#Ferguson is everywhere,' emphasizing the connection between online and offline forms of protest."[257] The activation of this visual-political field across physical and digital spaces, catalyzed by the reproduction of images of conflict across broadcast and digital media using hashtags such as #Ferguson, reanimated affective economies[258] of race and hegemonic ways of seeing[259] that signify Blackness as a troubling presence.[260] Mainstream news media (e.g., *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *New York Times*, CNN, etc.) constructed the *Black body* as the sign of chaos, lawlessness, and terror in a nation under siege (Adamson 2016). Unruly Black bodies, ones that "refuse[d] the closure that the Political promises,"[261] exemplified danger for citizen-subjects in Ferguson and elsewhere imagined as the nation's rightful proprietors. Hence, 1,500 National Guard troops were deployed in Ferguson[262] to aid in frontier defense, which required the exigent regulation of Black life. For the sake of the psychic and political health of dominant society, the actions, presences, *and* images of the wayward Black body had to be policed.[263] The prevailing visual of a troubled present, haunted by a recalcitrant past, needed to

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[255] For one example, see: Siegler, Kirk (2014). "LAPD Chief Has Lessons To Share About Department's Past 'Ghosts.'" NPR, December 15, 2014, sec. Code Switch. https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/12/15/370952512/lapd-chief-has-lessons-to-share-about-departments-past-ghosts.

[256] For images and coverage of some of these protests, see NBC News, "Ferguson Protests Continue Across Nation," TIME, November 26, 2014, https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/michael-brown-shooting/ferguson-protests-continue-across-nation-n256291?cid=par-time-article_20141126. Also, for images and coverage of protestors across the nation using the specific strategies of blocking major roads and highways, see Elliot Hannon and Juliana Jiménez Jaramillo, "Ferguson Protesters Are Shutting Down America's Highways," *Slate*, November 26, 2014, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2014/11/pictures-of-ferguson-protesters-shutting-down-americas-highways.html.

[257] Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa, "#Ferguson: Digital Protest, Hashtag Ethnography, and the Racial Politics of Social Media in the United States," *American Ethnologist* 42, no. 1 (2015): 4–17, https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12112, 11

[258] Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 117–39.

[259] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, Reprint edition (London: Penguin Classic, 2008).

[260] Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*, Illustrated edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[261] Calvin L. Warren, "Black Nihilism and the Politics of Hope," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 15, no. 1 (2015): 215–48, https://doi.org/10.14321/crnewcentrevi.15.1.0215.

[262] Eric Bradner, "Obama: 'No Sympathy' for Violence in Ferguson | CNN Politics," CNN, November 25, 2014, https://www.cnn.com/2014/11/25/politics/obama-holder-ferguson/index.html.

[263] Frank Wilderson, Irreconcilable Anti-Blackness and Police Violence w Dr. Frank Wilderson - iMWiL!, October 1, 2014, https://imixwhatilike.org/2014/10/01/frankwildersonandantiblackness-2/.

recede. A different representation of the nation's relationship to the Black body was urgently needed to restore normative order.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focuses on visual representations of race, the affective and spatial politics of racial rebellion, and digital infrastructure. Its title, "Wave and Wire," refers to what global media scholar Lisa Parks calls "media infrastructure," or the local and global nexus of cable (e.g., undersea, subterranean, and surface-level cables), cellular towers, data centers, protocols, electronic devices, broadcast transmitters, and corporate telecommunications entities "involved in the local, national, and/or global distribution of audiovisual signals and data."[264] This transmission of audiovisual content and information, what Parks and Nicole Starosielski have elsewhere termed signal traffic,[265] enables the fashioning of visual, political, affective and broader discursive contexts within which various actors and publics contemplate the meanings of race, nation, and political desire.

Engaging broadcast and digital media infrastructures (e.g., social media platforms, websites, Internet architectures and protocols) in particular, I demonstrate how the online trafficking of images of racial conflict produced in the aftermath of Mike Mike's death in Ferguson constituted haunted affective, physical, and digital landscapes that continually shape dominant framings of and spatial approaches to racial protest, justice, and national futurity in the United States. As Bonilla and Rosa suggest, "[s]ocial media cast a spotlight on this small Missouri township, but more importantly, by propelling Ferguson into a broader, mediatized, virtual space, social media users were able to show that '#Ferguson is everywhere'—not only in the sense of a broad public sphere but also in the sense of *the underlying social and political relationships that haunt the nation* as a whole" (emphasis added).[266] These social and political relationships exemplified in Ferguson and lurking as a haunted presence in the nation at large, Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles remind, position Ferguson the physical place and #Ferguson the mediatized space as enduring "ciphers for national debates about American racism, police profiling and brutality, militarized responses to civil unrest, government corruption and criminal justice reform."[267] This fact also explains why Ferguson, more specifically, the turbulent events the St. Louis suburb symbolizes, continue to be regarded as watershed moments in the fashioning of the current #BlackLivesMatter movement.[268]This chapter, thus, diverges from the previous two in both its spatial and temporal scope. While analyses in chapter one and two were grounded in the specific landscape of Ferguson (and greater St. Louis) proper, this section moves beyond the region's material boundaries to examine how Ferguson, as a hybrid geography produced across physical and digital contexts, maintains a spectral presence in popular imagery of and public debates about

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[264] Lisa Parks, "'Stuff You Can Kick: Toward a Theory of Media Infrastructures.,'" in B*etween Humanities and the Digital,* ed. Patrik Svensson and David Theo Goldberg (MIT Press, 2015), 355–73, 356

[265] Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* (University of Illinois Press, 2015).

[266] Bonilla and Rosa, "#Ferguson,' 12

[267] Sarah J. Jackson and Brooke Foucault Welles, "#Ferguson Is Everywhere: Initiators in Emerging Counterpublic Networks," Information, Communication & Society 19, no. 3 (March 3, 2016): 397–418, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1106571, 397

[268] For more on Ferguson's place in the larger #BlackLivesMatter movement, see Barbara Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century*, First Edition (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018).

more recent Black political mobilizations (e.g., George Floyd Protests in 2020).

I focus on one image in particular, primarily because of its global reach and recurrence across temporal and political contexts, 2014 and 2020 respectively. The photograph, while not taken in Ferguson proper, was captured at a Ferguson solidarity rally in Portland, Oregon on November 25, 2014, the day after the St. Louis County grand jury declined to indict officer Darren Wilson in the fatal shooting of Mike Mike. It featured a Black boy and a white police officer embracing while several attendees of the protest watch from the background. The picture, for many, offered a vision of optimism in a nation beset by racialized struggles between demonstrators and militarized police. The photograph circulated widely through media networks and garnered widespread acclaim, becoming an iconic visual in the mediated environment of #Ferguson. This chapter performs a close reading of the popular image, tracing its rapid spread in late 2014 following the non-indictment of Darren Wilson, the image's disappearance in 2018 after its primary subject was murdered by his adoptive parents, and the picture's reappearance in social media discourse during the racial uprisings in summer of 2020. I argue that the staying power of the hug photo, perpetually haunted by Mike Mike's death and the ensuing rebellion in Ferguson, is shaped by a persistent political desire for Black political acquiescence in (sub)urban landscapes and recurs over time to ameliorate white angst. The photograph, in short, functions as a visual strategy of racial and spatial containment—a technology of traffic control that seeks to arrest the visibility and practice of Black insurgency across physical and digital arenas.

"The Hug Shared Round the World"



*Figure 26. Police sergeant Bret Barnum (left) and Devonte Hart (right) embracing in front of spectators at a Ferguson solidarity rally in Portland, Oregon on November 25, 2014. Photography by Johnny Nguyen (*The Oregonian*)*

If disorderly Black bodies in Ferguson and other (sub)urban spaces across the nation were an affront to the nation, the conciliatory Black body was a welcome sight. A picture capturing an embrace between a Black child named Devonte Hart and a white police sergeant named Bret Barnum at a Ferguson solidarity in Portland, Oregon was one of hundreds that entered public discourse at the height of nationwide protests incited by the events in Ferguson. Captured by freelance photographer Johnny Nguyen the day after the controversial grand jury decision, the photograph was taken at Portland's Multnomah County Justice Center, where over 2,000 demonstrators gathered to protest the announcement that Darren Wilson would not be charged. The image, in other words, was produced and haunted by Mike Mike's death and brutal reign of police terror epitomized by the jury's verdict.

The Hart family entered this turbulent context, attending the rally, as Jennifer Hart stated on her Facebook account, "with the intention of spreading love and kindness, and to remind (ALL) people that they matter in this world."[269] To materialize this impulse, Sarah and Jennifer Hart

[269] This statement comes from a now-deleted Facebook post from Jennifer Hart. The post was reproduced in a November 2014 article by *The Oregonian*. It read:

"We hit the streets (Nov. 25) with the intention of spreading love and kindness, and to remind (ALL) people that they matter in this world. ... I noticed Devonte was struggling. Tears. He wouldn't speak. He was inconsolable. My son has a heart of a gold, compassion beyond anything I've ever experienced, yet struggles with living fearlessly when it comes to the police and people that don't understand the complexity of racism that is prevalent in our society. [...] It was one of the most emotionally charged experiences I've had as a mother. He trembled holding a Free Hugs sign as he bravely stood alone in front of the police barricade. Tears rushing from his eyes and soaking

tapped Devonte. Wearing a blue and orange crewneck, an oversized leather jacket, baggy jeans, a patterned hat, blue gloves, and holding a hand-painted sign that read "Free Hugs!! Pass it on," Devonte stood amid the large crowd awaiting embraces from anyone interested. A white, police sergeant named Bret Barnum noticed Devonte and gestured to the 12-year-old to come over to him. Devonte, tearful and trembling, approached Barnum. After a short conversation, Barnum asked the frightened, Black boy for a hug. Vietnamese American freelance photographer Johnny Nguyen captured their subsequent brief embrace. The photograph shows Devonte crying as Sergeant Barnum holds him close. The picture differed substantively from the images of conflict that dominated media coverage of the protests unfolding throughout the country. Nguyen sold the image to *The Oregonian*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Oregon and one of the oldest papers in the Pacific Northwest.[270] The Oregonian published the photo online, and it spread rapidly across social media platforms.

Johnny Nguyen's photograph of Devonte Hart and Sergeant Bret Barnum, locked in tender grasp at a Ferguson-related protest in Portland, came just in time to ease white fears about the evolution of Black revolt in Ferguson and its movement beyond Missouri's borders. Nguyen believed he had captured the quintessential image not only of Devonte and Barnum's embrace, but of the political moment writ large. After three shutters of the 50mm lens on his Canon 6D camera, he was sure of it. Nguyen was so certain of the photograph's merit (and commercial value) that, after uploading the photo to his Instagram page to much site traffic and acclaim, he "decided [he] wanted more of the world to see it." Nguyen approached Oregon's largest newspaper, *The Oregonian*, to sell the photograph. The publication purchased the image[271] and featured it as a visual supplement to a story about how "one officer and a young man paused to hear each other out" in the midst of "an otherwise hectic Ferguson rally in Portland."[272] Within a few hours of its posting online by *The Oregonian*, the photo was shared more than 150,000 times by users on Facebook.[273] In a matter of days, the picture achieved more than 400,000 shares on Facebook and over 68,000 reblogs on Tumblr.[274] Reacting to the image's extensive reach, *The Oregonian* dubbed the photograph "the hug shared around the world."

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his sweater, he gazed upon them not knowing how they would react. After a while, one of the officers approached him and extended his hand. Their interaction was uncomfortable at first. [...] There were generic questions about his favorite subject and what he liked to do in the summer, but the one that mattered hit straight to the heart. He asked Devonte why he was crying. His response about his concerns regarding the level of police brutality towards young Black kids was met with an unexpected and seemingly authentic (to Devonte), "Yes. *sigh* I know. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." The officer then asked if he could have one of his hugs."

[270] Britannica, "The Oregonian | American Newspaper | Britannica," May 9, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Oregonian.

[271] Joseph Rose, "Portland Photographer behind Viral Ferguson Rally 'hug Photo' Knew 'This Kid Was Special,'" OregonLive, November 30, 2014, https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2014/11/ferguson_photographer_hug_port.html.

[272] Special to The Oregonian, "Photo: Police Officer and Young Demonstrator Share Hug during Ferguson Rally in Portland," OregonLive, November 28, 2014, https://www.oregonlive.com/multimedia/2014/11/photo_police_officer_and_citiz.html.

[273] For more on this, see: The Oregonian/OregonLive (2014). "150,000 Facebook Posters Share Story of Young Demonstrator's Tearful Hug with Portland Officer." OregonLive. November 29, 2014. https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2014/11/post_495.html.

[274] Emirates 24|7, "Icon of Hope: Ferguson Picture Will Touch You Forever - News - Emirates24|7," December 2, 2014, https://www.emirates247.com/news/icon-of-hope-ferguson-picture-will-touch-you-forever-2014-12-02-1.571943.

The velocity of the photograph's spread across social media platforms, news publications, and independent blogs[275] were markers of the image's status as a media crease. Abigail De Kosnik defines the media crease as "an external manifestation of an individual's drive to engage over and over with a specific piece (text, genre, event) of media or social media."[276] The hug photo was shared and engaged repetitively by thousands of individual users, dominating news cycles, newsfeeds, and public discourse in the first several weeks of its emergence. *CNN* described Nguyen's photograph as "*the picture we needed to see* after this past week's turmoil."[277] *The Monitor* reported that the picture of Devonte and Barnum's embrace was "instantly emblematic of an effort to heal in the aftermath of the Aug. 9 shooting of an unarmed teenager, Michael Brown," and represented "a small catharsis" in the nation's disastrous racial politics.[278] The image, as a digital media crease, aroused powerful affective networks among viewers who eagerly reproduced the photograph across a variety of mediums. Its national and global reach reflected larger and hegemonic "cultural preferences, tastes, and investments"[279] regarding the visual discourse of race. In an interview with *The Oregonian*, Nguyen shared thoughts on why his photo resonated with so many people. He remarked:

> In the midst of all the photos depicting Ferguson and the riots and the protests (prompted by a grand-jury decision to not indict Officer Darren Wilson, 28, for fatally shooting unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown), the images have depicted violence, anguish and anger. But this one showed humanity, hope and positivity. I think, deep down, that's how every human being wants it to be. That's what people want to see. It's a reflection of where [we] want to go. The photo shows there is humanity left -- there is hope.[280]

Nguyen maintained that his image of Devonte and Barnum "showed humanity, hope and positivity" and provided visual proof that "there is humanity left -- there is hope." He narrated the photograph as an important and direct counter to the images that dominated national coverage of the events in Ferguson. The picture's thematic distinctiveness, in other words, informed its popularity and circulation.

A closer reading of Nguyen's words reveals an implicit commentary on race, visuality, and political desire. In his comments, Nguyen discursively equates "photos depicting *Ferguson and the riots and the protests*" (emphasis mine) with, from his view, repugnant images of "violence, anguish, and anger." That Nguyen assigns negative value to representations of rioting and protesting (and by extension, rioters and protestors) as opposed to say, militarized law enforcement that quelled dissent and spatial sovereignty in Ferguson, is purposeful. Nguyen frames rioters and protesters *in particular* as visually and politically displeasing, as social problems at odds with the desired national image. Akin to the ways urban planners, realtors, neighborhood associations, and municipal governments coded Black presence in greater St. Louis as markers of deviance and risk, Nguyen constructs Black demonstrators as the bearers of disorder, not the regimes of social

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[275] Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York ; London: NYU Press, 2013).

[276] Abigail De Kosnik et al., *Media Crease*, (forthcoming).

[277] Emanuella Grinberg, "The Hug Shared around the World," CNN, November 29, 2014, https://www.cnn.com/2014/11/29/living/ferguson-protest-hug/index.html.

[278] Patrik Jonsson, "Devonte Hart, Sgt. Bret Barnum, and the Hug Felt 'round the World," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 29, 2014, https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2014/1129/Devonte-Hart-Sgt.-Bret-Barnum-and-the-hug-felt-round-the-world.

[279] Abigail De Kosnik et al., *Media Crease*, (forthcoming).

[280] Rose, "Portland Photographer behind Viral Ferguson Rally 'hug Photo' Knew 'This Kid Was Special,'"

injustice that catalyzed them. Though he does not explicitly mention race, Nguyen's response activates an entrenched semiotic and political field wherein Black protest is denigrated as characteristically excessive, alienating, and irreverent. The subtext powering Nguyen's remarks, I argue, is that depictions of Black suffering and concomitant Black political outcry instantiate visual and political crises that taint the national image.

As Juliet Hooker astutely instructs, Black protest is often maligned for its "refusal to abide by the so-called norms of democratic civility."[281] Nguyen repeats this valuation of Black dissent, casting it as the antithesis of "what people want to see." His pronouncement on the Ferguson protests and riots exemplifies Nicole Fleetwood's assertion that "Blackness troubles vision in Western discourse."[282] For Nguyen, the sight of "violence, anguish and anger," his colorblind euphemisms for Black rage and Black pain in Ferguson, poses a threat to Western ideals of civil society, humanity, citizenship, and national futurity. Fleetwood argues further that "the troubling affect of Blackness becomes heightened when located on certain bodies marked as such."[283] This troubling affect, I argue, accretes tremendously in the image of the radical, the rioter, and the looter. These figures, constructed as varying signs for the criminal Black body across time,[284] provoke racialized dread, displeasure, and fear in the white political and visual imagination. Importantly, the intensity of these sensations and sentiments are substantively shaped by a larger cultural politics of space. Because suburban ecosystems are still implicitly coded as domains of whiteness to be protected, the presence of the insurgent Black body in suburban geographies multiplies white racial angst considerably. To borrow from Frantz Fanon, the visible Black body in pain and revolt, especially within the context of a historically-white suburb, functions as a "phobogenic object"[285]— a psychosocial projection of racist fictions, phobias, and grotesque fantasies.

The image of Devonte and Barnum, by contrast, offered a different sight of the Black body, and therefore, a different *and more pleasing* sight of the nation to behold for viewers like Nguyen looking from a white-liberal gaze. Devonte, I contend, was read by this audience, not as phobogenic but *culturally photogenic*. A photogenic subject is one that viewers enjoy looking at. Being photogenic implies a subject that compels attention by representing attributes that viewers find appealing. In this context, Devonte, embracing and being embraced by a white police officer, was a subject dominant society enjoyed looking at during a heightened moment of nationwide racial strife incited by the Ferguson Uprising. The image of the hug, then, is attractive to the hegemonic order, or culturally photogenic, because Devonte performs a vision of Blackness that yields to power, one that colludes with dominant political desire.

From Nguyen's point of view, Devonte and Barnum's embrace was not simply the climactic moment of the protest. It represented, for him, "the best way to go about our struggles" regarding race writ large. In fact, when he first encountered Devonte holding a "Free Hugs" sign around his

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[281] Juliet Hooker, "Black Protest / White Grievance: On the Problem of White Political Imaginations Not Shaped by Loss," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 116, no. 3 (July 1, 2017): 483–504, https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-3961450, 484.

[282] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 6

[283] ibid.

[284] Robin D. G. Kelley, "Opinion | What Kind of Society Values Property Over Black Lives?," *The New York Times*, June 18, 2020, sec. Opinion, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/18/opinion/george-floyd-protests-looting.html.

[285] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox, Revised edition (New York : Berkeley, Calif.: Grove Press, 2008).

neck, Nguyen felt compelled to photograph the weeping child. In a December 2014 interview with *My Modern Met*, Nguyen remarked:

> What compelled me about Devonte was the fact that he was the only one in the midst of a hundred protestors holding signs that could otherwise be seen as violent, angry, hateful, and graphic, who had a sign around his neck that said 'Free Hugs.' This opposite was what immediately drew me to Devonte.

Nguyen continued further:

> He also had tears running down his face when he hugged people. It wasn't until Sgt. Barnum and Devonte started to speak that I knew I had to really stay at the scene. The stark juxtaposition between White American Cop and Young African-American Boy is what got me.[286]

Nguyen's interest in Devonte as a photographic subject, which ultimately led him to capture the iconic hug, was framed by his aversion to protestors' political statements about police. He describes the other demonstrators' signs as "violent, angry, hateful, and graphic." Nguyen desires a more conciliatory attitude, and Devonte's 'Free Hugs' sign satiates that longing. Importantly, however, while the sign drew Nguyen to Devonte, it was the stark juxtaposition between a Black boy and a white cop that got him.

Nguyen's specific diction of *stark* and *cop* are crucial here. In a November 2014 interview with *The Oregonian*, Nguyen disclosed that he first photographed Devonte hugging "another [white] man, not Sgt. Barnum." Devonte and Barnum's embrace, however, presented an even greater contrast. The "stark juxtaposition" that Nguyen describes, then, is not only about Devonte's Blackness and Barnum's whiteness. Nguyen was further enchanted by the particular, historical social relations signified by Devonte and Barnum—a Black boy and a white *cop*, respectively. For Nguyen and the spectators within the frame, the embrace carried a powerful affective charge, that special "something,"[287] because the white *policing* body meeting the Black *policed* body with compassionate touch, rather than murderous aggression, was read as racial aberration. Further, and more importantly, the Black *policed* body meeting the white *policing* body with open arms, rather than ungovernable rage, was read as national reprieve. This was especially true in the immediate context of a political demonstration against police brutality, and in a broader visual, cultural, and political milieu where images of violent racial confrontation predominated. A white police officer hugging a Black kid defied the relation Nguyen understood to exist between law enforcement and Black life. It was, for Nguyen and many, not just a hopeful symbol of coming together. It was, for him, a radical inversion of the encounter between Darren Wilson and Mike Mike altogether. According to Nguyen, this was the message that had to be conveyed, that "love is the fix;" that "[l]ove and compassion is the real answer," not fury and resentment.[288]

Nguyen's image, haunted by Mike Mike's killing, launched a powerful iteration of what Zizi Papacharissi terms *affective publics*, or "networked public formations that are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment."[289] Papacharissi, limning the

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[286] Jenny Zheng, "Powerful Story Behind the Young Protestor Hugging a Police Officer at a Ferguson Demonstration," My Modern Met, December 1, 2014, https://mymodernmet.com/johnny-nguyen-devonte-hart-bret-barnum-ferguson-demonstration/.

[287] Emirates 24|7, "Icon of Hope: Ferguson Picture Will Touch You Forever - News - Emirates24|7"

[288] Zheng, "Powerful Story Behind the Young Protestor Hugging a Police Officer at a Ferguson Demonstration"

[289] Zizi Papacharissi, *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 125.

relationship between emotion, technology, and politics, chronicles how the technical affordances of platforms (e.g., liking, sharing, retweeting, hashtags) produce "mediated feelings of connectedness" and "facilitate networked circulations of affective flows" that shape experiences of political belonging and identification.[290] The spread of the hug photo produced a nodal and distributed network of affective energy that, in sum, congealed an affective public buttressed by tangible (infra)structures of hopeful feeling. Comments, "hearts," "likes," and "retweets" across platforms exemplified exchanges of sentiment and affective identification among individual users. Sprawling webs of hyperlinks established connections between news coverage of the hug photo and related sites including blogs about Devonte's transracial adoption story, the Hart family's Facebook profile, and Nguyen's Instagram page. News organizations and social media companies capitalized on the emotional fervor, leveraging new media forums (e.g., CNN on Facebook) and user-generated content such as hashtags (e.g., #DevonteHart) to shape discourse, compel user engagement, and drive site traffic.

In addition to Papacharissi's idea of affective publics, Sara Ahmed's theorization of *affective economies* is also useful here. Ahmed instructs that in affective economies, emotions do not inhere in objects but rather circulate and distribute across objects, signs, and bodies through movement. In this process of movement, emotions generate surplus-value, defined in this equation as affective value. In other words, within the digital and broadcast networks that disseminated and reproduced Nguyen's picture of the hug, "emotions [worked] as a form of capital."[291] The spread (movement) of the photograph translated to the accrual of dynamic modes of political feeling and emotional expression that connected hundreds of thousands of adoring viewers across time and space. While this affective public was by no means exclusively white or uncontested, it functioned metonymically as white,[292] hegemonic both in its affects and effects. This public, therefore, produced an interpretive racial commonsense—a "dominant or preferred meaning"[293] of the embrace—that, due to the vast accumulation of affective force, averted, bypassed, eclipsed, and barricaded critiques of the iconic photograph. The picture, in tandem with its dissemination, thus, functioned as technology of visual discipline. If seeing, as visual culture theorist Nicholas Mirzeoff contends, is "the intersection of what we know, what we perceive, and what we feel, using all our senses,"[294] then the hug photo functioned to regulate our sight, affective politics, and epistemology of racial violence. Each repetitive and laudatory share of the image bolstered its regulatory power. The widespread circulation of the image was a consequence of an extant affective, political, and visual landscape that framed Black anger and anguish as ocular problems and threats to the nation. The image offered a different image of Blackness that enabled affective publics to imagine the nation anew; a nation where the demands and exercises of Black insurgency faded from view.

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[290] ibid., 15.

[291] Ahmed, "Affective Economies," 120.

[292] For more on metonymic whiteness, see: Smith, Christen A. (2016). *Afro-Paradise: Blackness, Violence, and Performance in Brazil*. Illustrated edition. Urbana; Chicago; Springfield: University of Illinois Press.

[293] Stuart Hall, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, 1973), 513.

[294] Nicholas Mirzoeff, "The Murder of Michael Brown: Reading the Ferguson Grand Jury Transcript," *Social Text* 34, no. 1 (126) (March 1, 2016): 49–71, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-3427129, 49.

Can't We All Just Get Along?

In 1992, after several days of rioting in Los Angeles, Rodney King was called on to symbolize the possibility of reconciliation in a city divided by race. As the victim of police violence that catalyzed the mass uprisings, King, in the eyes of the city officials, was the perfect person to craft an appeal for peace. In a televised address on May 1st, 1992, King spoke publicly for the first time since his brutal injury. King posed a weighty question that continues to echo in our present—*can't we all just get along?* King's reverberant query, coupled with his amiable appearance on the world stage, transformed him into a racial icon. His desperate plea would "become part of the story Americans tell each other and the world about the unfolding of the nation and the possibility of democracy."[295] His words, shared instantaneously with viewers across the world, circulated extensively. The live broadcast of his speech served as a "conduit for affective expression"[296] and functioned politically to arrest Black demonstrators' outrage at yet another instance of police impunity. This framing of his speech followed King to his eventual death in 2012. Discussing the mainstream media coverage of King's passing, Nicole Maurantonio writes:

> Across coverage of King's funeral, journalists repeatedly commented on King as "a forgiving man who bore the scars of his infamous beating with dignity." The repetition of this phrase across news outlets nationwide suggests that King was to be lauded for bearing the burden of his beating in such a quiet way, making him a "model" civil rights icon. The burden, of course, was not simply physical. It was historical—reminiscent of the brutality enacted by whites against Black people for centuries. Despite this, Rodney King was not angry. He did not turn the injustice of American racism into a site for expressing anger.[297]

Media outlets' production of a narrative about King that lauded his capacity for forgiveness is not only suggestive of how he was read in 1992. It is indicative of a larger cultural repudiation of Black rage and radical action that endures in the present. King bore "the burden of his beating" *quietly* and *refused anger*. He represented an image of Blackness that is enduringly desirable to the normative social order—one that displays the appropriate form of political comportment in the face of police terror and judicial ineptitude, one that *yields to the haunted traffic of antiblackness*.

In this way, King's iconic, televised oration is yoked to Nguyen's iconic photograph of Devonte and Barnum. Devonte, as the image's cardinal figure, shouldered a similar public burden to ameliorate racial angst and disavow Black fury. Like King, Devonte was cast as a visible proxy for the power relations between Blackness and law enforcement. Devonte, similarly, was interpreted as a peaceable body to recuperate the value of U.S policing by performing Blackness as willing to forgive, reconcile with, and embrace state power. Such visions would supposedly rehabilitate the embattled soul of the United States in Mike Mike's wake.[298] So, although Devonte's white adoptive mother described him as an "inconsolable" Black boy who "struggles with living fearlessly when it comes to police,"[299] his embrace of a police officer was, in turn, used to assuage the nation's collective fear of Blackness. These political and affective congruences

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[295] Nicole R. Fleetwood, *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination*, First Edition, First (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 4.

[296] ibid.

[297] Nicole Maurantonio, "Remembering Rodney King: Myth, Racial Reconciliation, and Civil Rights History," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 91, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 740–55, https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699014550094, 748.

[298] Jonsson, "Devonte Hart, Sgt. Bret Barnum, and the Hug Felt 'round the World"

[299] Quote from Jennifer Hart Facebook post.

across 1992 and 2014, I believe, produce an observable resemblance between King's plea and Devonte's hug. The affinities between these two iconic moments illustrates what Black studies scholar and visual culture theorist Leigh Raiford calls *hypericonization.*

Hypericonization, Raiford instructs, refers to a photographic practice "in which viewers [are] presented with the restaging of representations."[300] Said differently, hypericonization describes how images accrue symbolic power by restaging past events and reproducing pervasive cultural scripts. Raiford reads this process at work in "an eight-page fashion layout entitled 'Free Angela: Actress Cynda Williams as Angela Davis, *Fashion* Revolutionary" that appeared in the March 1994 issue of *Vibe* Magazine. "The layout," she writes, "combined re-creations of pictures of [Angela] Davis from the early 1970s and a pastiche of Black Panther and Third Worldist iconography, specifically Black men with large Afros wearing leather jackets and sunglasses."[301] Raiford argues that the magazine's re-enactment and stylization of recognizable photographs of Angela Davis—namely, images circulated by the FBI to surveil and police the activist and scholar—"free[d] Angela from the political exigencies of 1970 yet imprison[ed] her in the outward appearances of that earlier moment."[302] In other words, the *Vibe* fashion spread reproduced the identifiable visual and cultural aesthetics of the 1970s Black Power movement while occluding their turbulent political context.

I want to suggest that Nguyen's hug photo of Devonte and Barnum functions as a hypericon of King's telecasted inquiry. The picture repeated the affective sentiment attached to King's aural gesture toward reconciliation. Furthermore, it revivified a visual correlate: the amicable Black body in a context of Black unruliness. As Devonte wept, encumbered and vulnerable in Sergeant Bret Barnum's arms, I argue that many *saw* in Devonte what those in an earlier era *heard* in Rodney King's urgent request in 1992. King had asked if a fraught and disjointed national public could get along. It was an appeal and an open question. In Devonte, though, enamored spectators found their definitive answer. A December 2014 article published by *The Oregonian* contemplating the different interpretations of Devonte and Barnum's embrace made this case precisely. The writers even paraphrased King's iconic words. The article, written by Casey Parks, read: "What could be more welcome and healing in the wake of Ferguson than a photo that offers an instant view of hope and reconciliation? *Can't we all just get along?* Yes. Here's visual proof" (emphasis added).[303] While the author eventually concludes that the "picture is as much Rorschach test as historical record," I find it compelling that they reanimate King's iconic utterance to make sense of Devonte's hug with Barnum. Nguyen's image is narrated as the visual response to King's lasting question. But just as both—Devonte's embrace and King's plea—attempt to beckon towards a democratic and postracialist horizon, they are apprehended, haunted, by the monstrous acts that produced them. As viewers watched King's press conference, they recalled the grotesque traffic stop and innumerable blows to his body. As viewers watched Devonte locked in Barnum's arms, they recalled the bullet-ridden silhouette of a Black teen in the street.

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[300] Leigh Raiford, "Restaging Revolution: Black Power, Vibe Magazine, and Photographic Memory," in *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory*, ed. Renee Christine Romano and Leigh Raiford (University of Georgia Press, 2006), 220–50, 222.

[301] ibid.

[302] ibid., 223

[303] Casey Parks, "Portland Hug Photo Debate: Is It a Post-Ferguson Symbol of Hope or Something Else?," OregonLive, December 8, 2014, https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2014/12/portland_hug_photo_debate_is_i.html.

A Visual Corrective

In Nguyen's image, Devonte and Barnum occupy the foreground; several spectators appear in the middle and background of the image. Barnum is dressed in full police uniform. The Portland Bureau of Police badge is visible on his shoulder. His reflective helmet is tightly clasped beneath his chin. A flashlight is attached to his hip and sits adjacent to the gun firmly set in its holster. Barnum leans against his motorcycle, positioned in the center of the road, perhaps strategically, to contain the crowd from encroaching into the nearby intersection. As the previous chapter showcased, protestors in Ferguson often seized city streets through pedestrian acts, stopping the flow of traffic, commerce, and exchange. These tactics were adopted across the nation, constituting interstate repertoires of refusal. Barnum's placement of the motorcycle may have been a subtle gesture to dissuade the proliferation of those practices. At the time of the photograph, Barnum held the title of sergeant and was tasked with overseeing traffic management and coordinating police presence at special events. This included "all athletic events, parades, and mobile protest events."[304] In other words, Barnum's professional duties centered on maintaining social and spatial order—an urgent set of responsibilities for law enforcement in the context of Ferguson. Insofar as Barnum was present to do his job, his role at the demonstration was to maintain and compel orderliness, to ensure those gathered remained in their literal and figurative lane, and to curtail the enactment of rage following the grand jury's sanction of Mike Mike's death. Barnum's embrace of Devonte must be evaluated with this in mind.

Barnum's arms are clasped around Devonte's back in an embrace. Devonte's jacket is furled beneath Barnum's fingertips, indicating that the hug is tight, or that Devonte's coat is oversized, or both. Barnum's facial expression is muted and imprecise but seems to approach an expression of relief. Devonte, alternatively, displays an unmistakable emotional fervor. He is tearful, vulnerable, and ailing. His gloved hand rests precariously atop Barnum's upper back. Devonte's grasp, compared to Barnum's, seems weak, as if a slight shift in movement might send his weary frame to the ground. Overall, the image is full of subtle contrasts: Devonte's youthful frailty and Barnum's authoritative largeness, Devonte's melancholic stare and Barnum's expression of pleased surprise, Devonte's vulnerable Blackness and the consumptive whiteness of everyone else in the photo (the three onlookers and Barnum). Barnum, clothed in a dark, nondescript police uniform that ironically magnifies his whiteness, appears conservative, monotone, reserved. Devonte, oppositely, is saturated, which, in the domain of photography, signals the degree to which an object or entity is differentiated from white. Here, Devonte is saturated, *a colored body thrown against a not-so-sharp white background*.[305] He is suffused with texture, emotional intensity, pigment, or the epidermal markings of racial difference. Because of his teary display, the visual facticity of his Blackness, and the imperceptibility of whiteness, Devonte is distinguished considerably. He catalyzes the image's affective power.

To reiterate, the political and affective force of the picture resides in Devonte's signification of Black acquiescence, which Nguyen and many others read as a necessary turn away from fury and resentment and a turn toward love and compassion. Nguyen encodes this thesis into the visual and formal elements of the photograph, primarily through the inclusion of spectators within the frame and the use of a 50mm lens. Nguyen needed the spectators in the frame to appear as

[304] Description retrieved from Sgt. Bret Barnum's LinkedIn profile

[305] Hurston, Zora Neale (1928). "How It Feels To Be Colored Me." https://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA01/Grand-Jean/Hurston/Chapters/how.html.

witnesses. Thus, he fashioned a medium shot that plots a relationship between Devonte, Barnum, and the spectators watching the scene. Nguyen uses the bystanders' repertoires to register the affective consequence and political importance of the embrace.

To capture the image, Nguyen used a Canon 6D digital camera with a 50mm lens. His choice in lens is purposeful in this case. In addition to several key attributes, 50mm lenses are renowned for their command of *bokeh*, or the aesthetic quality of the blurry, out-of-focus parts of an image. With this particular lens, a photographer can produce creative or dramatic effect by juxtaposing sharp, well-defined areas and cloudy, ill-defined ones in the same photograph. The result is an image that appears cohesive, balanced, and akin to human perception. The defined elements are easily apprehended because the out-of-focus regions of the image are soft, smooth, and blurred. This aesthetic property is achieved by the 50mm lens itself, rather than in post-production editing, and grants the photographer ample opportunities to guide attention, convey importance, and assign meaning (Figure 27).



Figure 27. 50mm lenses, like the one Nguyen uses to capture Devonte and Barnum's embrace, are known for their command of bokeh, or the quality of the blurred, out-of-focus components of an image.

In the photograph, Devonte and Barnum are placed left and in the first-third of the frame, where, in the United States, our eyesight is culturally primed to look first. Devonte and Barnum appear sharp and in-focus, enhanced by the haziness of the surrounding details. In the middle ground, two white onlookers appear as spectators of the scene (Figure 28). The rightmost person in the frame displays an ambivalent expression. Their body is angled toward something else (likely the crowd gathered at the steps of the Multnomah County Justice Center), but their gaze is fixed on Devonte and Barnum. The embrace competes for this person's attention and ultimately triumphs.



Figure 28. Two spectators bearing witness to Devonte and Barnum's hug.

The other viewer's countenance exhibits a subtle grin from behind their smartphone. This observer holds a protest sign beneath their arm—its text masterfully concealed and rendered out-of-focus by the 50mm lens—while capturing the notable moment. Their desire to enunciate a political statement through signage is superseded, at least for a moment, by an immediate compulsion to witness and document.

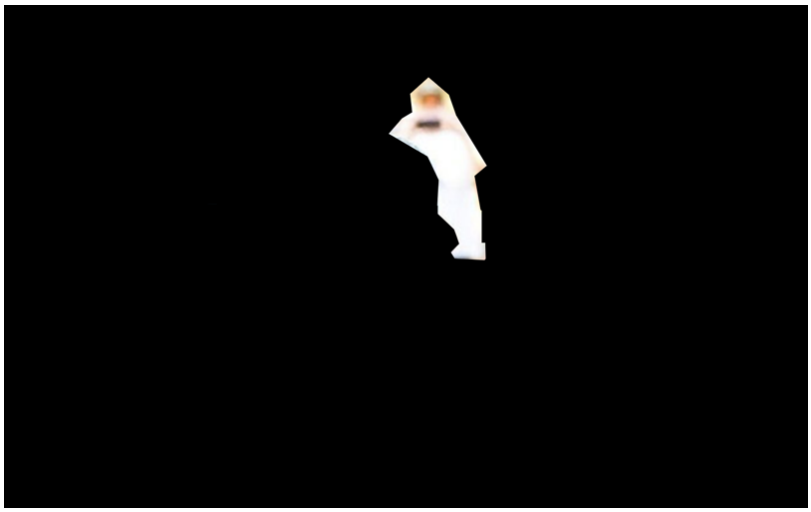


Figure 29. A third spectator making a record of Devonte and Barnum's hug.

A final viewer emerges in the image's background (Figure 29). The face of this third spectator is almost completely hidden by a cellular device. With their smartphone steadied between both hands, this individual views and records the performance taking place.

Nguyen's choices to include the spectators and use a 50mm lens acted in tandem to do discursive work. They enabled him to encode the image from his (and a generalized white-liberal)

political and affective standpoint. Through the picture, Nguyen urges that we focus on displays of compassion and hope rather than expressions of pain and rage. He declares that moments of embrace are more productive than protests and demonstrations; that a Black boy and white cop hugging was more instructive than any remark uttered on the Justice Center's steps. Nguyen's image performs this sentiment strategically by *blurring* (rather than cropping) the context in which the hug occurs, deemphasizing it in importance but not so much that we lose the setting altogether. The details surrounding Devonte and Barnum are made foggy but remain vital to the image. Nguyen, I argue, still needs us to see that a demonstration is unfolding. He needs us to see that a spectator chooses to look at Devonte and Barnum despite being physically oriented toward the protestors; that the person chose to give their attention to the embrace and not the assembled mass or the speakers at the rally. He needs us to see that a spectator tucks a sign beneath their arm and wants us to conclude that the words written on it do not matter, yet we are still able to make out the spectator's smartphone and smile. Nguyen needs us to see that Devonte and Barnum's embrace is the important thing here, not the Ferguson solidarity rally in which it takes place. *The hug is the act we should remember, record, and reproduce. The hug is the correct way to effect change.*

What we see in Nguyen's image, I insist, amounts to more than an uncritically optimistic representation of race relations or a restorative portrayal of police. The photo forwards an affective thesis about the place of Black rage and pain in civil society. The photograph rejects Black rage as an acceptable mode of political expression and denies it contemplation. It urges that we refuse "turn[ing] the injustice of American racism into a site for expressing anger."[306] Pain and anguish are permissible insofar as they remain politically opaque. This explains why, for all that was said about the hug, we know nothing definitive about Devonte's tears. Nguyen, in effect, gives the nation an image that obfuscates and arrests Black radical demand. Wielding the camera and lens as technologies of political and optical discipline, Nguyen diverts attention away from and *bypasses* the radical possibilities of protest, insurrection, and refusal. In this way, the image, I argue, functions as a strategy of containment, or a form of traffic control. Deceptively disguised as visual confirmation that we all *can* get along, his image attempts to discipline our sight toward an example of how the Black body should behave.

[306] Maurantonio, "Remembering Rodney King," 748.

Things Fall Apart

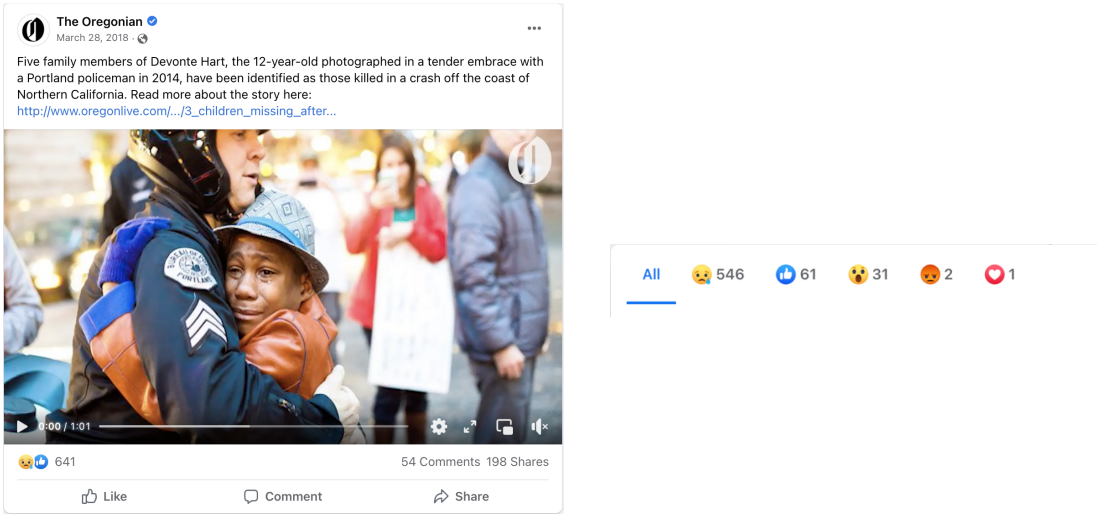


Figure 30. Author screenshot of the posting of the article detailing the Hart family crash on The Oregonian's Facebook page, as well as the different reactions to the post by Facebook users.

In 2018, several years after Nguyen captured hug photo at a Ferguson-related protest, news reports surfaced that Devonte and his siblings had been killed in a murder-suicide by their adoptive parents, Jennifer and Sarah Hart. As this tragic story circulated, the affective public that formed around the Nguyen's iconic image fell apart. *The Oregonian*, which first published the photo and contributed to its early spread, ran a story chronicling the Hart family's life story leading up to the crash. The article was shared nearly 4,000 times, and the corresponding social media post for the story (see Figure 30) recorded a relatively small level of engagement on Facebook. Notably, the release of the platform's "Reactions" feature just two years earlier enabled users to express specific responses to Facebook posts. The predetermined emotional responses include Like, Love, Haha, Wow, Sad and Angry.[307] The vast majority of users who reacted to *The Oregonian's* 2018 post indicated a feeling of sadness. Some commanded the "Wow" reaction to express shock and devastation. In the comments, people reported being distraught. One commenter shared that the news caused them distress and bodily discomfort. They fell apart in a literal sense: "Welp. This story was horrible enough, but somehow this revelation, that one of the lost children was *the boy in that image*, makes me feel even more sick to my stomach. I'm just gonna flip my table and go lie down in a fetal position somewhere" (emphasis added).[308] The comment demonstrates that "the hug shared around the world" faltered as a transmitter of public optimism and morphed into a stimulus of affective devastation. The conciliatory sentiment expressed by the photo deteriorated; the phantasmic vision of racial stability spread by the photo's circulation on social media platforms eroded. The realization of this induced nausea and tantrum.

[307] For more on Facebook's "Reactions" feature, see: "Like and React to Posts | Facebook Help Center." n.d. Accessed May 22, 2023. https://www.facebook.com/help/.

[308] This comment appears in the comment section of *The Oregonian*'s Facebook post sharing the story of the fatal crash. https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064955011108/search/?q=Devonte%20Hart

301 Redirect

In November 2014, *The Huffington Post* published an article titled "Photo of Young Boy Hugging Officer at Ferguson Rally Goes Viral and Becomes 'Icon of Hope'." The piece appeared in the publication's "Black Voices" imprint and joined other news organizations in assessing the popularity of the image of Devonte and Barnum's embrace. The headline nods to a remark Nguyen shared while being interviewed in 2014. Nguyen stated that people across the world viewed the picture as "*an icon of hope in regard to race in America*." While the link[309] for the article remains functional, it reroutes to a statement from the publication's editor (see Figure 31). Instead of the text of the original November 2014 story, a user finds a note explaining why the article is no longer accessible. According to the editor's note, the fatal "act raises retrospective questions about the circumstances of the photograph covered in this article, so HuffPost has removed them."

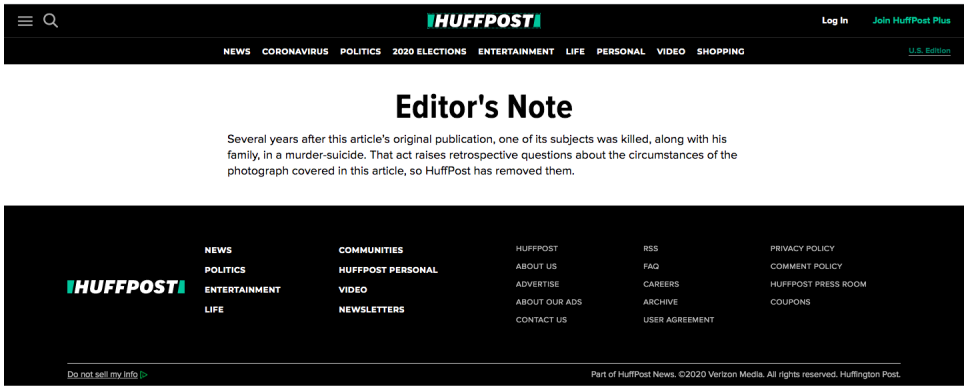


Figure 31. Author screenshot of HuffPost Editor's Note regarding previous web story on "The Hug" photo

It is not immediately clear when the editor at *Huffington Post* withdrew the initial November 2014 article. A review of screen captures I conducted on Internet Archive[310] revealed that, as late as July 15, 2018 (nearly four months after the murder-suicide), the original 2014 article was still readable, just on a redesigned webpage (see Figure 32). Internet Archive retained no screen captures of the article's webpage in 2019. However, by early June 2020, it appears that the address was redirecting traffic to a page displaying the explanation. In November 2020, Internet Archive attempted to crawl the webpage and received a *Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) 301 response status code* (see Figure 33).

[309] "HuffPost | Editor's Note." n.d. Accessed May 22, 2023. https://www.huffpost.com/static/editors-note-060120. The original link to the article is: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/30/young-boy-hugs-officer-viral_n_6244604.html

[310] Internet Archive is a free and accessible digital library that houses collections of digitized materials including websites, audiovisual data, software applications, and more.



Figure 32. Author screenshots of now-removed versions of HuffPost article on Devonte Hart and Sgt. Barnum's embrace. The first screenshot (left) shows the article as it appeared on December 1, 2014. The second (right) shows the article as on July 15, 2018. Articles retrieved via Internet Archive



Figure 33. Author screenshot of HTTP 301 response code via Internet Archive

Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) refers to a set of protocols that underpin Internet use. It is a standardized language that principally supports communication and informational exchanges between web browsers (e.g., Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari; also referred to as clients) and web servers. When an Internet user wishes to access a particular website, they enter a web address, or Uniform Resource Locator (URL). Web addresses or URLs correspond to physical locations where the components of a website are stored. Hence, when a user inputs a URL into a web browser (client), the browser sends a request to a specific computer and awaits a response.

Web servers are software programs stored on (large-scale) computers that field requests from web browsers. Web servers are tasked with retrieving websites (e.g., google.com, facebook.com, etc.) that are housed on a computer. After a user queries a web server by inputting a web address, the web server on that computer searches for the elemental pieces of data (e.g., text files, images, style attributes) relevant to the requested website. If found, the web server assembles the disparate contents and returns the complete website to the browser (client) as a response. Status responses are a class of codes that indicate whether or not a query between a client and server was successful and why. In particular, the 301-response status code, known as a redirect code, returns when a server is instructed to permanently redirect a client to a different URL than the original one

requested. Its function is to definitively reroute web traffic to a new location when desired or necessary.

This is the code structure underlying the HuffPost editor's note. Any request to access the original URL of the article's webpage permanently redirects users to a different address housing the statement from the editor. This technical maneuver is significant. The 301-response status code, known as a *redirect code*, returns when a server is instructed to permanently redirect a client to a different URL than the original one requested. Its function is to definitively reroute web traffic to a new location when desired or necessary.[311]

HuffPost Application of 301 Redirect code	
Original URL of *HuffPost* article	http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/30/young-boy-hugs-officer-viral_n_6244604.html
New URL of *HuffPost* editor's note	https://www.huffpost.com/static/editors-note-060120

404 Broken Links

Another, perhaps more familiar, response status code is the *404 "not found" error*. This response is returned when a web server cannot locate the website requested by the client. A user seeks a web resource that is no longer there. 404 error codes are described colloquially as *broken links*. Sociocultural anthropologist Linda Seligmann helps us comprehend the significance of broken links in a different way. She provides a *social* definition of broken links, specifically related to cultural understandings of filiation and the politics of transracial adoption. For her, broken links refer to "what is missing or unknown in the lives of birth parents, adoptive parents, and their children."[312] Seligmann's theorization, when read alongside the technical (404 error code), I argue, enables us to clearly perceive the intimacies between infrastructure, visuality, and affect.

First, let us briefly return to the image. The affective and disciplinary power of Nguyen's image hinged greatly on Devonte's signification of amicable Blackness, set in contrast to the ungovernability of Black Ferguson protestors in 2014. Part of its impact and appeal, however, was derived from Devonte's identity as a transracial adoptee. It explains why narratives of Devonte's life often circulated alongside the spectacular photograph. In fact, an article published in November 2014, two weeks before the hug photo by a New Zealand-based news site, *Paper Trail*, foreshadowed Devonte's racial iconicity. It read:

> Devonte Hart entered the world 12 years ago with drugs pumping through his tiny newborn body. By the time he was 4 years old he had smoked, consumed alcohol, handled guns, been shot at, and suffered severe abuse and neglect. He knew only a handful of words, including fuck and shit, and he struggled to identify with the names of food, body parts and every day objects. Devonte was a violent toddler and his health was weighed down by a heavy list of disabilities. It was a life with little hope and a future

[311] For more on this process, see: https://developer.mozilla.org/en-US/docs/Web/HTTP/Status/301

[312] Linda Seligmann, *Broken Links, Enduring Ties: American Adoption across Race, Class, and Nation*, 1st edition (Stanford (Calif.): Stanford University Press, 2013), 2.

> that seemed over before it began. That is until Jen Hart and her wife Sarah entered Devonte's life and adopted him and his two siblings seven years ago.[313]

The story suggests that through the care and proper parenting of his white adoptive mothers, Devonte overcame the pathologies of behavior historically wed to Blackness. With Sarah and Jennifer Hart as guardians, Devonte shifted from a boy with "a future that seemed over before it began" to a kid "defying stereotypes in the most remarkable way." In other words, the author hints that Devonte's proximity to whiteness, and in particular, white motherhood recuperated him from the cultural deficit that ostensibly marks Black urban life. Within a cultural milieu that dialectically valorizes white motherhood and criminalizes Black life—especially Black motherhood and childhood[314]—the Hart mothers were viewed as offering salvation to a group of children destined for lowliness and depravity. This belief structured the initial reception of Nguyen's image.[315] Inasmuch as it is deployed to symbolize reconciliation and the reestablishment of racial order, the image is also meant to signify *good parenting*. Good parenting, racialized here as white, is what prefigures the possibility of national harmony. As the *Paper Trail* article put it, "With [the Hart mothers'] unconditional love, nurturing natures, patience and acceptance, Devonte defied all odds and has grown into a young charismatic man with a heart of gold." In other words, the subtext of the iconic image is that *Devonte was able to embrace Sergeant because he was raised right.* The picture whispers that the problem of race might be solved if only Black people parted with their rage, were reared out of their destructive ways, and were taught the appropriate conduct and reverence for authority. This coded racial discourse of good parenting composes a malicious narrative that strives to frame Devonte as the foil to Mike Mike. More pointedly, the unelaborated and false premise beneath this cruel discursive maneuver is that because Devonte was raised by two white women whereas Mike Mike was raised by his separated Black parents, the former was taught to yield to law enforcement; the latter was not. This harmful rhetoric was enlivened by the disparaging news articles written about Mike Mike shortly after his murder.[316]

Yet, as we know, this same racial discourse of good parenting that grossly vilified Mike Mike and his loving family also shrouded Devonte's mothers in a presumption of innocence and benevolence, especially as adopters of Black and mixed wards of the state. In actuality, their parenting produced a legal archive replete with misdemeanor child abuse cases, guilty pleas taken, and minor penalties levied, teachers' appeals to law enforcement agencies, neighbors' calls to Child Protective Services, and welfare checks requested or initiated but never completed.[317] This racial discourse of good parenting allowed two white women to drive off a cliff and leave six children between the ages of 12 and 19 at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

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[313] The *Paper Trail* article was retrieved via Internet Archive. The article as it initially appeared can be viewed here: https://web.archive.org/web/20141202030954/https://papertrail.co.nz/meet-devonte-little-boy-big-heart/

[314] For more on this relationship, see: Morrison, Toni (2004). *Beloved*. Reprint edition. New York: Vintage; Roberts, Dorothy (2022). *Torn Apart: How the Child Welfare System Destroys Black Families--and How Abolition Can Build a Safer World.* New York: Basic Books; Spillers, Hortense J. (1987). "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." Diacritics 17 (2): 65–81. https://doi.org/10.2307/464747.

[315] See Special to The Oregonian, "Photo: Police Officer and Young Demonstrator Share Hug during Ferguson Rally in Portland"

[316] For one such example, see John Eligon, "Michael Brown Spent Last Weeks Grappling With Problems and Promise," *The New York Times*, August 25, 2014, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/25/us/michael-brown-spent-last-weeks-grappling-with-lifes-mysteries.html.

[317] For more on the timeline of the Hart family tragedy, including the abuses committed by Sarah and Jennifer Hart, see: The Oregonian/OregonLive (2018). "Hart Family Deadly Crash: A Timeline." OregonLive. March 29, 2018. https://www.oregonlive.com/pacific-northwest-news/2018/03/hart_family_deadly_crash_a_tim.html.

Coming back to Seligmann, the surfacing of the *familial* broken links, those missing and unknown details comprising the interior lives of the Hart's blended family, translated directly to a host of *technical* broken links in the digital realm. These 404 codes abounded in the aftermath of

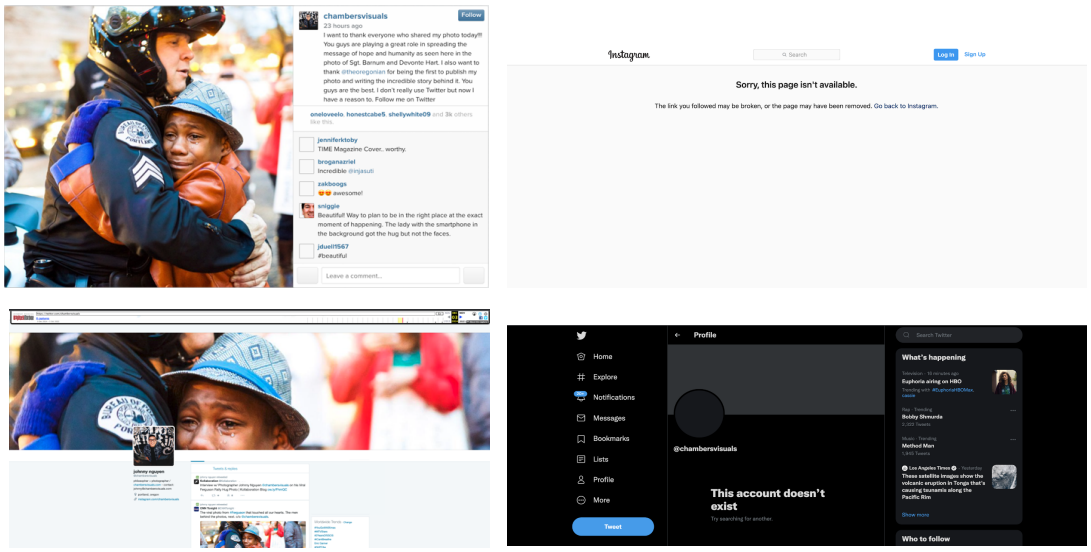


Figure 34. Author screenshots of Johnny Nguyen's former (top and bottom left) and now-deactivated (top and bottom right) Instagram and Twitter profiles.

the Hart family tragedy. Websites that featured the iconic photograph and garnered extensive traffic were pulled from servers and deleted. Like Devonte's precious body lost at sea, these sites could no longer be found. The social media profiles of Johnny Nguyen, for instance, once loci of affective intensity related to the hug photo, were emptied of content (see Figure 34). The *Paper Trail* article referenced above, once a widely hyperlinked resource, now displays an entirely unrelated 2019 story about the luckiest lottery shop in New Zealand (see Figure 35).

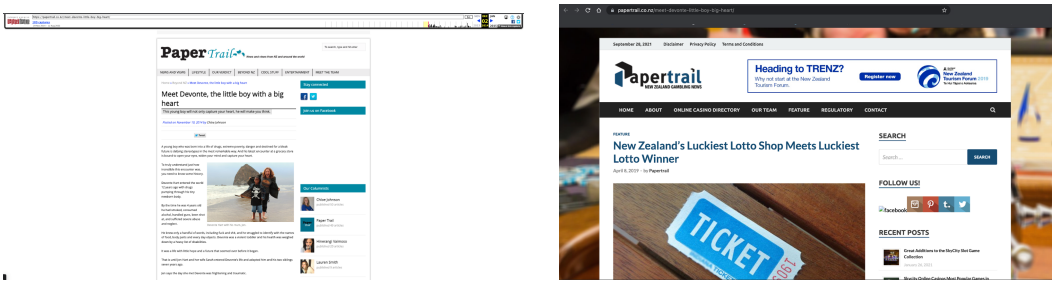


Figure 35. Author screenshots showing the former Paper Trail story about Devonte Hart (left) and the content currently displayed at the same web address (right).

In a striking parallel to his material disappearance, many of the affective implements and digital formations in which Devonte stood as a central catalyst vanished after March 2018. The removed pictures, deleted profiles, redirections, and broken links delineate how changing

relationships to the image necessitated a material deterioration of the "soft structures of feeling"[318] that supported the photo's initial spread. I contend that the hopeful affect so widely projected onto the iconic image crumbled under the weight of the racial terror that accumulated in the lives of the Hart children. Importantly, the same structure of racial terror that allowed the Hart mothers, despite being charged with child abuse, to move freely and evade accountability was the same structure that licensed Darren Wilson to lethally immobilize Mike Mike. While the hug photo is retrievable and remains in circulation to a degree, *Paper Trail's* positive article about the Hart mothers' "rescue" of Devonte has disappeared from public view and remains inaccessible, along with photographer Nguyen's social media accounts. The surfacing of the Hart mothers' extensive child abuse, and ultimately the murder of Devonte and his siblings, tainted these digital gathering places and made them obsolete. So rather than a vestige of hope that emerged in #Ferguson, the iconic image of Devonte and Barnum's hug now stands as a devastating reminder that Devonte, in his overexposure, was never actually seen.

A Burning Question

Despite Devonte's tragic death, the visual, psychic, and national dilemmas posed by the racial uprisings in the summer of 2020 caused Nguyen's notorious image to re-emerge in online political discourse. The year saw the crystallization of an affective field of racial panic similar to that in 2014 and 1992.[319] As the Trump administration failed to address a worsening global pandemic that disproportionately claimed Black life, another enduring pandemic—antiblack police violence—reared its head in spectacle. In February, three white men turned lynch mob hunted and killed a Black jogger during his run through a Georgia suburb. In March, plainclothes officers in Louisville, Kentucky fatally shot a Black EMT resting with her boyfriend at home. In May, a Minneapolis policeman knelt on the neck of a Black convenience store patron until he could no longer breathe. These lethal viruses of antiblackness—the collective disregard for Black medical

[318] Papacharissi, *Affective Publics*, 32.

[319] A *New York Times* article published July 3, 2020, makes a comparison between riots in 2020 Minneapolis and those in 1992 Los Angeles: "Over three nights, a five-mile stretch of Minneapolis sustained extraordinary damage. The police precinct house itself was set on fire, after the mayor gave orders to evacuate the building. A month later, the city is still struggling to understand what happened and why: Not since the 1992 unrest in Los Angeles has an American city suffered such destructive riots." An affect of racialized fear stimulated by Black rebellion and destruction connects 1992, 2014, and 2020.

attention alongside the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd—furnished a political environment ready to combust.



Figure 36. Demonstrators gather around the Minneapolis 3rd Police Precinct building as it burns on May 28, 2020. Photograph by John Minchillo/AP Photo

And combust it did. Black folks responded by setting cities on fire. They endeavored to bring the nation to a halt, to wade in the carnage exacted and witness the irreparable damage done. They overturned and danced atop police cars, seized city infrastructures, pillaged and destroyed buildings with a tenacity that aimed to dwarf the state's ferocious looting of Black life. "A six-story apartment building that was still under construction collapsed into a ball of fire. A high-tech factory was set ablaze."[320] A particularly harrowing image for anxious citizens across the country was the image of a police station in Minneapolis, Minnesota engulfed by flames (see Figure 36). The *Star Tribune* reported:

> For three consecutive nights starting on Wednesday, May 27, rioters pummeled blocks worth of buildings near the Minneapolis' Third and Fifth police precincts, inflicting heavy damage. On Thursday night, protesters torched and heavily vandalized the Third Precinct, and destroyed at least 20 nearby buildings, including several restaurants, an Auto Zone, Minnehaha Lake Wine & Spirits, a U.S. Post Office, a cellphone store and the building that housed Talk Town Diner, El Nuevo Rodeo and others. Midtown Corner, a multi-story affordable housing project that was still under construction, erupted into a towering inferno, burning so hot that it melted siding off a nearby house. The following night, about three miles west of the Third Precinct, protesters blanketed the area near the Fifth Precinct, heavily damaging at least seven buildings — including a U.S. Post Office, a Wells Fargo branch, a staffing

[320] Farah Stockman, "'They Have Lost Control': Why Minneapolis Burned," *The New York Times*, July 3, 2020, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/03/us/minneapolis-government-george-floyd.html.

> agency and a Subway in a nearby strip mall. Authorities also reported that shots had been fired at officers in the Fifth Precinct area, but there were no reports of injuries.[321]

The absence of a strategic response from the City Mayor, coupled with the sight of fiery disorder, left distressed viewers with a burning question: "*Why did the City let them burn us to the ground!????*"[322]

The Burden of Liveness



Figure 37. Author screenshot of a Twitter post during eruption of protests in Minneapolis during May 2020

In this context, Nguyen's image of Devonte and Barnum, with its diminished capacity to soothe racial angst and represent the manageability of Blackness, was re-introduced into visual and political discourse. Only this time, the coalescence of an affective public, grounded through "traffic in positive affect" attached to the photograph, was harder to achieve, perhaps because a young Black boy, once regarded a symbol of utopian futures, had perished at the hands of his white adoptive parents.[323]

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[321] Josh Penrod and C. J. Sinner, "A Deeper Look at Areas Most Damaged by Rioting, Looting in Minneapolis, St. Paul," Star Tribune, July 13, 2020, https://www.startribune.com/a-deeper-look-at-areas-most-damaged-by-rioting-looting-in-minneapolis-st-paul/569930671/.

[322] Joint Transportation and Judiciary and Public Safety Committee, Minnesota Senate (2020). "Review of Lawlessness and Government Responses to Minnesota's 2020 Riots / - Minnesota Legislative Reference Library." Saint Paul, MN. https://www.lrl.mn.gov/docs/2020/other/200998.pdf. p. 17

[323] Kathryn A. Mariner, "Intimate Speculation: The Flows and Futures of Private Agency Adoption in the United States" (Chicago, Illinois, University of Chicago, 2015), https://www.proquest.com/openview/c36987a4b9bdc52b3c9e98930428fa50/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750, 3.

As mass demonstrations unfolded in Minneapolis on the evening of May 27th, a forlorn social media user took to Twitter and offered a prescription for the nation's race problem (see Figure 37).[324] The tweet combined text and an emoji, two hashtags, and a compilation of four pictures. The text of the post repeated Nguyen's dictum about the healing power of love, urging that "We" move beyond assignations of blame ("less finger pointing") in favor of physical expressions of reconciliation ("more of THIS!!"). In fact, the author contended, a conciliatory approach was the only recourse we had (It's the only thing that's going to fix it…."). The broken-heart emoji connoted societal dread and reified the ostensible necessity of the hug as a political act. Two hashtags supplemented the author's statement. They functioned to situate the tweet in a broader conversation about the power of hugs, and to amplify a discursive statement that love is the surest remedy for racial strife. The images were included to buttress this claim, each showcasing Black boys and men in embrace with white, male police officers. Altogether, these disparate elements worked to regulate enactments of dissent, absolve the State of antiblack injury, and sanction respectable forms of Black political comportment.

The final photo in the series displayed Nguyen's 2014 image of Devonte and Barnum. The picture's resurgence during the 2020 uprisings illuminates several key points. First, the photo's return signaled the affective resonances between 2014 and 2020, and between the racial geographies of Ferguson and Minneapolis. This shared affective field, characterized by police killings of Black men and concomitant racial paranoias about Black rebellion and state collapse, impelled a vigorous, visual demand for a scene of subjection[325] in both temporal conjunctures. Second, the reappearance of the image in a different context of widespread protest clarified its initial purpose. In 2014, the photograph was used to abate white political dismay and sate desires for the reinstatement of normative racial order. The image resurfaced in 2020 because some hoped that, in spite of the photo's diminished affective power, it might fulfill similar objectives. The photograph's reprise further highlights its status as **a** *digital media crease*. But rather than the crease referring to the rapid spread and visual preponderance of the image (as it did in 2014), here the crease takes shape as the reproduction of and return to dominant, affective and symbolic codes across time. The media crease describes the reanimation of the image's political utility, exemplified in its disciplinary function. Third, and perhaps most important here, the image's recurrence demonstrated that its many charmed viewers, in 2014 and 2020, did not know (or did not care) about Devonte's life and death. They only knew or cared more about the virtual world of postracialism his image permitted them to imagine and feel—a world evacuated of Black radical potential. The heartbreak emoticon in the tweet represented a sense of despair that this imagined world might not be possible. The heart did not break for Devonte. For the tweet's author and the comparatively smaller contingent of people re-circulating the photo, Devonte was merely an implement of haunted traffic, a "black captive vessel of white ideality."[326] This way of seeing him underscored the impulse to resurrect an image of a now-dead boy.

This latter point is crucial. The fraught character of Devonte's will, his tears, his pain, and his affective longings in the photograph, compounded by the abrupt permanence of his terrible death, were all overlooked to concoct a punitive dream of happy, hug-worthy and hug-willing Blacks. This process rehearsed a visual and cultural exercise only tenable in a world made by chattel

[324] This was not the only tweet during this period that reproduced the image of Devonte and Barnum's embrace. However, it is one of the few that remain accessible, largely because it was the subject of media coverage during protests in the summer of 2020.

[325] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

[326] ibid., 62

slavery, and in an affective field borne in the U.S. minstrel tradition. The pleasurable use and spectacular staging of the Black body, the simulation of Black contentment, and the repeated effacement of Black interiority to fortify the (white) body politic creased time yet again. Devonte, even in death, was summoned as a performing body. He was made to live again digitally to visualize the racial fantasies of a fractured civil society. The return of the photograph subjected Devonte to what Jose Esteban Muñoz terms a *burden of liveness*, or "the ways in which the other is constructed as a live performing other whose place is that of entertaining the dominant order."[327] Muñoz explains further that the burden of liveness "affords the minoritarian subject an extremely circumscribed temporality" where the compulsion "to be only in 'the live' means that one is denied history and futurity."[328] Devonte was exhumed from a material present of lifelessness and forcibly placed back into the time of the 2014 photograph, the time of Ferguson and Mike Mike's devastating murder by police. The experiences of familial abuse that preceded and structured the picture were nullified and made sterile; the grotesque act of parental terror that succeeded the image and punctuated his future went unremarked. Burdened with liveness and denied eternal rest, the re-emergence of the digital image attempted to freeze Devonte in time, *imprisoning him in a luminous glare*.[329]

Counterdiscourse as Wake Work

While Devonte was symbolically returned to life and locked in time, his physical body was dead and lost at sea.[330] Devonte, in the most material sense, was and is *in the wake*. Christina Sharpe writes that "to be *in* the wake is to occupy and be occupied by the continuous and changing present of slavery's as yet unresolved unfolding." Being in the wake means "living the 'afterlife of property' and living the afterlife of *partus sequitur ventrum* (that which is brought forth follows the womb), in which the Black child inherits the non/status, the non/being of the mother."[331] Sharpe offers further:

> Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror that is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased.[332]

Devonte's life and death stood and stand as testaments to the power of the wake—signs of "the sheer weight of a history of terror"[333] inaugurated on the captive's person and meted against the Black body across space and time. Devonte's severance from his birth mother (and family), the punishments that characterized his abbreviated life as a transracial adoptee, the embrace that made

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[327] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers Of Color And The Performance Of Politics* (Minneapolis. Minn.: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1999), 188.

[328] ibid., 189.

[329] Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle*, Illustrated edition (The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[330] See Devonte Hart's entry on Find a Grave: https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/193728186/devonte-jordan-hart.

[331] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Illustrated edition (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 14-15.

[332] ibid.

[333] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 58.

him famous, the crash into the Pacific Ocean, and the reappearance of Nguyen's picture despite his tragic death were and are markers of the wake. But these assaults "[came] to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color."[334] In other words, Devonte's Black being in the wake, like Mike Mike, marked him as vulnerable to natal alienation, corporeal injury, iconicity, and premature death.

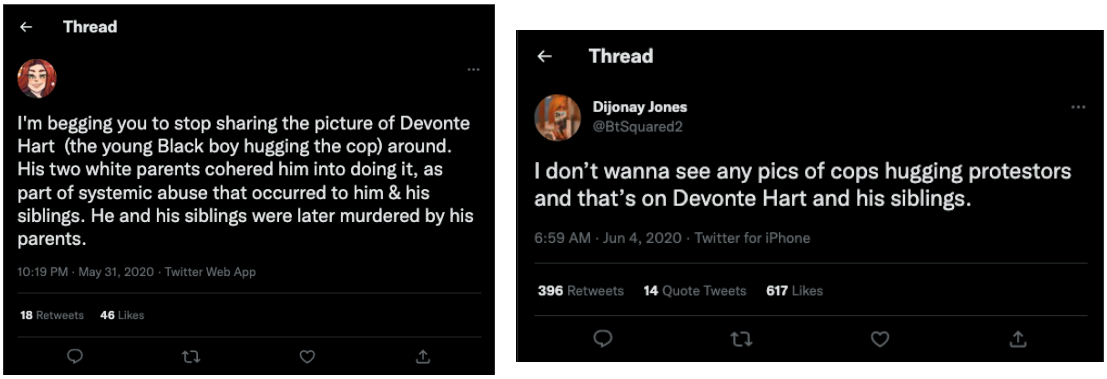


Figure 38. Author screenshots of Twitter users calling out the recirculation or reenactment of Devonte Hart and Sgt. Bret Barnum's embrace during the 2020 Uprisings

The return of the image during the 2020 uprisings, and its concomitant burden of liveness, worked to obscure and intensify this terror. The endurance of the hug photo authorized a cyclical, penetrative form of social violence that plundered Devonte's body and exacerbated the grim realities of his murder. Understanding this, some people rallied to defend Devonte when the picture reentered political discourse online (see Figure 38).

These tweets are illustrative. One user wrote: "I'm begging you to stop sharing the picture of Devonte Hart (the young Black boy hugging the cop) around. His two white parents cohered him into doing it, as part of systemic abuse that occurred to him & his siblings. He and his siblings were later murdered by his parents." Another tweet by a user named Dijonay Jones declared: "I don't wanna see any pics of cops hugging protestors and that's on Devonte Hart and his siblings." These posts serve as a testament to the continued relevance, nearly eight years after its initial emergence, of Nguyen's image to discourses about race, policing, and the nation, shaped indelibly by Mike Mike's death and the uprisings in Ferguson. The posts also exemplified an impulse among some social media users to speak against the misuse of Devonte's likeness and thwart attempts to use Nguyen's 2014 image as a call for peace and reconciliation. For these users, remembering and uplifting the truth about Devonte's life, namely the atrocious acts of his adoptive parents, functioned as a form of counterdiscourse. The critiques of the picture, which were present from the outset.[335] and pleas to curtail its reproduction undermined the image's political and affective

[334] Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 67.

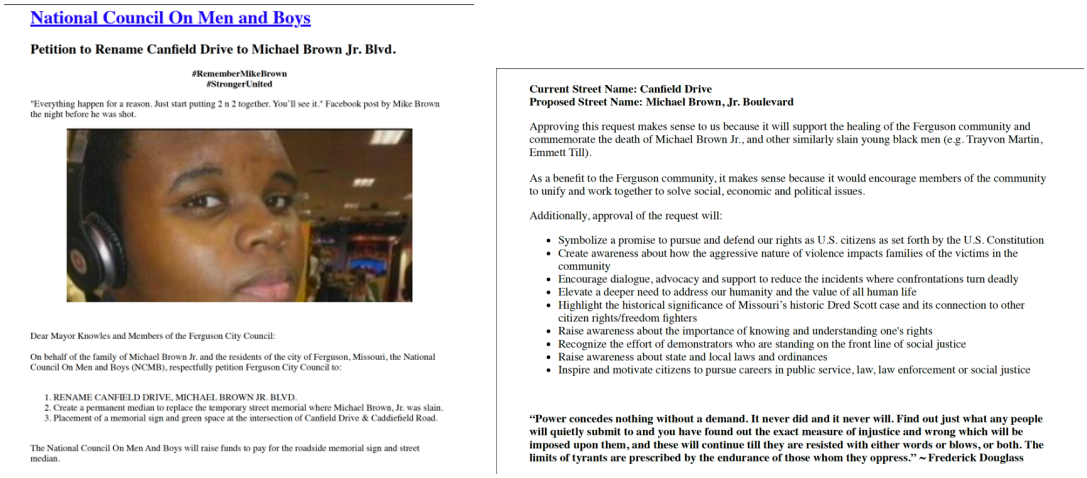
[335] There were many critiques of the picture in 2014 when it first emerged, but space constraints precluded extensive discussion of them in this chapter. For examples, see Jonathan Jones, "The Touching Hug Photo from Ferguson Protests Is a Blatant Lie," *The Guardian*, December 2, 2014, sec. Opinion, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/02/hug-photographs-ferguson-protests-lie; Casey Parks, "Portland Hug Photo Debate: Is It a Post-Ferguson Symbol of Hope or Something Else?," OregonLive, December 8, 2014, https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/2014/12/portland_hug_photo_debate_is_i.html; also Doug Sibor, "The

power. The authors of these posts, I argue, performed what Sharpe calls *wake work*—a defense of and vigilance over the Black dead and dying. The tweets represented a form of care, recognition, and protection that was denied to Devonte during his life. Finally, by pleading against the photo's continued visibility, these users also disrupted its disciplinary power as a technology of traffic control and conduct management. The tweets, rather, critiqued hugging police officers as a counterproductive and neoliberal practice, and recalibrated vision, attention, and praxis toward collective protest, pedestrian acts, and ongoing project of abolition.

The peculiar life of Nguyen's racially iconic image of Devonte and Barnum's embrace, shadowed by Mike Mike's tragic end, showcases the relationship between the mediation of affect, the visuality of race, and political desire. The picture's emergence as an image within the discursive context of 2014 Ferguson and reappearance during critical moments of racial uprising in 2020 reveals the persistence not only of haunted geographies of policing but also dominant political and affective desires for Black acquiescence, surrender, and yield.

Famous 'Ferguson Hug' Photo Was Reportedly Staged," Complex, accessed May 7, 2024, https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/a/doug-sibor/was-the-ferguson-protest-hug-photo-staged.

Coda



National Council On Men and Boys

Petition to Rename Canfield Drive to Michael Brown Jr. Blvd.

#RememberMikeBrown
#StrongerUnited

"Everything happen for a reason. Just start putting 2 n 2 together. You'll see it." Facebook post by Mike Brown the night before he was shot.

Dear Mayor Knowles and Members of the Ferguson City Council:

On behalf of the family of Michael Brown Jr. and the residents of the city of Ferguson, Missouri, the National Council On Men and Boys (NCMB), respectfully petition Ferguson City Council to:

1. RENAME CANFIELD DRIVE, MICHAEL BROWN JR. BLVD.
2. Create a permanent median to replace the temporary street memorial where Michael Brown, Jr. was slain.
3. Placement of a memorial sign and green space at the intersection of Canfield Drive & Caddiefield Road.

The National Council On Men And Boys will raise funds to pay for the roadside memorial sign and street median.

Current Street Name: Canfield Drive
Proposed Street Name: Michael Brown, Jr. Boulevard

Approving this request makes sense to us because it will support the healing of the Ferguson community and commemorate the death of Michael Brown Jr., and other similarly slain young black men (e.g. Trayvon Martin, Emmett Till).

As a benefit to the Ferguson community, it makes sense because it would encourage members of the community to unify and work together to solve social, economic and political issues.

Additionally, approval of the request will:

- Symbolize a promise to pursue and defend our rights as U.S. citizens as set forth by the U.S. Constitution
- Create awareness about how the aggressive nature of violence impacts families of the victims in the community
- Encourage dialogue, advocacy and support to reduce the incidents where confrontations turn deadly
- Elevate a deeper need to address our humanity and the value of all human life
- Highlight the historical significance of Missouri's historic Dred Scott case and its connection to other citizen rights/freedom fighters
- Raise awareness about the importance of knowing and understanding one's rights
- Recognize the effort of demonstrators who are standing on the front line of social justice
- Raise awareness about state and local laws and ordinances
- Inspire and motivate citizens to pursue careers in public service, law, law enforcement or social justice

"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress." ~ Frederick Douglass

Figure 39. Screen captures of a December 2014 petition to change the name of Canfield Drive to Michael Brown, Jr. Blvd. The petition was created by Mike Mike's family, following the grand jury's failure to indict officer Darren Wilson.

In December 2014, Mike Mike's family petitioned the Mayor and council members of Ferguson to redesign Canfield Drive and rename the street to Michael Brown Jr. Blvd. The petition outlined three requests: (1) the renaming Canfield Drive to Michael Brown, Jr. Blvd.; (2) the construction of a permanent median to replace the temporary street memorial where Michael Brown, Jr. was slain; and (3) the installation of a memorial sign and green space at the intersection of Canfield Drive and Caddiefield Road. In addition to those components, the family's petition specified what an approval of the terms would mean for the Ferguson community. This section of the document read:

> Approving this request makes sense to us because it will support the healing of the Ferguson community and commemorate the death of Michael Brown Jr., and other similarly slain young black men (e.g. Trayvon Martin, Emmett Till). As a benefit to the Ferguson community, it makes sense because it would encourage members of the community to unify and work together to solve social, economic, and political issues.

The text continued with a bulleted list of affordances that the street renaming, memorial median, and green space would bring to the community. The Brown family argued that the approval of their requests would, for instance, "[s]ymbolize a promise to pursue and defend our rights as U.S. citizens," "[e]levate a deeper need to address our humanity and the value of all human life," "[h]ighlight the historical significance of Missouri's historic Dred Scott case and its connection to other citizen rights/freedom fighters," and "[r]ecognize the effort of demonstrators who are standing on the front line of social justice," among other local and community benefits. The petition closed with a full quote from Frederick Douglass, the beginning of which included his oft-cited declaration that "[p]ower concedes nothing without a demand." The petition offered a meaningful inroad into understanding how the Brown family engaged the local municipal power

structure following the nonindictment of officer Darren Wilson and illustrated the continuing importance of the politics of commemoration and memory to the family's quest for a modicum of reparation.

What is particularly striking about the Browns' petition, however, is the work it does to illustrate the persistence of geographies of social and physical death. It relates Mike Mike's murder to other victims of state-sanctioned social terror across space and across time, demonstrating the continuing reach of captivity, unfreedom, and confinement in the United States. The petition surfaces slavery's specters and ghosts and makes visible the enduring and disastrous assaults on Black subjectivity, mobility, and spatial sovereignty that move from Dred Scott to Emmett Till to Trayvon Martin to Mike Mike. The petition, in other words, elucidates *haunted traffic* and the recursive character of racial and spatial violence. Conversely, the family's call for a street remaining, green space, and a permanent memorial median in the street where Mike Mike perished exemplified a *pedestrian act* and the continued struggle to translate Ferguson's abject geographies into cartographies of wake work, spatial sovereignty, and Black sociality. The three demanded elements represented desires for space to grieve, congregate, and tend to the memory of stolen life without the threat of incursion.

The Brown family's petition and its urgent calls for the transformation of the roadway infrastructure on Canfield Drive were ultimately diluted and dismissed. Instead of a permanent street median that held the promise of literally shifting the relations of *right-of-way*, a nondescript bronze plate in the shape of a dove and a commemorative plaque were installed on the sidewalk—the very place Darren Wilson attempted to consign the Black teenager in the first instance. This reduction and augmentation of the Browns' vision reflected another example of *yield*. In this case, the radical spatial and infrastructural imagination of the Brown family was marginalized and denied precedence in favor of the liberal reticence of municipal governance.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of Mike Mike's death, the Ferguson Uprisings, and the family's subsequent petition to honor this legacy in the local landscape. The street is still called Canfield Drive. While a small park and playscape were added in the community, there remains a severe lack of street design elements to help children cross the road and access them safely. There is no permanent memorial median in honor of Mike Mike, and even the makeshift community memorial that community members crafted and fiercely defended in 2014 has been removed. None of the requests specified in the family's initial petition have ever been met.

In lieu of this, the community has ritual. Every year for the past ten years, Mike Mike's family members and community members have gathered at the site of killing on August 9th to honor his life. Each time, the community rebuilds the memorial in the rectangle of street where he lied for four and a half hours. For the last two years, I have attended these memorial gatherings. In them, I have learned and witnessed some of the quieter lessons held in the performance of pedestrian acts, namely about the poetics of infrastructure.

Insofar as Black life in Ferguson, past and present, has been lived hard and at the margins of infrastructure, the pedestrian act encompasses an orientation toward softness, or a cessation to the racial, infrastructural, and geographic violences that bear down so hard on Black life, the land, and all living things. Mike Mike died a violent and hard death. His physical absence remains hard on his people. His family and community watched him lie, sullied and neglected, for hours beneath the hard August sun, on the hard ground. When his hardened body was taken away, they showered what remained of him with everything bright, gentle, and soft: teddies and keepsakes, tearful prayers and love notes, roses and candles. They offered him and each other what the world would not—softness; the space and permission to be delicate. At the memorial gatherings, it was this

rehearsal of this ritual that clarified the point raised by Brian Larkin that "[s]oftness, hardness, the noise of the city, its brightness, the feeling of being hot or cold are all sensorial experiences regulated by infrastructures."[336] In the same place where Mike Mike died, some painted. At the exact spot where he was defiled, others wrote of our love for him. For all of the hardness he suffered, and for all of the assaults on his life, his family, and those who rose to defend him, many placed offerings of living and soft things. Pedestrian Black folk held each other softly amidst the hardness of grief, and in each other's arms, they exchanged softness until it blanketed the asphalt, the sidewalks, the structures, the soil, and everything around us. The scene was, as Jodi Rios puts it, a "[symbol] of how both profane and sacred spaces can paradoxically exist within the same place."[337] A hard infrastructure and deadly place bloomed into a warm canvas for sweet incantation and soft memory.

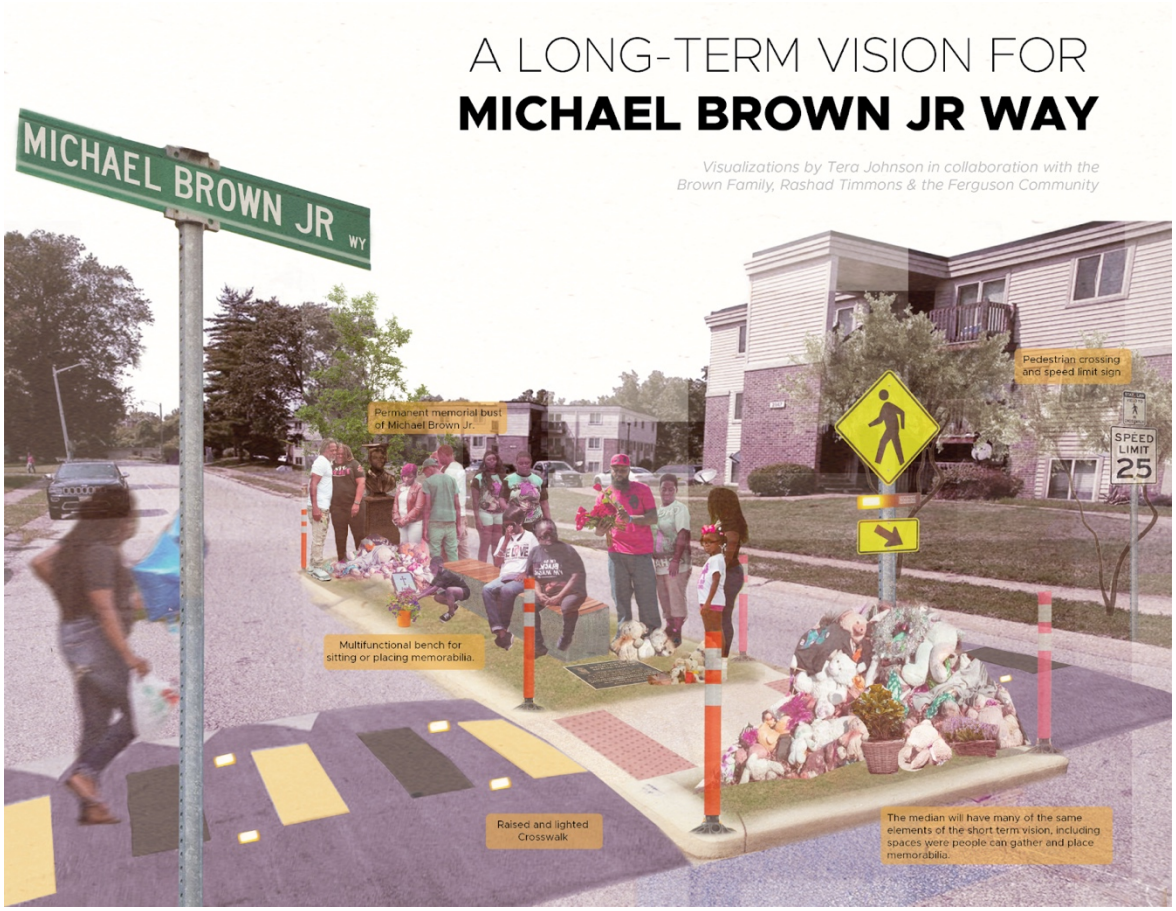


Figure 40. A speculative rendering of a permanent memorial median on Michael Brown Jr Way. The visualization was produced by artist and urban designer Tera Johnson in collaboration with the Brown family and Ferguson community members

The Browns' December 2014 petition might be best understood as an endeavor to change hard infrastructure, marked by Mike Mike's death and the suburb's longstanding traffic in antiblackness, into a place for soft memory; a place where the aggrieved and socially vulnerable

[336] Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," 337.
[337] Rios, *Black Lives and Spatial Matters*, 5.

may lay down their hard, heavy, and pedestrian burden. Despite the municipality's decade-long intransigence regarding the family's spatial desires, the egalitarian ideals of the petition persist. The family's nonprofit, The Michael Brown, Sr. Chosen for Change Organization (CFC), led by Mike Mike's father, restarted the petition in advance of the tenth anniversary memorial gathering titled "All Roads Lead to Ferguson." For the campaign, CFC collaborated with artist and urban designer Tera Johnson to generate renderings of speculative, short- and long-term visions for street. The long-term version, pictured above, displays a soft scene. Mike Mike's family and friends gather on green space within the memorial median, placing flowers, stuffed animals, and other memorabilia near the perimeter. A mourner, holding a balloon, proceeds toward the median along a lighted and raised crosswalk. An approaching vehicle yields. A bust of Mike Mike in a graduation cap is visible in the background, and a commemorative plaque can be observed in the middle ground. Illustrated boldly on the left and above the apartment complex (formerly The Village, Canfield Green Apartments, Pleasant View Gardens, and now Renewal Heights Apartments) is the new name for the street: Michael Brown Jr. Way. This visualization, though not yet tangible, gestures toward a different way of inhabiting and relating to suburban space. It concretizes an enlargement of autonomous pedestrian space and protection, which also correlates to an enlargement of memory—of Mike Mike and all those Black subjects before him denied softness and abundant life.

Archival Collections

Ferguson Historical Society
John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library
Kentucky Historical Society
Library of Congress
Missouri Historical Society
Missouri State Archives
National Archives
State Historical Society of Missouri
St. Louis City Recorder of Deeds
Washington University at St. Louis University Special Collections

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