



BEDTIME RADICALISM

WRITTEN BY SLIM
PHILOMATH

Illustrated by Soleada

Gentrification

AS A RELATIVELY NEW RESIDENT OF THE DC/MARYLAND/VIRGINIA AREA, I WAS SURPRISED TO FIND THE ETHNIC MAKEUP OF THE AREA WHERE I STAY IS PREDOMINANTLY BLACK AND OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR. THROUGHOUT MY PROFESSIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL CAREER, I HAVE BEEN IN BOTH WHITE SPACES AND BLACK SPACES. 10 OUT OF 10 TIMES, I PREFER TO BE AROUND MY OWN PEOPLE, BLACK PEOPLE. NEEDLESS TO SAY, BEING AROUND BLACK PEOPLE ENERGIZES ME BECAUSE WE DON'T ONLY SHARE THE SAME MELANIN, BUT WE ALSO REFLECT SIMILAR CULTURAL VALUES, AND ARE USUALLY ON THE SAME PAGE ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF BEING BLACK IN AMERICA. THEREFORE, COMING TO THE AREA WAS A SIGH OF RELIEF FOR ME BECAUSE SEEING MELANATED PEOPLE AT WORK, ON THE METRO, IN THE GYM, AND IN THE CLASSROOM WAS REFRESHING FOR ME.

AS AN OUTSIDER I VIEWED DC AS A HAVEN FOR BLACK CULTURE LIKENED TO CITIES LIKE ATLANTA OR NEW ORLEANS. HOWEVER, GRACE, A FRIEND OF MINE, THAT GREW UP IN THE AREA, CLAIMS THAT DC IS NO LONGER ETHNICALLY WHAT IT USED TO BE AND IS STARTING TO RESEMBLE A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTION (PWI). HAVING BEEN EDUCATED AT A PWI, I COULD NOT HELP BUT DISAGREE WITH HER CONSIDERING THAT 45% OF THE CITY'S RESIDENTS ARE BLACK IN COMPARISON TO THE 45% WHITE POPULATION. COMPARED WITH OTHER CITIES IN THE US, THIS STATISTIC WOULD BE A TESTAMENT TO THE CITY'S DIVERSITY. AT FIRST, I DID NOT UNDERSTAND WHY GRACE MOURNED HER CITY UNTIL FURTHER RESEARCH REVEALED THAT IN THE YEAR 2000, DC WAS ETHNICALLY 60% BLACK AND 30% WHITE. THIS IS AGAIN A STARK DIFFERENCE FROM THE 1980 CENSUS DATA OF DC BEING 70% BLACK.

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO DC, THE CAPITAL ONCE DUBBED CHOCOLATE CITY? THIS EXODUS OF BLACK PEOPLE OUT OF METROPOLITAN AREAS IS A PHENOMENON I HAVE NOTICED ACROSS CITIES IN AMERICA. SINCE THE GREAT MIGRATION AND THE SUBSEQUENT "WHITE FLIGHT" OF THE 1950S AND 1960S, METROPOLITAN AREAS HAVE BEEN THE BUSTLING HUBS FOR BLACK AND BROWN COMMUNITIES. HOWEVER, IN THE LAST DECADE THERE HAS BEEN A NEW WAVE OF YOUNG WHITE PROFESSIONALS MOVING INTO HISTORICALLY BLACK NEWLY GENTRIFIED NEIGHBORHOODS. THIS RESURGENCE OF WHITE PEOPLE IN BLACK NEIGHBORHOODS INTERESTS ME FIRST BECAUSE IT ILLUSTRATES THE ASPATIALITY – LACK OF PROPERTY RELATING TO OR OCCUPYING SPACE- THAT BLACK PEOPLE FACE ACROSS THE DIASPORA. SECONDLY, THE SAME APOLITICAL "PURE" MARKET CALCULUS THAT WAS USED AMID THE WHITE FLIGHT TO EXCLUDE BLACK FAMILIES FROM SETTLING IN THE SUBURBS IN THE 60S, HAS FOUND A SECOND WIND WITH GENTRIFICATION.





Tulsa Race Massacre

Over the past 400 years, Africans were robbed from the continent and were placed across the Americas. Despite this violent uprooting, Black people were able to form pseudo-communities even in the midst of a continual effort to eviscerate familial and intramural ties. This ability to “rise”, as Maya Angelou proclaims in her poem Still I Rise, may be seen as a testament to our persevering spirit despite the gratuitous violence we have faced. In this celebration, it must be noted that Blacks were still subject to an aspatiality and thus violence. One of the most infamous examples, being the 1921 Tulsa race massacre in which Black residents of Tulsa’s proclaimed “Black Wall Street” were violently mobbed and beaten. One might ask what sparked the burning of 35 city blocks, 300 lives being lost, the crippling of hundreds, and nearly 10 thousand residents being displaced (Parshina-kottas et al., 2021). There is a myriad of factors or excuses that can explain the tipping point of the massacre, however, the answer is summed up in the reality that Black people creating a financially active space that overshadowed the surrounding poor white neighborhoods, infringed on the societal law of Black inferiority. Therefore, out of envy or perhaps white fragility, there was a leveling of that Black space in Tulsa.

INTERNATIONALLY: HAITI & DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Moving outside of the US, another example of Black aspatiality is in the Caribbean on the shared island of Haiti and the Dominican Republic (DR). Haiti boasts a proud history of being the first Black led republic, the first independent Caribbean state, and today ethnically being 95% Black. As seen in Tulsa, despite this rich history, the nation of Haiti is regarded as an aspatial place or a Black hole in the international community. This is evidenced by the nation being “the poorest country in Latin America” as well as being “among the poorest countries in the world. In 2021, Haiti had a GNI per capita of US\$1,420” (Embassy of Haiti, 2021). An argument can be made that factors such as natural disasters are major contributors to the nation's poverty, yet this does not explain why their island neighbors, the Dominican Republic, do not experience the same adversities. According to Kevin Werner, “an average person of the Dominican Republic is nearly nine times richer than an average person in Haiti” (2014). Despite being neighbors, the lack of space for Black individuals is evidenced in DR through the militarized border between the two countries where Haitian refugees are met with overwhelming violence. This factor is related to the cultural history of antiblack racism in the DR where leaders such as Trujillo strove towards “European values” despite 70% of the nation being of African descent. In *An Epidemic of Negrophobia :Blackness and the Legacy of the US Occupation of the Dominican Republic*, Micah Wright described that during the US military occupation from 1916–1924, they reinforced necrophobia by describing the island's Black population as illegitimates therefore putting “hundreds of [white] foreigners from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Europe” in government offices (Wright, 2015, p 24). Further unregulated US interventions, led to an immigration of Haitians into DR as a means to obtain cheap labor and thus DR's working class began to “share creole elites’ understanding of blackness as a foreign threat to the nation” (Wright, 2015, p 25). The US occupation created a scaffold for Rafael Trujillo to subsequently follow in which he tried to omit Blackness from DR's history altogether. Even in close proximity or in sharing genetic ancestry there is a lack of space afforded and an effort to move away from Blackness.

"IN THE WAKE OF WHITENESS... THERE NEEDS TO BE AN EXPULSION OF BLACKNESS"

In the context of gentrification these same principles apply because in the wake of whiteness coming into a space, socially there needs to be an expulsion of Blackness. This is historically presented in the 1960s white flight from cities because there was a “deeper quandary: when individual and group with market-based rights, [led to] America’s procedural republic account[ing] for the ensuing contradictions” (Hoff, 2008 , p 268). This means that in the 60s the need for an exclusion of Black individuals from white social life led to racism not being “an exogenous variable that ruined otherwise race-neutral public policy. Rather, state policies and actors helped change the way that whites thought about race” (Hoff, 2008 , p 266-267). It should be noted that this did not change the fundamental epistemic antiblackness within America’s fabric, but rather the racism was dressed up differently as cold market calculus. Thus, white homeowners convinced themselves that, Blacks’ inaccessibility to suburban housing was not due to their underlying antiblack beliefs or policies, despite the mountain of evidence, but rather due to the seemingly rational market fact that black occupancy eroded property value. This prism of thinking was projected on the white society through homeowners being portrayed as white and middleclass, programs such as redlining, and banks rating Black neighborhoods poorly based on the ethnic makeup, both of which are the progeny of Jim Crow segregation. This of course led to white people leaving metropolitan areas to avoid the speciality that Blacks creates.



I argue that this prism of cold market calculus is what led cities to gentrify historically Black neighborhoods and is leading young white professionals to return to cities. As mentioned above, in spite of a violent uprooting and planting in America, Black people have been able to create an intramural amongst themselves. The Black migration set up these intramurals in urban environments, yet these intramurals are not honored by cities' governances because, as we have learned, to be Black is to lack a property relating to or occupying space. Therefore, as if stumbling upon newly found unfurnished land, it is in the cities best interest to bring in revenue by metaphorically clearing house and making room for civil society (whiteness). This is illustrated clearly in the coded language of "urban renewal projects" in which houses in historical Black and brown neighborhoods are replaced or refurbished into multimillion-dollar housing apartments. In comparison to the older rent pricing, the cost of living in these newly erected structures can cost hundreds of dollars more than what the previous residents are willing to pay. The buying and building of new housing developments might not seem overtly violent yet race inflected market calculus is evident. Despite buildings not being able to bar black residents from buying, distribution of wealth unfortunately favors the newly employed white professionals rather than the historical Black population in these cities. So then in the case of cities like DC, Black families are continually pushed out from the neighborhoods. This is seen in Navy Yard which is the most gentrified census tract in DC due to a 72% decrease in the Black population between 2000 and 2018 (Golash-Boza, 2022). According to ArcGIS, Black residents have been historically displaced south of the Anacostia River as evidenced by South East DC wards 7 and 8 only revealing a 0%-5% decrease in Black residents in comparison to the 15%- 70% decrease seen in wards 1, 5 ,and 6 (Golash-Boza, 2022). Unsurprisingly, neighborhoods in Southeast DC have some of the highest disinvestment scores in the city.

So, a question remains as to what we could do to stop this displacement of Black people from their homes. And to be honest I'm not sure. Although the US is becoming more segregated than it has ever been, the Fair Housing Act claims to discourage racialized housing practices and encourage diversity and inclusion in the cityscapes. The battle for housing becomes difficult because segregation is no longer viewed as an antithesis between black and white but rather the amount of green that's in your pocket. So perhaps to combat displacement there needs to be a critical look at how capitalism affects the housing market or rather how race even affects the market. Or perhaps those two factors are endemically linked. Ultimately Black people want to find a space that they can call there own so you tell me where we should begin.



Questions? Comments? Email me your thoughts at btr.zine@gmail.com

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