Race, Space, and the Destabilization of Practice

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ABSTRACT The articles in this special issue of *Landscape Journal* examine the relationships between the built form of the environment, the social construction of race, and minoritization in the United States. This introductory essay establishes the central themes involved in such explorations, provides key definitions and background for terms found throughout the issue, and establishes the value of investigations into race and space. It provides the theoretical backdrop for the essays that follow and suggests new directions for research.

KEYWORDS Race, whiteness, critical race theory, critical studies of whiteness, race and space

In February of 2006, a film opened in cinemas nationwide. Entitled "Something New," the film had a short theatrical run, and moderately favorable reviews. In many respects "Something New" is a conventional romantic comedy except that it pivots on questions related to interracial relationships. Starring Sanaa Lathan as a black female executive, and Simon Baker as the white landscape architect she hires to design and build her garden, the film does a better-than-average job of portraying upper-middle-class black women (rarely portrayed in any event), the struggles blacks daily encounter in the United States as they deal with the micro and macro-aggressions of everyday racisms, and some of the difficulties involved in interracial dating and relationships. It makes a modest effort at portraying white privilege and the frustrations it engenders in those identified as non-white, but the effort is nonetheless commendable. It is not at all surprising that the male protagonist—who must have an unquestionably white identity in order to make the plot effective—was written as a landscape architect. What better profession could the writer have chosen to represent whiteness? Despite years of efforts on the part of a relative few to diversify the field, landscape architecture remains essentially a white professional realm, and the professional label "Landscape Architect" (however undeserved since the character articulates his lack of credentials!) aptly serves to reinforce the character's whiteness.

The whiteness of landscape architecture, and the ramifications of that whiteness, are topics that have not yet received much critical scrutiny. This special issue of *Landscape Journal* aims, in part, to correct that, by asking a series of questions about the relationships that exist between race and space in the United States. By extension, it also asks about the relationship of these matters to the realm of professional practice. Although *Landscape Journal* has long served as an important venue for scholarly articles on a range of topics related to the interdisciplinary and broadly conceived topic of "landscape," the essays in this issue stretch the boundaries just a bit further. I therefore ask readers of this issue to consider the *Journal*'s mission as entirely inclusive of the cultural landscape such that housing and urban history are included in our definition of "landscape." The authors whose papers are assembled herein consider the topic of racism—an uncomfortable and even unpalatable topic for some—through the ways in which it is reinforced by and played out in the built environment. In doing so they also examine a range of questions related to race and the history of the built environment.

The articles in this special issue of *Landscape Journal* derive from a conference I organized at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in March 2004. Initiated from my own research into the ways ordinary postwar houses and gardens served as frameworks for the formation of racial and class identity, the symposium served initially as a means for further exploration of the broader questions implied by examinations of racial constructions and built form. Entitled "Constructing Race: The Built Environment, Minoritization, and Racism in the United States," the symposium included papers delivered by eight speakers who addressed this concern from a range of perspectives. The speakers examined the role of the built environment in the fortification of social constructions of racial identities and modalities of racism. Their papers focused on the spatial apparatuses that not only reflect, but reinforce and even create racially-based practices of exclusion, oppression, minoritization, and privilege in a variety of realms. Papers addressed the question of race within the context of the United States and beyond the binary of "black" and "white," including topics that examined Latino/a and Asian-American spaces. I was unable to

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locate a scholar whose work addressed Native American spaces from this perspective, and to my disappointment, that absence persists in these pages. Nevertheless, the issues explored by these authors have equal relevance for locations and peoples around the globe, though international perspectives are not included here. Neither the symposium, nor these papers constitute a comprehensive treatment of this subject so they must instead be understood as a starting point that will lead to further exploration. All the symposium speakers were invited to submit papers for this special issue, though some were unable to do so due to prior commitments. I therefore commissioned several additional essays to take their place. The essays that resulted raise especially challenging questions about the ways in which governments, policy-makers, patrons, designers, and ordinary citizens participate in the creation of racialized spaces—or in the decisions that have led to their creation—and the impact of those spaces on those identified as both "white" and "non white."

Each author centers his or her analysis on the physical framework of the built world, and many of the spaces they examine will seem familiar: streets, freeways and the spaces they enclose, urban squares and antebellum public space, university campus landscapes, private estates, public parks, and housing developments. The analytical approaches, however, will likely seem new: essays on housing segregation, for example, may be less common to the pages of this journal, but they are nonetheless critical to our understanding of race and space in the United States. Not all the material presented here is easily digested. I hope readers will return to the essays over time, re-reading and reconsidering the more difficult portions (here I refer to both the emotional challenges that race discussions can prompt and the complexities involved in linking an abstract concept such as race to the material and concrete forms of the built environment).

Why study race and space? What can the built environment tell us about the construction and maintenance of racial identities, or about the production of racism in the United States that we don't already know? After all, scholars within the humanities and social sciences have long articulated the history and consequences of racism both in the United States and abroad. Can space really tell us anything new about this topic? To answer that question, let me begin with an anecdote. In November of 2002, the black activist and writer Angela Davis gave a lecture at my university that focused on the topic of racism in the twenty-first century.[1] Davis asserted that racism in the post-Civil Rights-era United States had not disappeared, but had instead "moved underground." Most Americans today, she noted, understand that overtly racist behaviors will not be tolerated and that they constitute incivility that is often legally actionable, yet attitudes toward race remain largely unchanged if generally unspoken. Racism today, Davis claimed, hides in the institutions that govern our daily lives: health care, education, the judicial systems, media, and government itself. Davis's point—that racism is embedded in the structures that govern our daily lives and is therefore rendered simultaneously invisible and naturalized within systems of authority—was absolutely on target, but she neglected to consider the actual spaces and built forms that house those very institutions and the landscapes and spaces that are in turn created by them. Insofar as the built environment constitutes a primary structure for the performance of everyday life, it must be examined as an active agent in the formation of ideas about race, identity, belonging, exclusion, and minoritization.

The primary terms of racism—segregation, seclusion, marginalization, incarceration, hierarchy—are all spatial phenomena or have a spatial corollary.[2] In order to dismantle or reapportion such political and social structures, we have to understand the ways they operate in and through the spaces of the built environment. We have to question the spatial distribution of privilege and link social justice to environmental or spatial justice, which can only be done through careful examination of the spaces themselves.[3] If we want to design for diversity, we have to design for opportunity and for increased life chances for everyone. In order to do that we have to achieve a deeper understanding of what

George Lipsitz refers to in this issue as the various "spatial imaginaries" that are linked to the "racialization of space and the spatialization of race."

To develop these ideas further requires some definitions. First, in this special issue and as it is almost universally understood in the humanities today, "race" is examined as a socially-constructed and historically-reproduced phenomenon that is not related to any biological imperative. Definitions of race ("whiteness" and "blackness" for example) are historically unstable, constantly invented and reinvented to suit a range of political, economic, and social circumstances. They are also regarded as varied definitions since multiple, complex definitions about what it means to be "black" or "white" co-exist simultaneously. Since white identities—like all racial identities—are socially constructed, interrogations into race and space must also include studies of those spaces that exist or are seen as belonging to the dominant "white" culture.

This means that we must also critically examine "whiteness." Scholars in the field known as the "Critical Study of Whiteness" (also known as "Whiteness Studies") aim primarily to understand the ways in which power operates through the construction of white identities and the privileges accrued to those identified as white.[4] Examining constructions of white culture and the ways in which whiteness asserts its dominance while essentializing, minoritizing, and discriminating against all others, scholars in a range of disciplines have begun to direct attention to that which is so pervasive it is almost invisible: the apparent ineffability of white privilege in its myriad forms (Williams 2004, 18; Roediger 2004, 95; Berger 2004, 45).[5] As scholar/activists, they work toward the destabilization of white dominance as part of a larger set of anti-racist projects, and investigations into the operations of white privilege are situated at the core of their endeavors. What does it mean or has it meant to be considered "white" in various places and times? How have white identities been constituted and asserted and for what purposes? Most importantly, how do white identities allow for the continual reassertion of power and rights to unearned privileges (including unimpeded access to many spaces) in contemporary society? Race, we must remind ourselves, matters whether or not we are studying the spaces owned or occupied by underrepresented groups. Such a position can then lead us to question the often implicit assumption that all spaces are white unless otherwise specified as a barrio, a ghetto, a reservation, a plantation, or a historically black college campus. Moreover, since no site is discrete, but must be understood within its larger social, political, and physical context, the relationships between these spaces are strategic. In order to understand the ghetto for example, the houses and spaces of the white suburb must also be examined as two sides of the same coin.

Indeed, the essays contained in this special issue all start from the central assumption that race is a significant factor for consideration—at least to some extent—in sites of varying scales and in a range of settings throughout the United States. Although many would recognize that race relations are an important area of inquiry when a topic involves an ethnic enclave for instance, it may be less obvious that historically white spaces such as upper-class suburbs, corporate office parks, gated communities, or upscale urban spaces are equally racialized as white and therefore may also be examined through this lens. Race always deserves scrutiny in spatial studies, and though it may not always be the primary focus, this issue positions race as a key category for analysis of the landscape. The essays demonstrate that race inflects the questions we have always asked in landscape studies and in landscape architecture: Who creates most of the professionally designed landscapes and why is this so? For whom are most sites designed? Who is the presumed public that designers imagine? Where are designed landscapes situated and who has access to them? How are messages about access, belonging, and exclusion manifested in built form? How is the funding for public projects apportioned? All of these sample questions have implications for the study of form and aesthetics as well as social, political, and economic issues yet we seldom examine those connections.

Though it is certainly true that studies of race and space are relatively new, geographers and urban historians have already made important contributions to this topic (Kobayashi and Peake 2000, 399). My recently assembled bibliography of scholarly works related to the topic of race and space indicates that geographers outnumber architectural and landscape scholars working on this question (Harris 2004). I direct interested readers of this issue to Richard Schein's recently published volume, *Landscape and Race in the United States* (2006), which appeared as this special issue was going to press and which may serve as a useful companion to these essays.

Plainly stated, architecture and landscape architecture (and the histories of both fields) are overwhelmingly white disciplines/professions in which the techniques of study and practice—and the questions they leave unasked—frequently render the operations of racism, privilege, and exclusion opaque, or reinforce their invisibility. The whiteness of our disciplines extends to the demographic of our professions and professional degree programs. It is my hope that an increased scholarly focus on race and space—and in the number of university courses related to this question—might eventually lead to an increased number of underrepresented students enrolled in landscape architecture and architecture degree programs.

I mention the lack of focus on this topic not as an admonishment but as a challenge. One of the difficulties presented by race/space studies is the problem of visibility; issues about race and space can be particularly hard to see because they are completely naturalized within the spaces we daily inhabit. White privilege literally hides in plain sight (invisible especially to those who enjoy the privileges), a situation that is exacerbated by the fact that landscapes are particularly well-suited to masking such constructions because they appear to be completely natural, God-given, and neutral (Roediger 2004, 95). The silent signs of wealth, power, belonging, and exclusion are made even more potent when composed of large areas of mown and tended grass, carefully maintained mature trees, and manicured landscape settings that appear willed into existence. There is a long history that involves efforts to hide the evidence of work and laborers in the landscape (Duncan and Duncan 2004). But landscapes, and indeed architecture, are never "neutral." They are always powerful symbols and containers of cultural values, just as they simultaneously work to construct culture. Given this equivalence of invisibility between the ideologies of constructed space and constructions of race, built form and ideologies of race (as with class and gender) become complicit in the manufacturing of societal norms.

Trying to understand the complicity of the built environment in the construction of racial identities and racism then, can be particularly difficult to do because architecture, landscape, and city spaces are such effective guises for the perpetuation of—to use George Lipsitz's term—the possessive investment in whiteness (Lipsitz 1998). Lipsitz asserts that this investment is defined (in part) by the literal cash value of a white identity that "provides (those identified as white) with resources, power, and opportunity," and despite the fact that there are neither biological nor anthropological bases for the construction of such identities, they remain a social fact with profound economic and social consequences (Lipsitz 1998, vii). And although the construction of white identities in and through the built environment is not the particular focus of the essays in this special issue, the essays do examine the centrality of the spatial in processes of racial (including whiteness) construction so that we can, as Laguerre has written, "remap the terrain, identify hegemonic and subaltern sites of relationships and, in the process, develop a new and critical cartography of social practices" (Laguerre 1999, 5). These practices must include landscape architecture, urban design, and land use planning.

As a method for approaching the built environment, race theories provide a way of stepping outside the limitations of existing categories of analysis so that we can imagine histories emerging from entirely different perspectives that may and should lead us to ask entirely different sorts of questions. The essays that follow

provide starting points for scholars and other professionals working in the built environment who wish to consider these new strata. They should be read for their content, of course, but they should also be read for their respective methods since they point toward new directions for studying and understanding the built world. They ask us to consider new ways of knowing landscape that may not be comfortable or familiar. They ask us to deeply and critically question ourselves and our practices as scholars, as teachers, and as professionals. They also expand our notions of the boundaries of professional practice, asking us to consider such things as fair housing activism and to make them an integrated and routine part of everyday practice.

In the opening essay, George Lipsitz focuses on the destabilization of practice, asking us to "dissassemble the fatal links that join race, place, and power." His initial focus on New Orleans reminds us that the theoretical issues raised herein have real and immediate consequences and applications. His assertion, that the "rights to occupy and traverse space" are fundamental to conflicts around the globe, situates the study of race and space within a transnational context as well. Of particular importance is Lipsitz's notion of the "spatial imaginary" which is linked to notions of landscape cognition that are already familiar to many *Landscape Journal* readers. It is a concept that should help landscape architects think about place attachment as linked to the racialization of space, thereby extending our knowledge in that area, and it is a concept that likewise recurs in various forms in several of these essays.

Landscape cognition receives further attention in Dell Upton's essay, which examines cognition of space through the world of sound. Focusing on antebellum New Orleans, Upton demonstrates that mastery of public space and ideas about civility and citizenship are linked to ideas about sound and noises heard in the public and private sphere. He identifies a new kind of geographic and spatial reckoning system that occurred at a range of scales and in multiple realms. In so doing, he pushes at the boundaries of the ways we think about the history of the built world, asking us to consider the embodied experience as key. He considers Henri Lefebvre's well-known questions about the rights to the city, but he does so by considering claims to the production of the urban soundscape, linking them to further assertions to the rights to urban and public space and therefore to citizenship and even personal identity (Lefebvre 1996). This essay is among the only works of landscape scholarship to my knowledge that examines space through the experience of sound instead of relying on vision. It also forges new connections between the aural, everyday performances and actions, and the construction of identity (racial and otherwise), through examination of the spaces in which sounds were heard. Upton's essay also challenges us to consider alternate modes of spatial experience that move beyond what can be understood from a drawing, a model, or the traditional forms of spatial representation.

Rebecca Ginsburg similarly presents a historical study that may help designers understand various modes of landscape cognition. As both Lipsitz and Upton do, Ginsburg examines a racialized spatial imaginary. Her study of slave experiences and knowledge of plantation landscapes demonstrates that there is more than one "eye" for perceiving space and that multiple cognitive styles coexist for single locations. In so doing, Ginsburg emphasizes the need to understand the racialization of the landscape in order to uncover varying modes of landscape cognition. Slave landscapes existed as a way of knowing particular spaces, but also as a means that helped blacks understand aspects of their white owners' lives.

Los Angeles serves as the focus for three essays in this issue, which is not surprising since it is one of the most socially complex cities in the United States. Yet it is also emblematic of many large U.S. cities and as such, its problems and conditions can stand, to some extent, for those found elsewhere. As such, Greg Hise's essay provides important background for understanding a set of familiar urban conditions and shows us the historic bases for conditions naturalized by the logic of neoclassical economics and urban policy. He asks us to consider how and toward what ends boundaries are

established in cities? How are space and race used to create social distance? Through an examination of the urban history of Los Angeles, Hise examines the ways in which the terms embedded in the practice of urban planning—'nuisance,' 'disease,' 'blight,' and 'renewal'—serve to legitimate removal, segregation, and partitioning within cities.

Like Hise, Lynne Horiuchi examines the practice of social sorting by race as it occurs in cities by studying the racialized real estate market of San Francisco's Western Addition and Presidio Terrace development in the early decades of the twentieth century. Like Lipsitz, Horiuchi demonstrates the centrality of address in the formation of life chances. She provides a detailed examination of the intertwined roles played by restrictive covenants, urban planning policy, and aesthetic categories in the segregation of Asian Americans during the first half of the twentieth century. The example of San Francisco is both distinctive and paradigmatic because it reveals regionally-specific variations to situations that existed and were in fact widespread throughout the United States. Although Horiuchi's essay provides an example from history, it tells an unfinished story since fair housing remains a critical concern nationwide.

In "East Side Stories," Eric Avila once again examines a particular spatial imaginary, focusing on the Los Angeles freeway paintings created by a group of Chicano artists. For many, freeways are simply a means to move from place to place as rapidly as possible. But Avila shows us that for Los Angeles Barrio residents, freeways became barriers that created a defined zone of economic, social, and political limitation. They also became boundaries that contained groups of labor activists who worked to subvert those limitations and they served as the subject matter for important works of art that sometimes aided in that subversion. As Avila states, "The point is not that these artists celebrate or disparage freeways: it is that they see them." He makes visible a set of minoritizing boundaries that might normally serve only as the "invisible" space of transportation. Like Lipsitz, he deals with the relationship between urban infrastructure, its location, and minoritization.

Sharon Irish also examines the production of art in Los Angeles, demonstrating that public and private art have the potential to make visible the connections between race and space. Irish re-examines the high-style, modernist landscape of the UCLA sculpture garden such that it becomes a stage for the performance of a highly political drama. In so doing, she asks landscape architects to consider how the form and location of a space matters in the production of specific identities. Her essay examines the role of landscape spaces in foregrounding racial issues such that designed landscapes may become the stage for the performance of both identities and social activism. Like Upton, Irish examines the embodiment of identities created in spaces. She also asks that landscape architects who identify themselves as white carefully question and consider their own privileged position in order to reconfigure our notions of professional practice.

Laura Lawson's essay offers an applied study that begins to examine how form may be generated from fresh perspectives that consider an alternate range of spatial imaginaries. Her essay, which focuses on the design of parks in East St. Louis, sensitively reveals the ways landscape architects have made efforts over several decades to address questions of fair access and to encourage diverse participants in their designed spaces. She thus acknowledges important advances that have taken place in community design over the past three to four decades, and the ongoing commitment of the profession to such issues, while also pointing to the need to understand the deeper policy issues involved and their theoretical grounding in the racialization of space. She also points to the frustrating gap that so often exists between the scarcity of municipal funds and the abundance of designer/community good will—a scenario that highlights the limits of traditional practice and the need for landscape architectural practice to extend to activism at the level of local, state, and national politics in order to achieve change.

My gratitude goes to all the symposium participants and to those who agreed to submit papers for this special issue of *Landscape Journal.* At the outset, I

must also thank those individuals who facilitated both the symposium and this special issue. David Roediger served as Interim Director of the Center on Democracy in a Multiracial Society at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), from 2003-2004. A pioneering scholar in the Critical Study of Whiteness, Dave first suggested the possibility of such a symposium, granted the Center's financial and administrative assistance, and has generously guided me through the scholarly literature on Critical Whiteness Studies and Race Theory over the past several years. It is seldom that one finds a colleague who gives so freely of his time and intellect and I thank him here for making this special issue and the symposium possible. Additional support for the symposium came from the UIUC Department of Landscape Architecture and from the College of Fine and Applied Arts.

As always, I am deeply grateful for the support of my colleagues here in the Department of Landscape Architecture. James Wescoat provided departmental support without a moment's hesitation, and I continually benefit from the *esprit de corps* and intellectual stimulation presented by our faculty. Their presence at the symposium, and the questions they posed, substantially advanced my own ideas on this topic. Elen Deming and James Palmer have been enthusiastic supporters of this project since I first proposed it to them, and Elen dedicated hours of time, providing extensive editorial work and thoughtful suggestions. I am grateful to them for this opportunity to bring new material to the *Journal*'s readers, and for their courageous decision to dedicate an entire issue to the difficult, unsettling, and controversial topics covered herein.

NOTES

1. Angela Davis lecture, "Punishment and Democracy: Prison Abolitionism in the 21st Century." University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, November 14, 2002.
2. Michel Laguerre asserted that "space is a central phenomenon in explaining the minority question because space is implicit in the very notion of minority, which implies positioning, relations, hierarchy, mobility, displacement, difference, and segregation" (Laguerre 1999, 8).
3. Similarly, the geographers Owen Dwyer and John Paul Jones have asked "how the security of white identities and spaces can be deconstructed, and destabilized" in order to achieve a more just society (Dwyer and Jones 2000, 219).
4. Although theories about the social construction of race have been in currency for some time, "Whiteness Studies" emerged as a field around 1988 with the appearance of key publications by Richard Dyer, Aldon Lynn Nielson, Peggy McIntosh, and David Roediger among others. See for example, Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* vol. 1 (London: Verso, 1994); Alastair Bonnett, "White Studies: The Problems and Projects of a New Research Agenda," *Theory, Culture & Society* 13.3 (1996): 145-155; Mike Hill, ed., *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 1997); Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); Peter Kolchin, "Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America," *Journal of American History* 89.1 (June 2002): 154-73; Aldon L. Nielsen, *Reading Race: White American Poets and Racial Discourse in the Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988); Peggy Macintosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies," in *Race, Class, and Gender*, eds. M. L. Anderson and P. H. Collins (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991). My thanks to Tim Engles and David Roediger for directing me to these sources. See also J. Hartigan, "Establishing the Fact of Whiteness," *American Anthropologist* 99 (September 1997): 495-505; J. L. Kincheloe, S. R. Steinberg, N. M. Rodriguez, and R. E. Chenault, eds., *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). As a field led by ethnic studies, these scholars explore the idea that whiteness, like all other racial categories, remains a social construction rather than a biological fact, in this case a category that "came into use in late-sixteenth-century America" as a device of distinction. Significantly, it is during the postwar period that distinctions between race and ethnicity receive increased attention since the term "ethnicity," developed by a group of Zionist intellectuals, appears repeatedly in the press after 1945. Again, I thank David Roediger for supplying this information. For definitions of "white" see Helen Fox, *When Race Breaks Out: Conversations About Race and Racism in College Classrooms* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2004): 22. As Pem Davidson Buck has noted

   > Whiteness has been a continuously evolving smokescreen, adjusted and readjusted to the changing needs

of elites as the drainage system has been reorganized, disguising from many of the oppressed the nature of their oppression. Racial attitudes, like patterns of racial violence, and like race itself, are not 'natural'; neither race nor racism flow inevitably from 'difference.' Instead, there are reasons why people define particular 'differences' as important at particular times and places, and why at particular moments certain differences are defined as so critical that defending them is believed to justify violence. (2001, 225)

5. As Patricia Williams has noted, the power of whiteness, ". . . both visible and invisible—is so pervasive and systemic, so ordered and ordering. This totalism is at such seeming odds with its whimsy and irrationality" (2004, 18). Likewise, Maurice Berger points out that, "much of what defines race in culture is innately visual" (2004, 45) Yet we need help to "visualize and understand something that has ironically remained invisible in public discourse about race: whiteness." These scholars also work from an awareness that whiteness itself is constructed variously and is never monolithic, so that even those considered "white" have multiple experiences and backgrounds that must be interpreted and accounted for.

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