

SPACE

SPACE RACISM: A powerful collection of racist policies that lead to resource inequity between racialized spaces or the elimination of certain racialized spaces, which are substantiated by racist ideas about racialized spaces.

SPACE ANTIRACISM: A powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity between integrated and protected racialized spaces, which are substantiated by antiracist ideas about racialized spaces.

WE CALLED OUR African American studies space a Black space—it was, after all, governed primarily by Black bodies, Black thoughts, Black cultures, and Black histories. Of course, the spaces at Temple University governed primarily by White bodies, White thoughts, White cultures, and White histories were not labeled White. They hid the Whiteness of their spaces behind the veil of color blindness.

The most prominent person in our Black space at Temple had been piercing this unspoken veil since 1970, when he first printed the *Journal of Black Studies*. Molefi Kete Asante, who in 1980 would publish the seminal work *Afrocentricity*, railed against assimilationist ideas and called for Afrocentric Black people. There were multiple ways of seeing the world, he argued. But too many Black people were “looking out” at the world from a European “center,” which was taken as the only point from which to see the world—through European cultures masquerading as world cultures, European religions masquerading as world religions, Euro-

pean history masquerading as world history. Theories gleaned from European subjects masquerading as universal theories. "The rejection of European particularism as universal is the first stage of our coming intellectual struggle," Professor Asante wrote. In 1987, he established the nation's first African American studies doctoral program at Temple to wage the struggle, the program I entered twenty years later.

Asante's right-hand woman in our department was Professor Ama Mazama. A product of Guadeloupe and recipient of a doctorate in linguistics from La Sorbonne in Paris, Professor Mazama may have been more well-known outside the United States. Not minding, she enjoyed bolting the States to speak on her research on the Afrocentric paradigm, African religion, Caribbean culture and languages, and African American homeschooling. She loved African traditions deep in her soul. That same soul hated to see African people worshipping European traditions. "Negroes," she called them in disgust.

Professor Mazama spoke as softly as the African garb that draped her petite body. I remember her publicly debating an animated Maulana Karenga, the founder of Kwanzaa, with the same tranquility with which she spoke to her homeschooled children afterward. She taught me that the power of the spoken word is in the power of the word spoken.

Professor Mazama gave criticism the way she received it: unflappably. She almost welcomed ideological divergence from the people she held dear. We didn't agree on everything, but we shared a deep love of African people and scholarly combat. Professor Mazama was as intellectually confident, fearless, and clear as anyone I had ever met. I asked her to be my dissertation adviser and she obliged. I hoped at least a few of her intellectual qualities would rub off on me.

In my first course with Mazama, she lectured on Asante's contention that objectivity was really "collective subjectivity." She concluded, "It is impossible to be objective."

It was the sort of simple idea that shifted my view of the world immediately. It made so much sense to me as I recalled the sub-

jective choices I'd made as an aspiring journalist and scholar. If objectivity was dead, though, I needed a replacement. I flung up my hand like an eighth-grader.

"Yes?"

"If we can't be objective, then what should we strive to do?" She stared at me as she gathered her words. Not a woman of many words, it did not take long.

"Just tell the truth. That's what we should strive to do. Tell the truth."

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES took up part of the eighth floor of Gladfelter Hall at Temple University, which stoically faced its equally imposing twin, Anderson Hall. The two skyscrapers filled with middle-income White faculty and students loomed over North Philadelphia blocks teeming with low-income Black people. Temple's poorly paid security guards required anyone entering Gladfelter Hall or other campus buildings to show their university IDs to prevent those two worlds from meeting. Racist Whites saw danger in the "ghetto" walking on campus. They worried about safeguarding their White space inside North Philadelphia's Black space. But they could not understand why we worried about safeguarding our Black space inside Temple's White space. They branded Black studies a "ghetto," like my neighborhood in North Philadelphia, but insisted it was a ghetto of our making.

The defining character of Harlem's "dark ghetto," where Kenneth Clark lived and studied during the early 1960s, and of the North Philadelphia where I lived and studied four decades later was "creeping blight," according to Clark, "juvenile delinquency" and "widespread violence"—characteristics that exist in different forms in all racialized spaces. The idea of the dangerous Black neighborhood is the most dangerous racist idea. And it is powerfully misleading. For instance, people steer away from and stigmatize Black neighborhoods as crime-ridden streets where you

might have your wallet stolen. But they aspire to move into upscale White neighborhoods, home to white-collar criminals and "banksters," as Thom Hartmann calls them, who might steal your life savings. Americans lost trillions during the Great Recession, which was largely triggered by financial crimes of staggering enormity. Estimated losses from white-collar crimes are believed to be between \$300 and \$600 billion per year, according to the FBI. By comparison, near the height of violent crime in 1995, the FBI reported the combined costs of burglary and robbery to be \$4 billion.

Racist Americans stigmatize entire Black neighborhoods as places of homicide and mortal violence but don't similarly connect White neighborhoods to the disproportionate number of White males who engage in mass shootings. And they don't even see the daily violence that unfolds on the highways that deliver mostly White suburbanites to their homes. In 1986, during the violent crack epidemic, 3,380 more Americans died from alcohol-related traffic deaths than from homicides. None of this is to say that White spaces or Black spaces are more or less violent—this isn't about creating a hierarchy. The point is that when we chain ourselves from the space racism that deracializes and normalizes and elevates elite White spaces, while doing the opposite to Black spaces, we will find good and bad, violence and nonviolence, in all spaces, no matter how poor or rich, Black or non-Black. No matter the effect of the conjoined twins.

Just as racist power racializes people, racist power racializes space. The ghetto. The inner city. The third world. A space is racialized when a racial group is known to either govern the space or make up the clear majority in the space. A Black space, for instance, is either a space publicly run by Black people or a space where Black people stand in the majority. Policies of space racism overresource White spaces and underresource non-White spaces. Ideas of space racism justify resource inequity through creating a racial hierarchy of space, lifting up White spaces as heaven, downgrading non-White spaces as hell. "We have a situation where we

have our inner cities, African Americans, Hispanics, are living in hell, because it's so dangerous," candidate Donald Trump said during a presidential debate in 2016. In an Oval Office meeting in 2018 about Black and Latinx immigrants, President Trump asked: "Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?"

AFTER EXITING THE elevator onto Gladfelter's eighth floor, no one could miss the glassed-in classroom known as the fishbowl. Inside the glass walls often sat, in a circle, a motley bunch of mostly Black fish—many of whom had swum into Philadelphia from historically Black colleges and universities and were still soaked in school pride. One day before class, a Jackson State alum had the audacity to announce the Sonic Boom as the best marching band in the land. He looked at me. I fell out laughing, a deep and long and booming laugh that said everything I needed to say. Almost all of us were boosting our school bands and academic feats and homecomings and histories and alumni. Even Ali from Fisk University. "There are more PhDs," Ali declared one day, "walking around who went to Fisk for undergrad than any other HBCU." We all knew Fisk used to be illustrious, but these days small private HBCUs like Fisk were hemorrhaging students and revenue and donations and respect. "This is 2006, not 1906!" someone blurted. "All of Fisk's doctorates could easily fit in this fishbowl," someone shouted. "What y'all got, two hundred students right now?"

Jokes aside, I respected Ali's pride in Fisk and all my classmates' HBCU pride, no matter how outlandish they sometimes sounded. I had no respect for those who hated their HBCUs. And no one hated their HBCU more than the only other FAMU alum in our graduate program.

Every time I lifted up FAMU's examples of Black excellence, Nashay shot them down. She complained about the incompetence lurking on FAMU's campus the way Temple students complained about the dangers lurking off campus. One day, as we

awaited class in the fishbowl, I'd had enough. "Why you always dogging out FAMU?"

"Don't worry about it."

I pressed. She resisted. Finally, she opened.

"FAMU messed up my transcript!"

"What?" I asked, confused.

"I had them send my transcript and they messed it up. How can you have incompetent people working in the transcript office?"

She closed up. Class started, but I could not let it go. How could she use one horrible error from one person in one office to condemn the entire university—my university—as horrible? But I had said it all, heard it all before. I heard and heaped blame on HBCU administrators for the scarcity of resources. I heard Black students and faculty at historically White colleges and universities (HWCUs) say they could never go to HBCUs, those poorly run ghettos. I heard HBCU faculty and staff talk about escaping the dark ghettos and moving to HWCUs.

I heard my uncle say, like Dartmouth alum Aisha Tyler, that HBCUs do not represent "the real world." The argument: Black students are better served learning how to operate in a majority-White nation by attending a majority-White university. The reality: A large percentage of—perhaps most—Black Americans live in majority-Black neighborhoods, work in majority-Black sites of employment, organize in majority-Black associations, socialize in majority-Black spaces, attend majority-Black churches, and send their children to majority-Black schools. When people contend that Black spaces do not represent reality, they are speaking from the White worldview of Black people in the minority. They are conceptualizing the real American world as White. To be antiracist is to recognize there is no such thing as the "real world," only real worlds, multiple worldviews.

I heard people say, "Even the best black colleges and universities do not approach the standards of quality of respectable institutions," as economist Thomas Sowell wrote in 1974. Sowell's "description remains accurate," Jason Riley wrote in *The Wall*

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Street Journal on September 28, 2010. Selective HBCUs lag behind “decent state schools like the University of Texas at Austin, never mind a Stanford or Yale.”

Riley had pulled out the familiar weapon safeguarding space racism and menacing Black spaces: unfairly comparing Black spaces to substantially richer White spaces. The endowment of the richest HBCU, Howard, was five times less than UT Austin’s endowment in 2016, never mind being thirty-six times less than the endowment of a Stanford or Yale. The racial wealth gap produces a giving gap. For public HBCUs, the giving gap extends to state-funding gaps, as racist policies steer more funds to HWCUs, like the current “performance based” state models.

Resources define a space, resources the conjoined twins divvy up. People make spaces from resources. Comparing spaces across race-classes is like matching fighters of different weight classes, which fighting sports consider unfair. Poor Black neighborhoods should be compared to equally poor White neighborhoods, not to considerably richer White neighborhoods. Small Black businesses should be compared to equally small White businesses, not to wealthy White corporations. Indeed, when researchers compare HBCUs to HWCUs of similar means and makeup, HBCUs tend to have higher Black graduation rates. Not to mention, Black HBCU graduates are, on average, more likely than their Black peers from HWCUs to be thriving financially, socially, and physically.

NASHAY FORCED ME to reckon with my own space racism, but I would learn there was more to her story.

A financial-aid officer had stolen thousands from her as an undergraduate student at a White university, but she still held that university in high regard. A botched transcript and she condemned her Black university. What hypocrisy. At the time, I could not be angry at her without being angrier at myself. How many times did I individualize the error in White spaces, blaming

the individual and not the White space? How many times did I generalize the error in the Black space—in the Black church or at a Black gathering—and blame the Black space instead of the individual? How many times did I have a bad experience at a Black business and then walk away complaining about not the individuals involved but Black businesses as a whole?

Banks remain twice as likely to offer loans to White entrepreneurs than to Black entrepreneurs. Customers avoid Black businesses like they are the “ghetto,” like the “White man’s ice is colder,” as antiracists have joked for years. I knew this then. But my dueling consciousness still led me to think like one young Black writer wrote in *Blavity* in 2017: “On an intellectual level, I know that Black people have been denied equal access to capital, training, and physical space. But does that inequitable treatment excuse bad service?” Does not good service, like every other commodity, typically cost more money? How can we acknowledge the clouds of racism over Black spaces and be shocked when it rains on our heads?

I felt Black was beautiful, but Black spaces were not? Nearly everything I am I owe to Black space. Black neighborhood. Black church. Black college. Black studies. I was like a plant devaluing the soil that made me.

THE HISTORY OF space racism is long. It is an American history that begins with Thomas Jefferson’s solution to the “Negro problem.” Civilize and emancipate the Negro. Send the Negro to Africa to “carry back to the country of their origin the seeds of civilization,” as Jefferson proposed in a letter in 1811. But the Negro commonly wanted no part in returning and redeeming Africa “from ignorance and barbarism.” We do not want to go to the “savage wilds of Africa,” free Black Philadelphians resolved in 1817. Slaveholders were, meanwhile, decrying the savage wilds of free Blacks. A writer for the South’s *De Bow’s Review* searched around the world, through a series of articles in 1859 and 1860,

for “a moral, happy, and voluntarily industrious community of free negroes,” but concluded, “no such community exists upon the face of the earth.”

On January 12, 1865, in the midst of the Civil War, General William T. Sherman and U.S. secretary of war Edwin M. Stanton met with twenty Black leaders in Savannah, Georgia. After their spokesman, Garrison Frazier, said they needed land to be free so “we could reap the fruit of our labor, take care of ourselves,” Stanton asked if they would “rather live . . . scattered among the whites or in colonies by yourselves?”

“Live by ourselves,” Frazier responded, “for there is a prejudice against us in the South that will take years to get over.”

Four days later, General Sherman issued Special Field Order No. 15 to punish Confederate landowners and rid his army camps of runaways. Black people received an army mule and “not more than forty acres” on coastal plains of South Carolina and Georgia. “The sole and exclusive management of affairs will be left to the freed people themselves,” Sherman ordered.

Horace Greeley, the most eminent newspaper editor of the day, thought Sherman’s order deprived the Negroes “of the advantage of white teachers and neighbors, who would lead them to an understanding and enjoyment of that higher civilization of which hitherto they have been deprived as slaves.” Freed Southern Blacks “like their fellows at the North” will be “aided by contact with white civilization,” Greeley wrote in his *New-York Tribune* on January 30, 1865.

Black people were rejecting Greeley’s integrationist strategy. By June 1865, roughly forty thousand Blacks had settled on four hundred thousand acres of land before Confederate landowners, aided by the new Johnson administration, started taking back “their” land.

The integrationist strategy—the placing of White and non-White bodies in the same spaces—is thought to cultivate away the barbarism of people of color and the racism of White people. The integrationist strategy expects Black bodies to heal in proximity to Whites who haven’t yet stopped fighting them. After enduring

slavery's violence, Frazier and his brethren had enough. They desired to separate, not from Whites but from White racism. Separation is not always segregation. The antiracist desire to separate from racists is different from the segregationist desire to separate from "inferior" Blacks.

Whenever Black people voluntarily gather among themselves, integrationists do not see spaces of Black solidarity created to separate Black people from racism. They see spaces of White hate. They do not see spaces of cultural solidarity, of solidarity against racism. They see spaces of segregation against White people. Integrationists do not see these spaces as the movement of Black people toward Black people. Integrationists think about them as a movement away from White people. They then equate that movement away from White people with the White segregationist movement away from Black people. Integrationists equate spaces for the survival of Black bodies with spaces for the survival of White supremacy.

When integrationists use segregation and separation interchangeably, they are using the vocabulary of Jim Crow. Segregationists blurred the lines between segregation and separation by projecting their policies as standing "on the platform of equal accommodations for each race but separate," to quote Atlanta newspaper editor Henry W. Grady in 1885. The U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned this spoken veil in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. Separate but equal covered up the segregationist policies that diverted resources toward exclusively White spaces. In 1930, segregationist Alabama spent \$37 for each White student, compared to \$7 for each Black student; Georgia, \$32 to \$7; and South Carolina, \$53 to \$5. High school was unavailable for my maternal grandparents around this time in Georgia.

"Equal," thought to be the soft target of the "separate but equal" ruling, ended up being a formidable foe for civil-rights activists—it was nearly impossible to get equal resources for Black institutions. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund switched tactics to taking down "separate." Lawyers revived the old integrationist "assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps

the colored race with a badge of inferiority," which Associate Justice Henry Billings Brown called a "fallacy" in his *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision.

In the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954, NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall attempted to prove the assumption using the new integrationist social science. Marshall asked psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark to repeat their famous doll tests for the case. Presented with dolls with different skin colors, the majority of Black children preferred White dolls, which the Clarks saw as proof of the negative psychological harm of segregation. White social scientists argued the harm could be permanent. The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously agreed. "To separate [colored children] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone," Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote.

Justice Warren did not judge White schools to be having a detrimental effect upon White children. He wrote the "segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children." It retards their "education and mental development," Warren explained. "We conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

What really made the schools unequal were the dramatically unequal resources provided to them, not the mere fact of racial separation. The Supreme Court justices deciding both *Plessy* and *Brown* avowed the segregationist lie that the "Negro and white schools involved have been equalized, or are being equalized," to quote Justice Warren. By 1973, when the resource inequities between the public schools had become too obvious to deny, the Supreme Court ruled, in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, that property-tax allocations yielding inequities in public schools do not violate the equal-protection clause of the U.S. Constitution.

THE 1973 SUPREME Court ruling reified the only solution emanating from the *Brown* decision in 1954: busing Black bodies from detrimental Black spaces to worthwhile White spaces. Since "there are adequate Negro schools and prepared instructors and instructions, then there is nothing different except the presence of white people," wrote an insulted Zora Neale Hurston in the *Orlando Sentinel* in 1955. Martin Luther King Jr. also privately disagreed. "I favor integration on buses and in all areas of public accommodation and travel. . . . I think integration in our public schools is different," King told two Black teachers in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1959. "White people view black people as inferior. . . . People with such a low view of the black race cannot be given free rein and put in charge of the intellectual care and development of our boys and girls."

King had a nightmare that came to pass. Non-White students fill most of the seats in today's public school classrooms but are taught by an 80 percent White teaching force, which often has, however unconsciously, lower expectations for non-White students. When Black and White teachers look at the same Black student, White teachers are about 40 percent less likely to believe the student will finish high school. Low-income Black students who have at least one Black teacher in elementary school are 29 percent less likely to drop out of school, 39 percent less likely among very low-income Black boys.

King's nightmare is a product of the dueling *Brown* decision. The court rightly undermined the legitimacy of segregated White spaces that hoard public resources, exclude all non-Whites, and are wholly dominated by White peoples and cultures. But the court also reinforced the legitimacy of integrated White spaces that hoard public resources, include some non-Whites, and are generally, though not wholly, dominated by White peoples and cultures. White majorities, White power, and White culture dominate both the segregated and the integrated, making both White. But the unspoken veil claims there is no such thing as

1970s, I had always thought the ultimate goal of better race relations was integration," wrote Manhattan Institute fellow Tamar Jacoby in 1998. "The very word had a kind of magic to it," but now "few of us talk about it anymore." We are not pursuing Martin Luther King's "color-blind dream" of "a more or less race-neutral America."

The integrationist transformation of King as color-blind and race-neutral erases the actual King. He did not live to integrate Black spaces and people into White oblivion. If he did, then why did he build low-income Atlanta apartments "using Negro workmen, Negro architects, Negro attorneys, and Negro financial institutions throughout," as he proudly reported in 1967? Why did he urge Black people to stop being "ashamed of being Black," to invest in their own spaces? The child of a Black neighborhood, church, college, and organization lived to ensure equal access to public accommodations and equal resources for all racialized spaces, an antiracist strategy as culture-saving as his nonviolence was body-saving.

Through lynching Black bodies, segregationists are, in the end, more harmful to Black *bodies* than integrationists are. Through lynching Black cultures, integrationists are, in the end, more harmful to *Black* bodies than segregationists are. Think about the logical conclusion of integrationist strategy: every race being represented in every U.S. space according to their percentage in the national population. A Black (12.7 percent) person would not see another until after seeing eight or so non-Blacks. A Latinx (17.8 percent) person would not see another until after seeing seven or so non-Latinx. An Asian (4.8 percent) person would not see another until after seeing nineteen non-Asians. A Native (0.9 percent) person would not see another until after seeing ninety-nine non-Natives. White (61.3 percent) Americans would always see more White people around than non-White people. They would gain everything, from the expansion of integrated White spaces to Whites gentrifying all the non-White institutions, associations, and neighborhoods. No more spatial

wombs for non-White cultures. Only White spatial wombs of assimilation. We would all become “only white men” with different “skins,” to quote historian Kenneth Stampp in 1956.

Americans have seen the logical conclusion of segregationist strategy, from slavery to Jim Crow to mass incarceration and border walls. The logical conclusion of antiracist strategy is open and equal access to all public accommodations, open access to all integrated White spaces, integrated Middle Eastern spaces, integrated Black spaces, integrated Latinx spaces, integrated Native spaces, and integrated Asian spaces that are as equally resourced as they are culturally different. All these spaces adjoin civic spaces of political and economic and cultural power, from a House of Representatives to a school board to a newspaper editorial board where no race predominates, where shared antiracist power predominates. This is diversity, something integrationists value only in name.

Antiracist strategy fuses desegregation with a form of integration and racial solidarity. Desegregation: eliminating all barriers to all racialized spaces. To be antiracist is to support the voluntary integration of bodies attracted by cultural difference, a shared humanity. Integration: resources rather than bodies. To be an antiracist is to champion resource equity by challenging the racist policies that produce resource inequity. Racial solidarity: openly identifying, supporting, and protecting integrated racial spaces. To be antiracist is to equate and nurture difference among racial groups.

But antiracist strategy is beyond the integrationist conception that claims Black spaces could never be equal to White spaces, that believes Black spaces have a “detrimental effect upon” Black people, to quote Chief Justice Warren in *Brown*. My Black studies space was supposed to have a detrimental effect on me. Quite the opposite. My professors made sure of that, as did two Black students, answering questions I never thought to ask.