# PLACE-MAKING AND PLACE-TAKING: AN ANALYSIS OF GREEN GENTRIFICATION IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

by

AIMÉE OYINLADE OKOTIE-OYEKAN

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Student: Aimée Oyinlade Okotie-Oyekan

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This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the Environmental Studies Program by:

| | |
|---|---|
| Kari Norgaard | Chairperson |
| Gerard Sandoval | Member |
| Raoul Lievanos | Member |

and

| | |
|---|---|
| Andrew Karduna | Interim Vice Provost for Graduate Studies |

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Division of Graduate Studies.

Degree awarded September 2021

THESIS ABSTRACT

Aimée Oyinlade Okotie-Oyekan

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Despite the benefits of urban greenspace, Atlanta's Westside Park is causing gentrification and displacement pressures in Grove Park, a low-income African-American community in northwest Atlanta, Georgia. This study used data from qualitative semi-structured interviews with community stakeholders, a content analysis of public documents, and participant observation in community forums to understand the interplay between the climate crisis, Atlanta's racialized development history, and constructed conceptions of place. After analyzing the data to distill common themes, this research found that green gentrification stemming from the Westside Park development represents the latest form of place-taking along a spatio-temporal continuum of displacement catalyzed by green initiatives, authenticating the inherent conflict between green initiatives situated within western and capitalist worldviews and place-keeping policies that support deep democracy and autonomy in marginalized communities. In sum, place-making for some is inherently the place-taking from others. I consequently recommend policy initiatives that promote equity and climate resilience.

# CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Aimée Okotie-Oyekan

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene
University of Georgia, Athens

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Science, Environmental Studies, 2021, University of Oregon

Master of Community and Regional Planning, Community and Regional Planning, 2021, University of Oregon

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Environmental Justice
Climate Change
Urban and Regional Planning

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Employee, School of Planning, Public Policy, and Management, University of Oregon, September 2020-March 2021

Environmental and Climate Justice Coordinator, NAACP Eugene/Springfield, September 2020-present

Graduate Employee, Environmental Studies Program, University of Oregon, September 2018-September 2020, March 2021-June 2021

Laboratory Technician III, Department of Marine Sciences, University of Georgia, September 2016-August 2018

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Digital Advocacy Grant, Union of Concerned Scientists, 2021

Soderwall Research Fund, Soderwall Foundation, 2020

Environmental Studies Summer Research Support Funding, University of Oregon, 2020

Doug McClain Memorial Scholarship in Planning, University of Oregon, 2019

Baker Scholarship, University of Oregon, 2018

Zell Miller Scholarship, University of Georgia, 2013

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This is dedicated to Patrick and Caroline Okotie.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

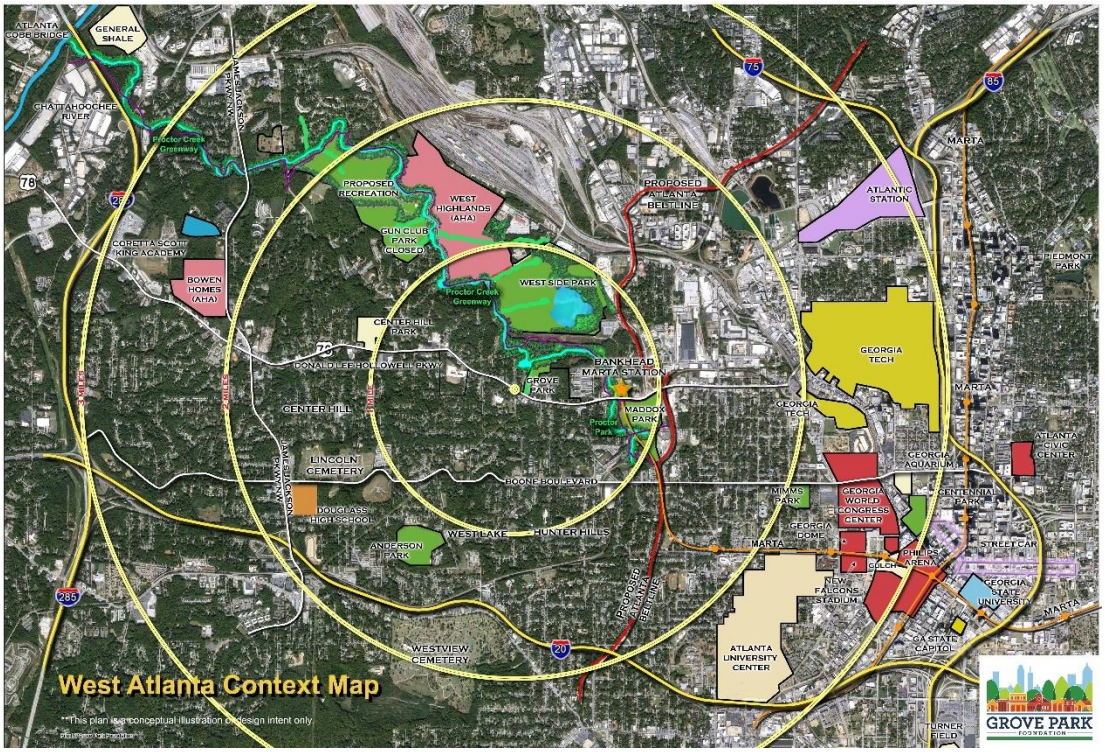
# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

> "We, the undersigned, represent voices of residents and organizations from the community surrounding the Westside Park, including Grove Park, Center Hill, Almond Park, and Howell Station. We write today as deeply concerned and frustrated residents and stakeholders of neighborhoods most directly impacted by Westside Park development. As the largest infrastructure project in the City of Atlanta, the Westside Park, now compounded by the new Microsoft development, is already having massive inequitable gentrification and displacement effects on our community, particularly on our Black and brown residents of Grove Park, Center Hill, and Almond Park" (WPEDTF, 2021).

On March 8th, 2021, a strong letter of dissent was addressed to Keisha Lance Bottoms, Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, along with her two chief officers Jon Keen and Carmen Chubb. The primary writers were the 10 members of the Westside Park Equitable Development Task Force, an advisory body established via city executive order in a bold effort on Mayor Bottoms' part to stall aggressive development pressure in the communities surrounding Westside Park. Among these communities is Grove Park, a predominantly African American community situated off Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway, just 10 minutes west of Midtown Atlanta, Georgia (Fig. 1).

The landscape surrounding the Grove Park community is dotted with subtle clues to Atlanta's industrial past: dilapidated rail infrastructure, long flat-roofed manufacturing buildings, and shipping warehouses. Starting in the 1970's, suburbanization began steadily sapping the vitality of the community, which continued to see decline through the close of the century (Grove Park Neighborhood Association). A major turning point came in 1999, when an innovative urban planning master's project out of The Georgia Institute of Technology paved the way for one of the most unique adaptive reuse projects in the southeast: The Atlanta Beltline (Immergluck & Balan, 2018).

Figure 1: West Atlanta Context Map




Source: Grove Park Foundation

City decision-makers are addressing threats stemming from climate change by pushing for increased “green” initiatives, including the development of parks and greenspace (Gould & Lewis, 2016). Atlanta, Georgia is a city periodically suffering from drought, and at a point was falling behind the national median of city area dedicated to greenspace (Germany et. al., 2008; Atlanta Climate Action Plan, 2015). Their solution for their water and greenspace deficit was to convert an abandoned granite quarry, Bellwood Quarry, into a water reservoir and develop the surrounding 280 acres into Atlanta’s largest recreational greenspace (Rodriguez, 2017). The resulting Westside Park is contiguous with the Atlanta Beltline, a 22-mile corridor of greenspace and a trailblazer in the growing trend of adaptive reuse projects that revitalize and transform abandoned

urban infrastructure into purposeful private and public spaces (Immergluck & Balan, 2018).

The ramifications of urban greenspace development are multi-faceted, spanning social, economic, and ecological dimensions. Some of the earliest greenspace and park advocates perceived parks as providing moral uplift, an opportunity for improved gentility and civility, and a "footing of perfect equality where both rich and poor could mingle" (Taylor, 2009). The human health benefits of greenspaces are also well documented. Offering instances of temporary repose from bustling urban spaces, their recreational opportunities and aesthetic enjoyments improve both psychological and physical wellbeing (Zhou & Rana, 2012). A wealth of literature illustrates how urban greenspaces preserve the ecological integrity of cities through their ecosystem services, such as increasing biodiversity, filtering air pollution, providing localized air cooling, diverting storm water, and replenishing groundwater (Chiesura, 2004; Wolch et al., 2014 Heidt and Neef 2008). Finally, these developments subsequently help boost local economies and real estate values by making the areas around them desirable places to live, work, and visit (Anguelovski et al., 2018). By sequestering harmful carbon pollution, protecting people and infrastructure from increasingly severe storms, sea-level rise, heat waves and droughts, and stimulating social and economic wellbeing, urban greenspaces have the potential to be an effective strategy in building climate resilience (Schottland, 2019) This is particularly true for front-line communities, who are disproportionately impacted by climate-related hazards.

Despite the numerous benefits Westside Park can bring to Atlanta, the development is proving to be a double-edged sword. Grove Park, bordering Westside

Park to the south, exhibits ideal conditions for economic displacement: an estimated 96% of the neighborhood's residents are African American, 13% percent of all residents are living in poverty, and 38% of Grove Park's housing units are renter-occupied (Mosaic Group, 2018). The inherent risk is that poor, racially marginalized, and longtime residents will no longer be capable of affording the increasing housing prices as developers and wealthy gentrifiers are drawn in, attracted to new amenities and retail offerings (Checker, 2011; Sullivan, 2007). Longtime residents may feel also alienated by changes in neighborhood identity, especially if whites move into previously minority neighborhoods (Anderson, 1990; Freeman, 2004; Kasinitz, 1988). The case presents a cruel irony in that community members who could benefit most from the green investments will not be the ones reaping the benefits. Furthermore, a historical analysis reveals the racialized history of the project site: Bellwood Quarry, a 400ft deep granite crevasse, originally operated as a convict leasing camp, siphoning primarily African American convict labor to extract granite that went into the development of the city's built environment (Atlanta Rail Corridor). Many within and beyond academia would see this co-occurrence of environmental degradation with the exploitation of marginalized human communities as an *environmental injustice* (Pellow 2018; Taylor, 2009).

Considering Bellwood Quarry's history as an environmental injustice site, an examination of Westside Park thus offers a unique contribution to gentrification and urban studies literature by finding that green infrastructure is not the objectively beneficial climate solution it is so often touted as. Such ahistorical framings erase important historical contexts and nuanced environmental experiences that impact how communities respond to green infrastructure development. This research subsequently

investigated the historical precedents of racially motivated land use and development decisions that shaped and continue to shape current day environmental injustices, carrying implications for the future of urban green infrastructure planning as a climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. *What histories of place contribute to present-day displacement vulnerabilities in Grove Park?*
2. *What are the implications for planning for climate resilience?*

This case study drew from both empirical evidence and theoretical conceptualizations of greenspace, racialized development, and displacement discussed in environmental justice literature. Using data derived from qualitative semi-structured interviews with community stakeholders, public documents, and media platforms, this research sought to understand how histories of place-making and place-taking contribute to present-day conditions in Grove Park. After analyzing the data to distill common themes, this research ultimately found that the interplay between the impending climate crisis, Atlanta's racialized development history, and constructed conceptions of place result in the emergence of green gentrification as the latest form of place-taking along a spatio-temporal continuum of displacement catalyzed by the development of conservation areas and other green initiatives. These findings informed recommendations for more just processes and outcomes in climate resilience planning that preserve history and culture, promote long term housing stability, reduce local greenhouse gas emissions, and improve physical conditions in the public realm. This case study on green gentrification in Atlanta, Georgia speaks to planning practitioners, scholars,

policymakers, and community members, emphasizing the importance of the social sector of environmental planning, which is often overshadowed by the ecological and economic priorities of urban greenspace development. Using the Atlanta Beltline as a case study, I offer both a cautionary tale of the shortcomings of unsound environmental planning and subsequent solutions from which Atlanta can be a beacon for other cities to follow suit on a trajectory that leads to equitable distribution of environmental amenities for *all* members of our communities.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

*Atlanta's History of Racialized Development*

The 20th century marked a period of intense neighborhood racial segregation in Atlanta, driven by a combination of decades-old migration patterns and state-sanctioned marginalization of the Black population (Bayor, 1988). Race had a unique role in shaping not only the social and political characteristics of the city, but its physical structure as well. For instance, the city's highways and roads were strategically sited to serve as physical barriers to sustain racial ghettos and control Black migration (Bayor, 1988). Bellwood Quarry is another such example of the agency society and race possess in shaping the physical characteristics of Atlanta. One source suggests the quarry was established in the mid to late 1800s to provide the developing city of Atlanta with granite. African-American workers, most of whom were recently emancipated slaves with limited options for work, provided the labor used to extract the material from the Earth (Rodriguez, 2017; Atlanta Rail Corridor). The working conditions in the camp were nothing short of abysmal and were the subject of periodic newspaper articles from the early 1900s condemning the facility's labor practices (Rodriguez, 2017).

Today, the 400ft deep excavation represents the inseparable history of human and environmental exploitation that played such an integral part in the Atlanta's development. The camp closed in the 1960s, and at approximately the same time, Atlanta had begun to see significant shifts in its demographic composition. Between 1970 and 1996, the Black population in Atlanta had increased by 158%, while the white population increased by just 78% (Sjoquist, 2000). This dramatic reduction in white populations in the inner city is known colloquially as "white flight", and was driven by the integration of city schools,

neighborhoods, and other facilities in the urban core of cites. This large-scale societal and economic restructuring continues to have lasting impacts on inner-city communities. Currently, despite its status as a booming economic hub of the south, Atlanta is the epitome of inequitable distribution of wealth (Sjoquist, 2000). These dynamics, borne out of state-sanctioned segregation and exclusion, continue to drive the inequitable distribution of environmental resources among Atlanta's residents.

*The Atlanta Beltline*

The Atlanta Beltline is a 22-mile corridor of bicycle, walking trails, and contiguous greenspace, connecting 45 different neighborhoods in the metro-Atlanta region (Atlanta Beltline). Today, many of the white residents living in low-income areas complain about the lack of economic investment in green infrastructure and see Westside Park at Bellwood Quarry as a largely anticipated addition to the Atlanta Beltline (Rodriguez, 2017). The critics of the Beltline harbor concerns that these developments will end up pricing lower income African American communities out of their neighborhoods (Palardy et al., 2018). Tellingly, previous greenspace development research in Atlanta has demonstrated "there has been little consideration for how the racial and socioeconomic composition of neighborhoods influence resident support for greenways" (Palardy, Boley, & Johnson Gaither, 2018). Such concerns have been shown to be legitimate in one such study that reveals within a four year period, "housing values rose between 17.9 percent and 26.6 percent more for homes within a half-mile of the Beltline than elsewhere" (Immergluck & Balan, 2018).

In addition to economic factors, little time is spent reflecting on the racialization of outdoor recreation by considering that recreational preferences can vary significantly by race. For instance, "African-Americans reputedly enjoy more sociable and sports orientated, urban park settings…whereas [w]hites are said to focus on individualism" and "prefer settings that offer secluded nature. Asians appear to value 'scenic beauty' over recreational functionality" (Wolch et. al., 2009), whereas Latinos are said to desire 'a more developed environment' with good access to group facilities such as parking, picnic tables and restrooms" (Wolch et. al., 2009). The potential result is greenspace that culturally includes some racial groups while excluding others.

*Theoretical Framework of Critical Environmental Justice*

The case presented by my research is one steeped in environmental justice implications. According to David Pellow, environmental injustice is the disproportionate exposure of marginalized groups to environmental hazards (Pellow, 2018). Just the same, environmental injustice is also used to explain the lack of access to environmental goods experienced by these same groups. Pellow's Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ) studies articulate a more thoughtful, inclusive, and radical analysis of environmental injustice, with the intention of pushing the boundaries of traditional environmental justice studies. Pellow structures his assertions through a novel interpretive framework, the four pillars of CEJ, planting the seed for new articulations of what should be considered within the realms of environmental injustice.

The first pillar, emphasizing the intersectionality of social inequality and the agency of the more-than-human world, assists me in highlighting the agency of the

nonhuman environment as well as in dissecting traditional articulations of human-environmental interactions aimed at othering certain populations. This pillar posits that, in reality, patterns of oppression are significantly more widespread and intersectional than what may initially be perceived (Pellow, 2018). Single-axis analyses of social oppression fail to recognize how categories of social differences overlap. Consequently, "intersectionality" arose as a concept to explain how power relations, identities, and social categories, rather than acting in isolation, build upon each other and create overlapping systems of discrimination across bodies and space (Pellow, 2018; Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2020). The term emerged out of the scholarly work of Black feminists as a critique of feminist and racial injustice analyses that rarely gave attention to the unique experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). Even more rare is the inclusion of speciesism and the agency of the non-human environment in analyses of injustice. Because sites of human and environmental exploitation are often overlapped, considering impacts of oppressive structures on the non-human world gives rise to a more comprehensive understanding of environmental injustices. Moreover, this intersectionality of various forms of oppression is necessary when dissecting social constructions of identity and human-environmental interactions, as it provides explanations for the emergence of hegemonic structures that both establish and justify normative identities while simultaneously "othering" those that do not conform to such standards.

The social constructions of human-nature relations attempt to detract agency from nature and enforce an artificial delineation between society and the non-human environment. Placing figurative distance between humanity and the nonhuman-

environment creates an illusion of separation that feeds a lack of consciousness of the role our everyday activities as humans play in negatively impacting the environment. Adding to this, by designating the nonhuman environment as an "other", it justifies the abusive, extractive, and exploitative actions done unto the environment. In the case of Bellwood Quarry, both the quarry and the African Americans who labored within it were seen as transgressing the boundaries of the celebrated normative identity—white, landowning males—and thus were the target of such abusive treatment. Additionally, when considering how identity articulation influences environmental experiences, previous literature has provided evidence that parks in the Atlanta Beltline are more likely to be supported by affluent, white communities than members of less affluent, majority African American communities (Palardy et al., 2018). If the development of Westside Reservoir Park is designed to cater to a certain kind of normative identity, then this supports what is called a "racialized recreational identity" (Martin, 2017). This identity does not account for differences in recreational preferences that may exists between different categories of race and asserts that only a privileged few are granted access to green spaces. In contrast, the presence of othered groups, namely African Americans, are deemed incompatible with the hegemonic visions of sustainability, recreation, and urban greenspace.

This designation of which identities belong in parks, and which do not, suggests that parks too, are socially constructed (Robbins, 2012; Pellow 2018; Taylor, 2009). The social construction of parks reflects specific ideologies of nature-making, arising as a method of social control meant to secure power for an elite community (Robbins, 2012). Thus, our environmental and social "realities" are not absolute, but rather fluid and

malleable, and can be analyzed and dissected to expose their social and political origins. This first pillar of CEJ thus implies the necessity of the "hatchet and seed" ideological approach (Robbins, 2012), which aims to hatchet away at environmental and social issues that are posed as apolitical or ahistorical, and through historical analysis unmask their social and political drivers. This is then followed by a progressive reinvention of these driving structures, planting a seed for new realities that no longer rely on the degradation of human and nonhuman life, but lead to just and sustainable futures (Robbins, 2012).

The second pillar calls for a multiscale temporal and spatial analysis of environmental injustices. Attention to spatial scales can reveal how environmental degradation in one location can have disastrous implications for both human and environmental health in another. Adding to this is the expansion of the definition of an environmental injustice site, as something that can be as extensive and abstract as the global environment or as intimate and personal as the human body. Equally important is an inspection of environmental injustice over temporal scales, which discloses how environmental justice struggles have changed overtime, potentially elucidating the social and political drivers of environmental crises. And so, the call for a multiscale analysis consequently adds greater resolution and nuance perspective when analyzing environmental and social injustices.

When applied to this case study, this second pillar elucidates the historical precedents for green space inequity, which stem from western ideals of conservation relying on colonial occupation, land appropriation and the displacement of Indigenous communities. David Pellow discusses the degree to which recreational spaces memorialize, or erase, the histories of the sites upon which they are built. In his analysis

of the Israel-Palestine conflict as an environmental justice struggle, Pellow uses the example of the siting of parking spaces for Israel's Dor Beach as an erasure of Palestinian life and death (Pellow, 2018). Dor Beach, one of Israel's most celebrated beaches, is also the site of the massacre of Palestinian village Tantura during the Arab-Israeli War of 1948, which led to the founding of the State of Israel and permanent expulsion of 750,000 Palestinian Arabs from the region. Furthermore, a temporal and spatial analysis of the connection between environmental conservation and exclusion reveals the same patterns at the scale of the development of the United States National Park System in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Pellow, 2018). Such large-scale developments under the guise of ecological conservation and sustainability sought to enclose green space and wilderness areas, ironically in the name of "public lands". Coupled with this privatization of land was the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples, denying them access to the traditional territories upon which their livelihoods and cultural expression depended. Such describes the concept of settler colonialism, a form of domination that violently disrupts human relationships with the environment by strategically destabilizing Indigenous lifeways and establishing new settler connections to place (Whyte, 2018; Barry & Agyeman, 2020).

The work of "just sustainabilities" scholar Julian Agyeman positions settler colonialism as offering "new and productive language for interrogating a range of urban inequities and ongoing processes of displacement (Barry & Agyeman, 2020). Several literatures seek to use these framings to draw connections between settler colonialism, gentrification, and displacement in urban environments (Barry & Agyeman, 2020). Pellow's multi-scalar analysis thus reveals settler colonialist legacies which help explain

gentrification and displacement and reveal the inherent structures of power that drive greenspace enclosure and displacement at the smaller scale of the urban park. If one were to analyze gentrification associated with urban parks as an isolated and ahistorical incident with no previous precedent, they would fail to realize that the exclusion of othered groups from areas designated for environmental conservation is an intentional process that can be seen over the course of history as mechanism of cultural erasure. I argue that the repurposing of the Bellwood Quarry area and the displacement of residents in the surrounding community in the name of sustainability and conservation could then be deemed as an environmental injustice issue on a long spatio-temporal continuum of socially constructed and multiply marginalized environmental identities.

According to the third pillar of CEJ, social inequality and hierarchical structures of power are deeply embedded in society and are reinforced by authoritative institutions that thrive off of and perpetuate oppression (Pellow, 2018). Included in this stance is a direct critique of frameworks that look to the state for solutions to environmental and social injustices. Such outlooks, while noble and honest in intention, may result in the reinforcement of the state and its power, which are the inherent perpetrators of environmental and social injustice. The consequence could be an even more oppressive regime that is put in the position to orchestrate further human and environmental exploitation. The implications call for anarchist solutions that work beyond the reaches of state and federal power to support institutions that reinforce and deepen direct democracy and achieve progressive change. By eliminating oppressive institutions and forging movements of social and environmental change that operate independent of state power,

we leave space for only those elements of the state that support democratic decision-making.

The Atlanta Beltline Inc, along with the Atlanta Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs, the Atlanta Department of Watershed Management, and finally the Atlanta City Council are just a few local departments and governing bodies directing the decision behind the development of Westside Park. Applying the third pillar of CEJ to my study spurs careful scrutiny of the intentions of these authoritative decision makers, in that their goals are not to develop Bellwood Quarry into a sustainable and inclusive green space but rather to maximize capital accumulation, seek personal gain, and reinforce their power and influence as municipal departments.

Finally, the fourth pillar of CEJ speaks to an idea that marginalized populations are seen as dispensable and are thus marked for destruction by the societies in which they live (Pellow, 2018). Traditionally, environmental justice studies reserve the concept of dispensability when denoting specific and highly contaminated areas known as sacrifice zones. CEJ expands articulations of dispensability to assert that entire populations can be viewed as expendable and destined for early death. Furthermore, CEJ opposes the white supremacy and human dominion that fuels this framework and makes it explicit that these marginalized populations are not expendable, but rather indispensable for our collective futures if we are to build a society that is socially and environmentally just.

Aside from the inequities in green space development addressed in my research, Atlanta is a city fraught with environmental injustices. These injustices are perpetrated by racist views seeking to prevent minorities from emigrating out of Atlanta's core and into the suburban metropolitan Atlanta counties. Previous literature paints a vivid picture of

widespread environmental injustice, with higher proportions of lower income and minority populations living within 300m of major sources of air pollution in the city (Brantley, 2019). Similarly, Atlanta's current transportation system, MARTA, is one of the 10 most patronized transit systems in the United States (Holifield et al., 2018). With the availability of effective and affordable transportation being fundamental for access to work, education, healthy food, and medical care, inequitable access to transportation has detrimental consequences for the livelihoods of Atlanta residents (Kraner, 2017). Tellingly, since the 1960's, the majority white residents of metropolitan Atlanta counties have been rejecting proposals to expand and improve Atlanta's transit system. As a result, economic development bypassed the central Atlanta region and began expanding northward, out of reach of the neglected transit system that was concentrated only in the counties that contained the majority Black city of Atlanta. Thus, through structures fueled by racist exclusion, the intentional containment of othered communities within the bounds of Atlanta's urban core alongside the area's underfunded transit systems, poor air quality, and other compounding injustices, is testament to the concept that certain populations are deemed as worthless and expendable.

Pellow's higher resolution examination serves as a formidable hatchet by with I can break away flawed and limited conceptualizations of human-environmental relationships. Simultaneously, I use the framework to plant and pave the way for novel avenues to addressing social and environmental injustices.

*The Future of Urban Sustainability*

Successful adaptation and mitigation in the face of global environmental change involves sustainably-minded planning initiatives that foster the creation of both ecologically and economically stable communities, while preserving the capacity for these communities to participate in decision-making. The aforementioned literature presents an inherent conflict between policies that support direct democracy and community autonomy and environmental planning initiatives situated within western and capitalistic conceptualizations of green space. This case study carries forth this assertion and fills gaps in scholarship of sustainable urban studies by considering the often-neglected social dimensions of environmental decision making in order to reconcile this tension. Previous analyses of racially differentiated park preferences are limited in scope in that they focus primarily on "how the demographic composition of neighborhoods influence resident support for these recreational development" (Palardy et al., 2018). Emphasizing social sustainability involves investigating how structures of power and racial formations "might configure the park spaces themselves" (Byrne & Wolch, 2009). This approach would recognize socio-ecological and racial relations of power as both an input and an outcome of green space development. This can further inform the path towards development that heightens adaptive capacity and social wellbeing for all members of the community, rather than exacerbating already present vulnerabilities (Shi, 2016).

## CHAPTER III: METHODS

The hatchet and seed analytical approach required that this research attempt to unearth the historic social and political drivers of present-day inequities in Grove Park. Only after this undressing can the path towards resilient futures that rectify past injustices and give way to regenerative socio-ecological systems be made clear. The color afforded by qualitative accounts of community experience and change cajoled me to source my data from a variety of qualitative sources to achieve this end. Rather than seeking to identify a single objective truth, qualitative research works best in elucidating the breadth and depth of varying perspectives that each hold their own validity and truth (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). In this way, my methods allow me to reveal the multifaceted nature of my case study and develop new theoretical perspectives, test the validity of my assumptions, and evaluate the effectiveness of certain policies and initiatives (Peshkin, 1993). My research design, a longitudinal and descriptive case study, is designed to analyze one entity at multiple time points with the purpose of describing a sequence of events and underlying mechanisms that inform dynamics present within the case (Eisenhardt, 1989). As case studies are able to draw from a variety of mixed methodologies of data collection, this design is well suited to accommodate the different methods of data collection used in this study. This case study employed semi-structured narrative interviews with community members and key greenspace decision makers, content analyses of public documents and media, and participant observation of community forums to investigate the histories of place that contribute to present-day displacement vulnerabilities in Grove Park. By identifying narratives across this mosaic of data sources, I piece together a local history that not only informs recommendations

for local climate resilience initiatives but carries implications for the future of climate resilience planning transcending the boundaries of the Grove Park community.

*Semi-Structured Open-Ended Interviews*

Open-ended interviewing allows the researcher to "access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (Patton, 2001). I therefore resorted to semi-structured open-ended interviews to understand the extent to which community members and City of Atlanta decision makers perceive the gentrification and displacement effects of neighborhood proximity to the Westside Reservoir Park development as a product of the history of racialized uneven development and exclusion in Atlanta.

I intentionally selected interviewees that (1) have a disproportionately large role in dictating the configuration of the Atlanta Beltline and (2) based on socioeconomic preconditions are likely to be impacted by greenspace gentrification. This design carried the assumption of a power differential between each group and sought to identify discrepancies between the respondents from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and those with formally recognized and institutionally reinforced access to capital, power, resources, and decision-making authority. This design also carries the assumption that the "perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit", which contests with normative ideologies that elevate certain kinds of knowledge and meaning-making while devaluing others (Patton, 2001).

I interviewed a total of nine community members (Table 1). Eight interviewees self-reported their racial demographics, including one Asian-American stakeholder, three Black stakeholders, three white stakeholders, and one mixed-race stakeholder.

Table 1: Key Stakeholder Interview Demographics

| **Interviewee** | **Race** | **Gender** | **Age** | **Class** | **Tenure** | **Positionality** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Asian-American | Female | 34 | Middle | Owner | Community Member, Westside taskforce member, Westside Advisory Committee Member |
| 2 | Black | Male | 52 | Not reported | Owner | Community Member, Westside Taskforce Member |
| 3 | Black | Male | 42 | Upper middle | Owner | Community Member, Westside Advisory Committee Member. Grove Park Neighborhood Association Leader |
| 4 | White | Male | 38 | Middle | Renter | Community Member |
| 5 | White | Male | 27 | Lower-middle | Owner | Community Member |
| 6 | White | Female | 27 | Lower middle | Renter | Community Member |
| 7 | White and Black | Male | 29 | Upper Middle | Owner | Community Member, Grove Park Neighborhood Association leader |
| 8 | Black | Female | 49 | Middle | Owner | Community member, Grove Park Neighborhood Association Leader, Westside Taskforce Member |
| 9 | Not reported | Not reported | Not reported | Not reported | Not reported | Elected Official |

The eight self-reported interviewees for the gender and age categories were predominantly male and over the age of 30. Renters were disproportionately underrepresented among those that self-reported tenure status, with only two out of eight renting their home. Of the seven that self-reported class, two self-identified as low-middle income. When considering all 9 interviewees, community members from Grove Park were the majority, with only one individual with formally recognized and institutionally reinforced power consenting to an interview. Other decision-making stakeholders with disproportionate authority in the development of Westside Park declined to be interviewed.

Out of the nine interviewees, two represent Grove Park on the Westside Equitable Development Task force, two sit on the Westside Park Advisory Committee, and three are previously elected leaders of the Grove Park Neighborhood Association.

Access to the site was established and maintained by identifying community gatekeepers to facilitate entrance into the site. For example, one individual was an elected leader of the Grove Park Neighborhood Association, sat on the Westside Park Advisory Committee, and was a board member of the Grove Park Foundation. This community member served not only as a gatekeeper who facilitated contacts with other helpful individuals, but a key informant who provided information and insights relevant to the case study questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). By forming relationships with community members such as this, I was able to maintain periodic contact and establish of rapport with other stakeholders relevant to case study. I recruited interview participants through email recruitment, attendance at neighborhood association meetings, and through other interview participants, known as “snowball sampling” (Oregon State University).

Stakeholder interviews lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they were conducted in-person and took place in public locations such as cafes, and semipublic places such as community meeting spaces. Post-COVID-19 pandemic, interviews took place remotely via over the telephone and Zoom. For each participant, I obtained either verbal consent or a signed consent form, informing the subject of the intent of the research, the purpose of the study, and any risks involved. I requested permission to audio or video record the interviews. If permission was granted, I recorded the interviews using Zoom or a recording device on an iPhone. If permission to record the interview was not granted, I took notes throughout the interview. During the interviews, I asked open ended questions, such as "What does gentrification mean do you?" and "How do you know gentrification is happening?". I additionally used a questionnaire in order to collect basic demographic information such as age, race, gender, housing tenure, and socio-economic class. Following interviews, recordings and hand-written notes were transcribed manually and by use of an automated transcription service.

*Content Analysis*

I additionally supplemented community narratives from my interviews with data collected via content analysis, which refers to any "qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings" (Patton, 2001). I content-analyzed text from public documents such as community plans, reports, local ordinances, and social and earned media (Table 2). This proved particularly useful in filling in gaps that went unaddressed in the data from the interviews.

Table 2: Content Analysis Sources

| Source Type | Example |
|---|---|
| Plans | Atlanta Climate Action Plan<br>One Atlanta Strategic Housing Affordability Action Plan<br>Atlanta Clean Energy Plan<br>One Atlanta Transportation Plan |
| Legislation | Executive Order 20-03 |
| News Publication Platforms | Atlanta Journal Constitution, Urbanize Atlanta, Atlanta Business Chronicle, Atlanta Studies |
| Social Media Accounts | Grove Park Neighborhood Association Facebook Page |
| Advocacy Documents | Advocacy Letter to Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, Westside Equitable Development Task Force Recommendations |

*Participant Observation*

Adding to interviews and content analyses, I engaged in participant observation, an ethnographic methodology in which the researcher becomes immersed in the daily life of the people (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). This method was beneficial because it allowed me to observe how community members naturally interact with one another and their shared spaces. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, participation observation was conducted in person at Grove Park Neighborhood Association meetings. Post-COVID-19 pandemic, this method was conducted virtually through participation in Grove Park Neighborhood Association meetings and the Atlanta Department of Parks & Recreation and Department of Watershed Update Meetings, and the Atlanta Planning, Housing, Transportation Update Meetings. Interestingly, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the availability

of recorded meetings, I was able to observe the community members without being either physically or virtually present. There is a possibility that behaviors could have been altered had my observation been perceivable to the community members in the meeting.

*Data Analysis*

The transcriptions and notes from the interviews, content analyses, and participant observations were analyzed via a series of coding techniques. I first followed the open coding strategy (Emerson et al., 1995) by dividing up the data based on the source and extracting notable quotes and statements that served as signposts for key categories, such as “place-making” and “place-taking”. These categories were further divided into subcategories, such as “urban renewal”, “community engagement” and “proposed solutions”. I then axial coded the data, forming relationships between the categories and subcategories, with the purpose of learning more about each category and its context. For example, quotes about transportation injustice were often connected to quotes about impervious surfaces and flooding issues in the community. Impervious surfaces are surfaces like roads and parking lots that do not allow the infiltration of liquid. This was followed by focused coding, in which I combined interrelated categories into a chronological storyline that formed the backbone of the case study. Finally, I developed my key findings which are posited to explain the conditions observed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

## CHAPTER IV: PLACE-MAKING

Bruce D. Haynes (2001) posits that "race makes place, and, in doing so, place makes race." What the sociologist was asserting was the reciprocal co-construction of race and place. This co-construction dynamic can manifest through the hierarchical valuation of racialized places, which Pellow (2018) argues in his articulation of the fourth pillar of CEJ is a precondition of communities being deemed as dispensable in comparison to other communities being valorized. We see designated dispensability emerge in the history of the Muscogee (Creek) people, who are the traditional stewards of the land now known as Grove Park. They are descendants of the Mississippians, who lived on the land that is now South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida since before 1500 AD (The Muscogee Nation). Before they were forcefully expelled by the United States government, the Muscogee (Creek) peoples built large mounds and lived in sophisticated towns that made up what is now known as the Muscogee Creek Confederacy. They were successful farmers and traded with other tribes (Native Knowledge 360). The racialization of place, or the constructed association of a racial group with a particular environment, is rooted in this history of forced relocation institutionalized by the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The Treaty of 1832 ceded the last of Muscogee ancestral homelands east of the Mississippi River for new lands in Oklahoma. In the 11 years between 1827 and 1838, 23,000 Muscogees were removed from their traditional homelands, with thousands losing their lives during the journey or soon after they arrived in Oklahoma (Native Knowledge 360).

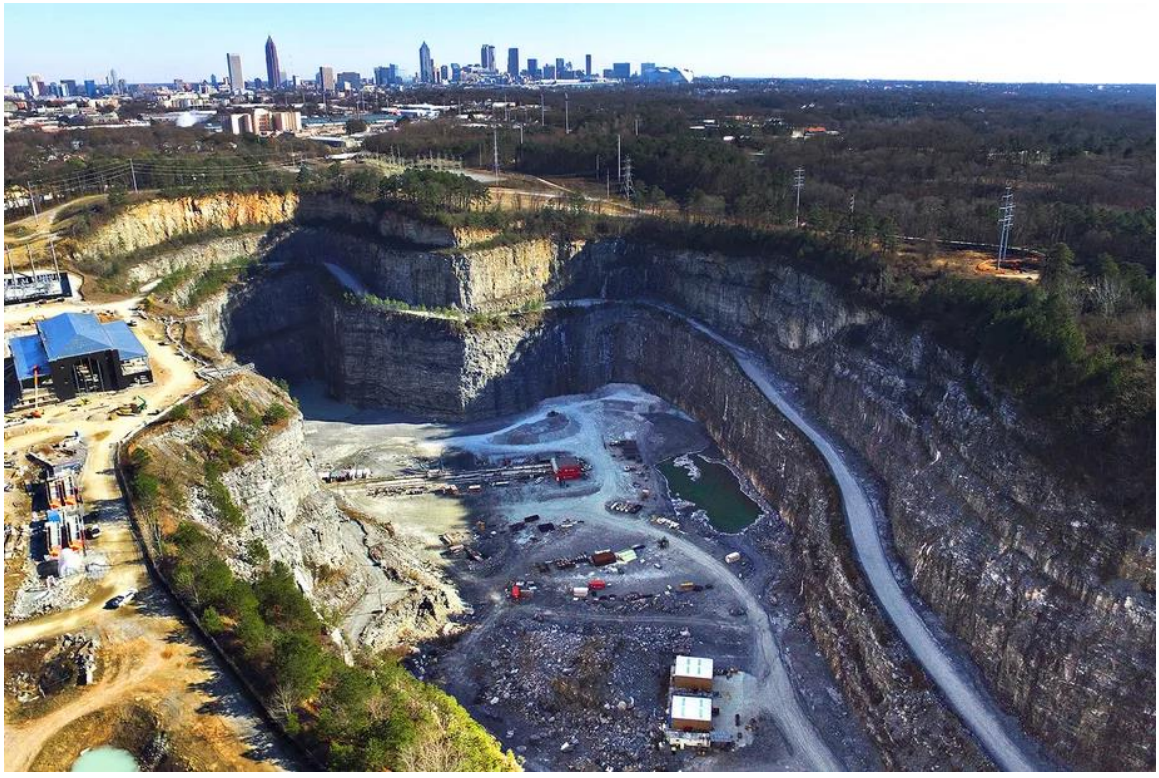
Considering this continuum of racialized violence and exclusion, we begin with the Bellwood Quarry and examine the histories of human and environmental exploitation

imprinted upon the landscapes. We then transition to the establishment of the Grove Park community, and the changes the area underwent in the first half of the 20th century. Along the way, I identify the policies, decisions, and driving ideologies that place this area on a path towards systematic disinvestment along racial lines.

*History of Bellwood Quarry*

Though sources conflict regarding when mining began at Bellwood Quarry, one source suggests the area (shown in Figure 2) had been mined under the ownership of Fulton County since 1852.

Figure 2: Bellwood Quarry



Source: Jonathan Phillips. Curbed Atlanta

The introduction of convict labor in Bellwood Quarry, and consequently the racialization of this manufactured environment, is also contested, with one source stating convict labor was a practice upon establishment and another stating it was not prominent in Bellwood Quarry until 1938 (Stephens, 2019). The 1920s-1950s however did mark a period when the practice was common, as illustrated by the prison's frequent appearance in Atlanta Constitution newspapers (Rodriguez, 2017). A few Grove Park residents also confirm that the racialized history existed, particularly within the context of the recent emancipation and the emergence of Black Codes.

> "They used prison labor to mine for granite. This was when slavery was abolished, but because of restrictive laws, the prison camps were predominantly people of color. People were criminalized for the miniscule crimes that could not compare to their white counterparts. It's bad history with the use of prison labor. I'm very surprised they did not unearth any human remains." – Grove Park Resident

In 1865, only 25 years prior to the establishment of Bellwood Quarry according to one source, Congress ratified the 13th amendment, which was formally interpreted as the amendment that abolished slavery. However, it is widely acknowledged that the 13th amendment did not completely abolish slavery, because of a clause that stated the practice was permissible as punishment for a crime an individual had been convicted of. Deliberately, Black Codes emerged as restrictive laws that criminalized Black people for petty crimes in the post-civil war era. Therefore, prisons are recognized as state-sanctioned sites of enslavement, with laws like Black Codes functioning to increase incarceration of Black Georgian's and maintain the system of slavery that served as the South's main socioeconomic engine. David Pellow's CEJ framework engages explicitly with prisons as sites of environmental injustice, human incapacitation, and widespread coerced labor (Pellow, 2018). Using Pellow's second pillar, this spatio-temporal analysis

revealing the racialized criminalization associated with sites of prison labor deepens the significance of Bellwood Quarry and its co-option as a mechanism of environmental injustice. Currently, the only historical records of the site are within the Atlanta Constitution articles (Rodriguez, 2017). Limited and conflicting information between scholarly and media documentation, interviews, and participant observation data concerning the context of the site suggest the violent and racial history of this site may not be widely known.

> "Truthfully, I've never heard any conversation about that from Black people. Any mention of the history of the quarry has only come in my presence from non-Black people, and it makes me wonder—you know I'm not asserting anything here—but it does make me wonder whether Black people know or care." - Grove Park Neighborhood Association Member

Stakeholders, including residents of Grove Park, non-residents, and representatives of local non-profits, admitted to knowing or caring very little about the quarry history. Interviewees expressed that the daily challenges of taking care of family members with limited resources provide an explanation for this lack of interest among community members to engage with this important history.

> "We don't have time to study and find resources and stuff. We're trying to take care of our families. And so I would doubt that a lot of our neighbors know the history of Bellwood. And I didn't until someone told me." – Grove Park Resident

In a February 2020 meeting, the West Side Park Advisory Committee recommended to "officially remove Bellwood from the park name" (Westside Park Advisory Committee, 2020), raising questions as to how the community plans to memorialize this culture and history among visitors of the new park. Considering David Pellow's engagement with selective memorialization in his analysis of Israel's Dor Beach, parallels arise between the erasure of Palestinian history for Dor Beach's

construction and the erasure of Grove Park history for Westside Park's construction. The ultimate concern arises that the development of Westside Park is not solely erasing the symbolic history of the site. Rather, it is yet another example of recreational space as a guise of cultural erasure and the physical displacement of Black residents from Grove Park to give way to new residents with alternative connections to place. Using Pellow's attention to scale thus acknowledges the settler colonialist legacies at play in processes of gentrification and displacement (Pellow, 2018; Barry & Agyeman, 2020; Whyte, 2018). Part of the Westside Advisory Committee's work includes creating a way to memorialize the park. With using the park's name out of the question, the conversation ensues on how to turn this local geography of strife into a regenerative and memorialized space that does not commodify or bastardize the highly selective memories and legacies of long-time residents (Whyte, 2018).

*Establishment of Grove Park*

When millionaire and entrepreneur pharmacist Edwin Wiley Grove established Grove Park as an Atlanta suburb in the 1920s and 30s, it was a majority white community. Spearheading the Grove Park Development Company, Grove designed Grove Park, then called Fortified Hills, as entirely his own conception, resolving to name many of the streets after his wife, daughter, son, and grandchildren (Stephens, 2019; Grove Park Neighborhood Association). Grove also had the intention of beautifying it and making it into residential parks. Many of the later side streets created in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s were wide, tree-lined avenues with well-tended frame cottages, brick tudors and ranches. Though Grove intended on preserving affordability for the man of

moderate salary, according to residents, Black people were notably absent from this early utopian conception of the neighborhood.

> "The community's been pretty much historically Black, for the last 30 or 40 years. Now before that, it was all white." – Grove Park Resident.

Environmental justice literature posits that environmental injustice can be framed as the lack of access of environmental benefits. It is no coincidence that when we observe the emergence of a community stocked with environmental amenities, such as tree cover, there is a marked absence of people of color. The rhetoric that associates white communities with higher quality environmental infrastructure is used to protect white spaces from the invasion of less desirable communities, and their associated land uses. Therefore, attention to how white privilege and institutional racism shape place begs the question of why environmental pollutants and substandard public amenities are directed away from white communities and toward Black communities (Pulido, 2000).

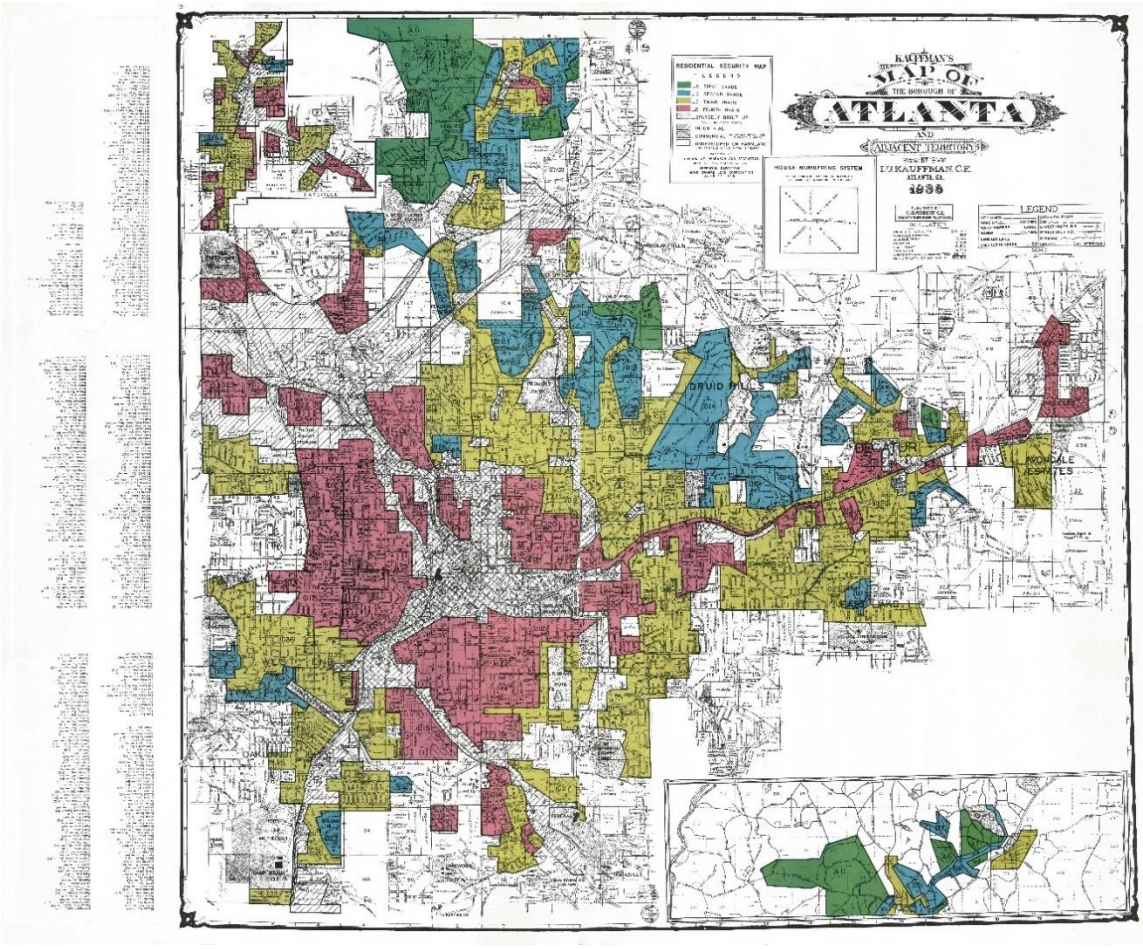
*Race and Space in Grove Park*

In the early 1900s, planning was being recognized as a legitimate profession as the U.S Department of Commerce passed state zoning and city planning enabling acts that established models after which municipalities would zone and plan their cities. Atlanta's first official planning commission was elected by the state legislature in 1920 and was comprised of Atlanta's white, male civic-elite, many of whom had substantial interests in real-estate and development of the physical environment (Brownell, 1975). The City's first zoning laws were introduced in 1922 in an apparent attempt to address the social and environmental ills of the industrial city and protect property and investment. Yet, they preserved racial segregation, enacted social control, and interfered with private property rights (Brownell, 1975). Using the design of the city to perpetuate

racial segregation was further federally institutionalized by the practice of redlining and was used to inform place-making in Grove Park. Stemming from President Roosevelt's plan to address the economic market collapses of 1929, the Home Ownership Loan Corporation (HOLC) assisted in the refinancing of mortgages for nearly 40% homeowners (Haynes, 2001). Using data organized by local real estate professionals, HOLC created area descriptions in U.S. cities to assign grades to residential neighborhoods indicating which areas were beneficial for investment from banks and other mortgage lenders. HOLC openly asserted that the proximity of African Americans, immigrants, and working-class whites, compromised the values of homes and the security of mortgages (University of Richmond). The 1938 HOLC map of Atlanta in Figure 3 reveals the Grove Park area received a yellow "C" grade of "Definitely Declining". According to the area description, though no Black people were living in the community at the time, the area was comprised of factory workers and was subject to detrimental influences such as heavy vehicular traffic along Bankhead Ave (now Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway), mixed land uses, housing of poor conditions and the encroachment of business along Bankhead Avenue. The section directly adjacent to the Grove Park parcel received a red "D" grade and was "predominantly negro" (University of Richmond). The implication is that lenders were anticipating Black encroachment from this area into what is now Grove Park. In addition to redlining, the prevalent use of racial steering practices and restrictive covenants, which intentionally guided prospective home buyers towards or away from certain neighborhoods based on racial make-up, also arose as a method of protecting white suburban spaces from undesirable infiltration. Relating the third pillar of CEJ to these policy initiatives illustrates the inherent role of federally

and state permitted policies and actions in racializing residential space and devaluing Black owned-property (Pellow, 2018; Haynes, 2001). This racially guided forethought reified through area maps and redlining practices, would begin to shape patterns of disinvestment around the Westside communities for decades to come.

Figure 3: HOLC Map of Atlanta




Source: Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," American Panorama, ed.

## CHAPTER V: PLACE-TAKING

The place-making that occurred in and around Grove Park leading up to mid-century constituted deliberate attempts to construct racially segregated geographies in the city of Atlanta. These geographies relegated people of color and low-income communities to areas characterized by lack of access to cultural resources, dense and mixed-use development, dilapidated infrastructure, and industrial pollutants. Once place-making through the racialization of space is realized and reinforced, the devaluation, disinvestment, and destruction of these human populations along with the non-human environments in which they live is justified. Thus, place-making in the context of racialized development exists concurrently as a method of place-taking for communities labeled as expendable. We begin to see this play out in the second half of the 20$^{th}$ century, with the footprints of these place-making ideologies ever present in current conditions in Grove Park.

### *War on Density*

In the decades following World War II, Atlanta began losing many of its urban neighborhoods to a planning ideology that lauded auto-oriented and compartmentalized land use development in both suburban and urban areas. In contrast to Good Urbanism, a compact urban form that encourages pedestrian activity, land use diversity, and equitable access to goods, services, and facilities, this hegemonic planning ideology constructed a conceptualization of urban space that saw the infiltration of density and commercial activity within residential neighborhoods as an abomination that needed to be expunged (Hurley, 2016). By the 1950s, Atlanta's central business district had become poor and

dilapidated, characterized by overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions. Once again, federally sanctioned programs would provide the catalyst for further racialization of space with the 1949 Housing Act, which sought to revitalize urban areas through federally subsidies local redevelopment projects (Collins & Shester, 2013). In 1955, Atlanta began its Urban Renewal Program, administered by the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) and financed by the federal government, to eliminate "slums" and "blighted" conditions in designated areas of the City of Atlanta. AHA acquired and cleared the "blighted areas", and then sold the land to private enterprises for new development. (Atlanta Housing). However, "blight" and dilapidation were not the only criteria that determined which areas of the city were cleared. A digital mapping project from the University of Richmond's Digital Scholarship Lab called *Renewing Inequality* illustrated the spatial relationship between HOLC redlining grades from the 1930s, racial demographics from 1960, and the location of urban renewal projects in Atlanta. Urban renewal projects disproportionately coincided with areas designated "hazardous" and "definitely declining" in HOLC redlining map. These areas also contained majority Black populations by 1960 (Digital Scholarship Lab). These racially-motivated and capitalistic interests continued to infiltrate the planning profession and drove Atlanta's war on density in the post-war period. As a result, Atlanta transformed into a city with lower densities and large monoculture land use zones separated by buffers. This enabled vehicle movement and storage to dominate the planning process and lead to gross inequalities in the public realm (Hurley, 2016). These ideologies were clearly articulated in the first regional plan for metropolitan Atlanta, the 1952 *Up Ahead: A Regional Land Use Plan for Metropolitan Atlanta*.

> "Declines in population are predicted for some central districts. They will result from ``artificial`` rather than ``natural`` causes, however—public policies to reduce existing densities, wipe out blighted areas, improve the racial pattern of population distribution and make the best possible use of the central land areas" (Atlanta Metropolitan Planning Commission, 1952).

*Up Ahead* justified lowering urban density and eliminating commercial development within residential areas and mixed land uses. This rhetoric even seeped its way into the mainstream media, with a 1952 Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution series on urban redevelopment deeming obsolete cities "built for small populations, pedestrians, wagons, horses and carriages" (Spalding, 1952). Urban renewal was marketed to the Atlanta public as a program to eliminate slums and modernize the city. This was in fact a guise for a war on people-focused urban design (Hurley, 2016). Referring back to the racialization of place and subsequent association of denser, mixed use areas with nonwhite populations, this was simultaneously a war on people of color.

> "Urban renewal here in Atlanta had similar traditional urban planning routes to what many other cities experienced. So redlining definitely shaped the city. Deed restrictions, deed covenants, based on race shaped our city. That's why our neighborhood is 90% Black right now, and also a disenfranchised, low-income base" – representative of Grove Park Renewal

The white, landholding elites whose worldviews informed Atlanta's mid-century development had very particular notions of what constituted a thriving urban environment. These notions protected the power and property of Atlanta's elite, and reflect similar dynamics that played out in other U.S. cities in service to white supremacy (Digital Scholarship Lab). Urban renewal was coupled with the inherent power of federal and state governments to enact eminent domain and seize private property for public use. These powers are recognized within the 5$^{th}$ and 14$^{th}$ amendments of the U.S. Constitution and

further provide evidence of the inherent role of the State in perpetuating inequality. These hegemonic structures would continue to influence the configuration of Atlanta's urban realm.

*Justified Disinvestment*

Beginning in the 1950's, sociopolitical shifts began to take their roots in and around the Grove Park community.

> "You have the movement for the civil rights beginning or happening in late 50s early 60s so finally the feds make them integrate the schools in the late 50s early 60s. And with that there were a bunch of Black folks…the rest of our city was redlined and deed restricted and so this is one of the only areas they could move to so the first Black family start moving here in the late 50s early 60s" – Grove Park Renewal Representative

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka was the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court civil rights case that ruled that state-sanctioned discrimination on the basis of race in public schools was unconstitutional. Black families flocked to Grove Park because early redlining and racial realtor steering deemed other parts of Atlanta off limits. Other residents confirmed the sudden influx of Black families, also attributing the increase in diversity to prominent Black figures that paved the way for others.

> "People like Alonzo Herndon and Joseph E. Boone. You know, a lot of it is they figured out a way to get large sums of money. They got rich. The Bronner Brother's haircare people, they were part of that movement. About, I would say about six or seven big Black families got rich. And they bought a couple houses over here. And guess what happened in white flight." – Grove Park Resident

Unfortunately, white people living in the area did not take lightly to the influx of Black residents in their communities, as residents recount. Integration catalyzed the flight of white residents to other areas of the city.

> "When that happens, white people freak out. They burn the school down there and a bunch of them move out in droves at that point as Black folks start to move in and so my understanding is by the mid to late 60s, it's predominantly Black."

The exodus of their white counterparts did not seem to bother Black Grove Park residents.

> "What it is, it was the freedom that white people left us alone. We got a lot of freedom to do a lot of things." – Grove Park Resident

Elder community residents reported to reflect on a period of relative stability that descended on the area in the late 1960s and early 1970s as Black community took hold. According to community members, one bastion in the stability of the Black community during this time was the Black church, though it is hinted that reliance on religion might not always have positive implications. One resident in particular remarks of the weakness of dependency of the church which, despite the institution's prevalence in the community, does not seem to be doing much to improve community conditions.

> "The church was like our mainstay. I mean all the way from the slavery days. They taught us to seek refuge and search and seek help. Everything was geared around the church so yeah, it has stayed that way…obviously if you look at the situation I mean we're not short on churches at all. There are churches on every block, but the surrounding members and the homes are dilapidated. The people are dilapidated. Everything's dilapidated but the church." – Grove Park Resident

In his well-known sociological study, "*The Philadelphia Negro*", W.E.B. Du Bois details the benefits of shortcomings of the Black church. As the last remaining inkling of African tribal life and articulation of political organization among slaves, it is natural then that social life among freed African Americans would center around the church (Du Bois, 1935). Still, given the institution's tendency to lean towards extravagance and show, secret societies of dishonest intentions, and disorganization and internal dissension (Dubois, 1935), it is defensible why residents may be wary of the church's prominent presence.

In the same vein, the safety-net provided by the government subsidized housing projects created an additional sense of cohesion and interdependency within the close-knit community, who often looked to one another for everyday favors.

> "We are dependent on each other within the project in order to provide for like babysitting or a couple of dollars, bar and a cup of sugar. All that we did it within ourselves." – Grove Park Resident

Looking to Dorceta Taylor's remarks on the role of strong and dense interpersonal networks on social movement participation, spatially concentrating Black communities may lend to greater political and social mobility and articulations of power (Taylor, 2009). Anything that risked disrupting these networks would have disastrous impacts for the community, which became apparent in the years to follow. Unfortunately, Atlanta's racialized war on density earlier in the 20th century primed the Atlanta region to incentivize suburbanization through the build out of Atlanta's highway systems.

> "Not just Black neighborhoods but all urban neighborhoods are feeling this pressure. Anyone with money who can get out and live their American dream and the suburbs has better schools, more space, bigger houses. That obviously hurts our neighborhood and hurts our city as a whole" – Grove Park Resident

The development of highways like I-20 wreaked havoc on communities in Atlanta, particularly Black communities in South Atlanta. Interestingly, the use of highways as mechanisms for enacting violence against Black communities implicate the labor and materials that constitute our transportation systems. These same human and non-human actors constitute the sector that produces the majority of Atlanta's greenhouse gas contributions.

As suburbanization facilitated the movement of the Black middle class out of Atlanta, it drained the vitality of communities like Grove Park. However, nothing quite

decimated the community like crack cocaine in the 1980's. Federal policy again facilitated an attack on Black communities with the "War on Drugs". The rapid increase in drug use thus justified the intense and racialized law enforcement programs that followed.

> "I won't get off into where crack cocaine came from and who put it here and all that. I will tell you the devastating the effects that it had on this side of town. We had the projects, and we had low-income people who were always more prone to using drugs and alcohol. But what we also had was a surrounding, middle to upper class, so that what would happen is Black people kept finding their money in the community. If a poor person was going to the store to buy candy—let's say like, right now all the corner stores are owned by, I guess, the Middle Eastern Indian people—but we use to own those corner stores, or the power store or the junkyard. And we don't own any of that anymore. So even if we did have this lower income level of people, we all got along well together because they spent their money with you. And in turn, Black people would put money back out in the community. So everybody kind of fed off of each other. After the crack cocaine came along, the lower income people were so dilapidated, that it dried up the income that the middle-class people were making. So what a lot of the middle class people Black people did was say, 'I got to get out of this side of town'. So they weren't afraid to uproot, from that safety net. The business minded people weren't afraid to go away. So they went away, and the business went away with it. And slowly but surely, we just went down scale." – Grove Park Resident

Grove Park was being targeted for decimation and disinvestment from multiple directions. The news that Atlanta would be hosting the 1996 Olympics was a catalyst for the destruction of public housing. Studies of community change as a result of other Olympic games, such as the 2012 London Olympics and the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, also reveal a pattern of disrupted communal connections and displacement as a result of redevelopment pressures spurred by anticipated Olympic Games (Watt 2013; Anguelovski 2017).

> "The Olympics was one of the first times Atlanta was on a major stage…it was a catalyst to closing down the housing project. When they close down the housing projects, that greatly diminished the number of residents living in the community, and they knew what they were doing. I don't think it was unintentional. I think it

> was completely on purpose. So that closing the public housing was a big deal around here. And if you ask me, it was start of gentrification."

Following suburbanization and the spread of crack cocaine, the demolition of the public housing projects, beginning in 1990 with Techwood Homes, the nation's first government-owned public housing project, and concluding with Palmer House in 2010s, destroyed the safety-net that kept communities like Grove Park intact. (Garlock, 2014; Hankins et. al., 2014).

> "Were told two or three months before they tore the place down that they had to find somewhere new to stay. And then they get bused out to Clayton County and told good luck with your vouchers" – Grove Park Resident

Furthermore, the destruction of public housing projects in other areas, such as the demolition of Overlook Atlanta, led to the spill over of displaced residents into the Grove Park area. By the turn of the 21st century, Grove Park had transitioned from a predominantly white to a predominantly Black neighborhood. In the process, racially-motivated policies had perpetuated the racialization of the built and natural environment of Grove Park, fueling outmigration, disinvestment, and demolition in this and other Westside communities.

# CHAPTER VI: CURRENT CONDITIONS

Ryan Gravel became the initial conceiver of the Atlanta Beltline concept around the same time New Urbanism was taking root. This approach to planning and development promotes the "peopling" of cities and focuses on human scale urban design, a rejection of the auto-centric anti-density ideologies of the post-WWII era. Gravel's (1999) thesis leaned on tenets of New Urbanism to critique Atlanta's "uncontrollable suburban growth and unmitigated sprawl," and it urged a "significant shift in the attitude of a region that has for too long prioritized the automobile as the primary tool for urban expansion" (Gravel, 1999). The end result was a proposal to repurpose a 2-mile radius of abandoned rail infrastructure encircling Atlanta into a 22-mile modern streetcar circuit.

In 2004, when the initial ideas for the Westside Park emerged out of the Trust for Public Land Alex Garvin & Associates report "The BeltLine Emerald Necklace: Atlanta's New Public Realm", there was no analysis of the existing neighborhoods surrounding the park or consideration of how the park's development would impact them, besides increasing their value (Stephens, 2019). This lack of consideration for the social dimensions of the park for disadvantaged community members carried disastrous implications. Catching up to the present, we can begin to clearly see the ideologies, policies, and decisions that have concentrated poverty and disinvestment in the Grove Park Community. The instances of environmental injustice in this community manifest in a range of ways spanning from limited multimodal transportation access, inadequate housing, utility burden, disaster vulnerability, food access, and public health concerns. It was in this context that Westside Park was introduced, without any substantial plans to curb the displacement residents feared would come.

*Transportation Injustice*

After conversations with residents and local leaders, we clearly see the intersection between different aspects of the built environment and the implications those intersections have for community wellbeing. The local transportation system, for example, is notorious for prioritizing the movement of cars over the movement of goods and people and contributing to public safety concerns in the community.

> "The Georgia Department of Transportation, they've historically only cared about cars and getting cars from point A to point B" – Atlanta City Councilperson

Grove Park sits on Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway, a state route listed on Atlanta's top 10 dangerous streets. These 10 streets make up 8% of Atlanta's roadway network but accounted for 88% of traffic fatalities in the years 2014 to 2016 (Saxton, 2018). Residents further remark on the poor condition of the sidewalk coverage:

> "When I walk the proctor Creek Trail, I drive over there and walk. That makes no sense. I would love to leave my car and walk over there. But I can't because we have no sidewalks." – Grove Park Resident

Atlanta's Department of Transportation was only just established in 2019. Before that, transportation was housed in the Department of Public Works. Within interviews, residents commonly drew connections between gentrification, land use and transportation inequities rooted early land use policy by citing the shortcomings of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA).

> "There's not an expansion of MARTA to Cobb County and Gwinnett County because it's all fueled by systematic racism and these scare tactics. I think that was the foundation of gentrification because it created this urban sprawl and people wanted to move out move out move out, but the epicenter of the South is still Atlanta so now that people need to come into the city to take care of business or to do business or for their career, now they have to deal with the inequities of lack of

> transportation. So you either want to drive an hour one way in traffic to get to work every day or you want to move in town where it takes you 10 minutes to get to work" – Grove Park Resident

Referendums to expand MARTA to Atlanta suburbs frequently receive harsh opposition rooted in a desire to protect white suburban spaces from encroachment from inner city people of color (Binkovitz, 2017). The lack of expansion of public transit contributes to sprawl and its social and environmental implications. In Georgia, electricity generation and transportation are the leading sources of CO2 emissions, with Georgia's transportation sector is responsible for 34 percent of the state's CO2 emissions, the predominant greenhouse gas contributing to global climate change. Between 1990 and 2007, mobile-source CO2 emissions in Georgia increased 40 percent. Between 1990 and 2005 residents saw a 60 percent increase in VMT (Atlanta Regional Commission, 2010). A sprawling city consequently puts people farther and farther away from access to daily needs. The implications are an artificial demand for density and walkability, fueling gentrification and movement back into the inner city. There is a tradeoff here, however, as one encounters the exorbitant price of housing one has to pay for increased livability and access to walkability and mixed-use offerings. With housing prices increasing rapidly on the westside, there is a growing divide between who can afford livability and who cannot.

> "When I was looking for a house two and a half years ago, we found ones that were fully renovated, admittedly, not necessarily renovated well, but fully renovated for a hundred thousand dollars. We bought six months later. We were in the house buying process and housing prices had increased a hundred thousand dollars in six months." – Grove Park Resident.

A high percentage of renters in the community means residents are particularly susceptible to displacement due to these housing price increases. A dilapidated housing

stock with low-income residents that often cannot afford home repairs translates to high utility costs and frequent energy burden. Many neighborhood-based assistance efforts seek to alleviate utility costs for residents. This case study thus presents an entry point to conversations of energy injustice as well. A comprehensive plan to address land use, housing, and transportation could thus address Atlanta's housing crisis while driving down emissions and energy costs from transportation and land uses.

*Community Health and Safety*

Public health and safety have always been at the roots of the environmental justice movement. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the first time African Americans had mobilized a national opposition against what they considered environmental injustices was the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike. Workers were advocating for safer working conditions and better pay (Environmental Protection Agency). The connections between health and environmental justice are also emphasized within the 8th and 9th Principles of Environmental Justice, which affirm the right the healthy working conditions and quality health care for victims of environmental injustice (Environmental Working Group).

In Grove Park, the underinvestment in stormwater and sewage infrastructure has given rise notorious environmental and public health concerns in the Proctor Creek tributary, which borders Grove Park to the north.

> "When you look at Proctor Creek, that runs through the Chattahoochee River, which is the city's water supply, the source, it's all polluted and contaminated from illegal dumping. It's also polluted by impervious surface because we have so many dang gon' parking lots and all of those oil and contaminants this run off into the watershed. So I think that for my neighborhood, I think that the lack of proper gutter systems--the sewer systems are inadequate; no curb and gutters throughout

> the neighborhood. You have a lot of water runoff. We have a lot of illegal dumping. It's much better than what it was 20 years ago, but it still has a ways to go because what you see in Grove Park you don't see in Morningside. That's Buckhead. You gotta ask yourself, 'why is that?'" – Grove Park Resident

Impervious surfaces, which cannot infiltrate ground water effectively, illustrate the role of an auto-dominated landscape in contributing to negative environmental outcomes in their community. Scaling up and out, the connection here is also made to broader climate-change related threats. There is also a close association between impervious surfaces and extreme heat, urban heat island effect, and negative public health outcomes (Environmental Protection Agency). Such impacts are all exacerbated by the climate crisis which will impact low income and historically underserved communities disproportionately. The glaring inequities between the west/south and the north side of Atlanta carry the implication of disproportionate climate vulnerability is areas like Grove Park as a result of underfunded and environmentally unsound public infrastructure. To add to this, water vector diseases because of the poor infrastructure and ecological health of the community also threaten community livability.

> "Big storm water issue in this neighborhood. My own house I've put in at least $2,000 so far into trying to address the flooding. I wish we had talked to yesterday and I could have shown you the pond that occurs every time we have the heavy rain. We had a heavy rain today I think. It was Friday if I'm not mistaken. And up until yesterday this whole driveway over here was just flooded. Usually sits a good two days before once we get a good sunny day. It does you know after a while dry up and evaporate but it's out there breeding mosquitoes and it's just awful."

A combined sewer overflow system had contributed to the historic environmental health issues associated with the Proctor Creek Watershed. Legal action in 1990 from local environmental watchdog groups resulted in a federal consent decree mandating

Atlanta address its sewer overflows problems. Public-private partnerships bolstered capacity for extensive revitalization of the creek, but flooding issues continue to plague the surrounding communities today (Environmental Protection Agency; Leslie, 2014). Climate change in Georgia is projected to increase the severity and frequency of severe flooding and rainstorm events (Environmental Protection Agency, 2016). Steps taken to mitigate flooding in Grove Park can promote better public and environmental health outcomes and build climate resilience in the community.

The availability of healthy and affordable foods is another cornerstone of environmental justice.

> "The Grove Park community has grappled with food insecurity for years. A lack of essential businesses such as grocery stores or pharmacies has turned this area into what is known as a food desert." (Villarreal, 2020)

Poor diet is a risk factor linked to ischemic heart and vascular diseases, which are the leading causes of death in Grove Park (Mosaic Group, 2018; Clinic Barcelona) Neighborhood efforts, such as Claudia's House, help address historic food insecurity in the community by providing meals to feed people from local churches, nonprofits, businesses, community groups, and individuals. Such public health concerns are also associated with the lack of greenspace in the area and public recreational facilities in the community.

> "West side Atlanta has the least amount of trails and green space and very low community engagement around the parks and trails and green space because there is a lack of them here" (Grove Park Resident)

The ecological benefits of greenspaces are well researched, and the presence of greenspace for the westside community could bring much needed flooding mitigation and evaporative cooling benefits to mitigate urban heat. More access to outdoor spaces could

improve physical and social health outcomes as well. Therefore, the developing Westside Park has the potential to be a shining asset to this community and an integral part in building climate resilience. However, longtime, marginalized residents are being adversely impacted by green gentrification as they experience a lower sense of community. Several studies report that feelings of not belonging in greenspace contribute use of green space less often than newcomers, perpetuating the inequities in outdoor recreation and greenspace access that lead to poor health outcomes and increased vulnerability to climate-related hazard (Jelks et. al., 2021).

*(In)Equitable Development*

In light of the housing and economic instability and historic disinvestment in the community, the idea for Westside Park emerged not only as an ecological asset and critical source of backup drinking water for the city, but an intentional catalyst for development in the Westside neighborhoods (Atlanta Parks and Recreation). Such a revitalization effort could not happen equitably without being informed by the communities directly impacted by the development. In the months following the Westside Park groundbreaking in September of 2018, the City of Atlanta Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) recruited a diverse stakeholder advisory committee consisting of residents, business owners, community, civic and faith-based leaders, and environmental and technical experts. The engagement was established to enable community members to provide input into the planning and development, to improve relationships between the surrounding neighborhoods and the Department of Parks and Recreation, and to create a sense of community ownership and empowerment around the

Park (WPEDTF, 2021). One important point of advocacy for the advisory committee was equitable south side access to the Westside Park to ensure it met the needs of current residents. The opening of the Proctor Creek Greenway in May of 2018 provided connections to the future Westside Park from the Bankhead MARTA Station, a strategic location for transit-oriented development and multimodal transportation access. However, community engagement was poorly executed, and the City neglected to provided access to the trail from Grove Park.

> "The Path Foundation said 'look, here's what we want to build for you', and at that point Grove Park Neighborhood Association was like, "wait, how do we access the trail on the south side?' You managed to completely not connect the southern community to this trail, which is going to be the lower income, more Black, constituents for this trail. So they just felt cut off and quite hurt, honestly" – Grove Park Resident

The Advisory Committee presented an opportunity to improve relationships between the city and Westside Communities. Things were going well, with a series of advisory committee meetings occurring throughout the year of 2019. The members worked collaboratively in sub-committees to develop recommendations around the park's naming and history, mission, playground, sustainability, uses and programs, and conservancy (WSEDTF, 2021). When COVID-19 hit in early 2020, engagement came to a standstill. At the same time, gentrification was in full swing and concern was building that 15 years of planning for the Westside Park still yielded no protective measures to ensure vulnerable residents were not impacted adversely by the development. Local advocacy and resistance efforts, such as those from the Grove Park Community Development Cooperation (CDC), were critical in mobilizing neighbors and amplifying community outcry.

> "So we started showing up to city hall meetings, Fulton County meetings, neighborhood association meetings, kind of reinforcing and repeating the same thing…it was a few months after that kind of push that the moratorium happened in Grove Park….I would say a lot of our neighbors who were in this movement pushed and made it happen, because they kept using their voices" – Grove Park Resident

As a result of grassroots community advocacy, in February of 2020, the City of Atlanta passed Executive Order 20-03, which established a "moratorium on the acceptance of applications for rezonings, building permits, land disturbance permits, special use permits, special administrative permits, and special exceptions" in the areas surrounding the park dedicated as the overlay zone (City of Atlanta, 2020). During the time of the moratorium, the executive action directed the city request that the department of city planning identify the immediate impact area most affected by the Westside Park development, develop an Equitable Development Framework for the immediate impact area, engage the Atlanta beltline to coordinate community engagement for the westside park and other beltline parks in the immediate impact area, align activities in the one Atlanta housing affordability plan, develop a westside park transportation plan in alignment with the one Atlanta Strategic Transportation Plan, and identify city or other public agency-controlled land located in the immediate impact area. (City of Atlanta, 2020)

Out of this action emerged the West Side Equitable Development Task Force, comprised of community representatives from Grove Park, Center Hill, Almond Park, and Howell Station to "work collaboratively with the City to develop and implement an Equitable Development Framework that would ensure that both public and private investment would support the current residents and address their concerns. (WPEDTF, 2021). In early September 2020, the Mayor's Office committed to the development of

four Westside Park Equitable Development Working Groups around Housing, Transportation, Economic Mobility and Development, and Quality of Life. The Working Groups were intended to be a collaborative space where City staff and key partners could work jointly together with community representatives to provide updates from City projects, respond to community questions and concerns, negotiate priority action items to jointly create a binding Westside Park Equitable Development Framework, and then participate together to implement Equitable Development Framework initiatives.

Over a year since executive order, both aforementioned city-led efforts have failed in producing fruitful results.

> "We remain frustrated that the City has yet to develop deeply committed plans with the community or allocated significant City budgets to implement actions that fulfill the Executive Order and address residents' top concerns around equitable development, anti-displacement, transportation, economic development, Westside Park access, and other critical needs." – WPEDTF

The Department of Parks and Recreation backslid on community engagement efforts when the Advisory Group seemed to disband without notice to community members in February of 2020. With the exception of two email updates concerning the Westside Master Plan in May and September 2020, the community received minimal communication while the Department proceeded with completion of Phase 1A and start of Phase 1B of the park. No other updates were provided to the Advisory Committee after until Grove Park community members discovered construction on a south side access trail in Grove Park and urgently convened a meeting with the City. The meeting in early February 2020 still did not provide any relief to the tensions, with residents reporting feeling disrespected and disappointed.

> "On Tuesday, February 9th, 2021, representatives of the City attended a community engagement session that included over 100 invested residents and stakeholders around Westside Park. Residents engaged with the Department of Parks and Recreation in hopes that a conversation would result in an apology for the lack of engagement, fruitful dialogue on the shortcomings of the trail and access point, solutions for how to move forward with better community engagement, and resources to ensure that future construction and planning would better meet the needs of the community. Instead, the meeting publicly turned to a showing of dismissal as the concerns, thoughts, and lived experiences of community attendees were disregarded and community members left feeling disappointed and disrespected. Moreover, in that meeting community members learned that in the past year the City started building a second entrance on the north side. As our neighbor, Timothy Freeman said in one meeting with the City, "This park isn't for us to enjoy. You are building the city's largest park in the middle of our neighborhood with no regard for us. This is anything but equitable development.""

Frustrated by the trajectory of the events, residents felt the city's demonstrated lack of commitment was a disrespect to the community leaders who spent hundreds of hours engaging with the City and community individuals so that current neighbors of Grove Park would be able to remain in place and enjoy the benefits of city improvements for which they have advocated so long. Despite their trust being continually broken, the residents persisted. In their March 2021 letter to Mayor Bottoms, the residents outlined a list of critical demands for the city to immediately deliver upon, including the implementation of an immediate and measurable anti-displacement strategy that is specifically tailored to the community surrounding Westside Park, the dedication of all City and public-agency controlled parcels to workforce and low-income housing, the development of a comprehensive traffic plan for the neighborhoods surrounding the Westside Park, the re-envisioning of the Donald Lee Hollowell Corridor to support the master visions of Almond Park, Center Hill, Grove Park, and Howell Station, equitable access to the park including the development of a Westside Park South Entrance, and the

development of a comprehensive strategy and dedicated capacity for community engagement and project implementation for the initiatives of Westside Park Equitable Development Taskforce.

# CHAPTER VII: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

> "I think our relationship with the rest of the city needs to change. I don't know that the changes necessarily need to be internal, the change needs to be almost external, where we need more recognition more. More than that respect, necessarily, but like, I think that we are treated differently on the west side, quite honestly. And even if you want to say that, well, the city is trying to be more, you know, equitable about how it's treating its neighborhoods, you can't, you know, just dismiss the decades of mistreatment." – Grove Park Resident

## *Driving Structures*

The legacy of colonization and slavery resulted the designated expendability of Black and Indigenous populations and the areas in which they lived, worked, played, and prayed. As Pellow (2018) notes, such dynamics established systems that saw these communities and their bodies as sponges for the negative externalities of capitalism and sites of unlimited extraction of land and labor which exist as a precondition for capital accumulation. Both colonization and slavery were legally sanctioned, global institutions that siphoned the very essence of what constituted humanity and place for these communities. In the United States and Georgia, we can directly implicate government institutions who instill and perpetuate these oppressive and extractive structures, which continually seek to uproot and erase pre-colonial lifeways and replace them with new ones in service to settler colonialism, white supremacy, and capital accumulation.

Parks and recreational greenspace specifically emerge as apparatuses of injustice. Environmental Justice scholar Dorceta Taylor writes of the destruction of the African American communities in Seneca Village for the creation of New York's Central Park (Taylor, 2009). Mark David Spence details of the violation of treaty rights and restricted access to traditional hunting land of the Blackfoot Indians as a result of the development of Glacier National Park (Spence, 1996). Whites in late 19th century South Africa

coalesced around the concept of an 'African wilderness' and created heavily policed game reserves such as Kruger National Park for the recreational enjoyment of whites while driving out local Africans who relied on access to the land for vital lifehood resources (Dahlberg et. al., 2010). These disturbing patterns of local exclusion with underpinnings in colonial occupation establish normative standards of not only who can use public spaces, including greenspace, but whose use of public space is given humanity and deemed legitimate. Through exclusion from environmental and sustainability planning and management, these conceptualizations of place imply that local and Indigenous peoples are incompatible with and threats to sustainability (Pellow, 2018).

These same driving structures enabled Native American displacement with the Indian Removal Act of 1930, which resulted in the expulsion of Muscogee Creek Indians from the land that is now the site of Westside Park. They also enabled the racially organized social structure of the American South, and the loophole in the 13th Amendment that allowed the development of Bellwood Quarry as a prison labor camp for almost a century beginning in 1850, where the natural environment alongside Black bodies were continually exploited to serve capitalist interest. In 1952, the predecessors of the Atlanta Regional Commission created Atlanta's first regional plan *Up Ahead*, which transformed the post-war "war on density" ideology into real life outcomes. The plan facilitated the racialization of place, as "blighted" was used to describe areas not just with dense, commercial, and heterogeneous land uses, but areas where Black people lived. This racialized conceptualization of urban space in combination with capital interests guided further development decisions in Atlanta through the second half of the 20th century, incentivizing driving and suburbanization. The continued destruction, disruption,

and criminalization of Black spaces with the widespread use of crack cocaine and the series of public housing demolitions into the 21st century further withered away both sense of place and opportunities for economic stability.

Today, 70% of the Westside communities rent their homes. 39% of the housing stock in Grove Park is renter-occupied, and the median household income for the community is around $25,000. The environmental legacies of spatially-concentrated disinvestment, serial extraction and externalization are the Brownfield sites that now dot the area in between the Quarry and Chattahoochee River, providing justification for the revitalization efforts that are displacing the populations targeted for erasure by these driving structures. As Atlanta's eastside already succumbed to gentrification pressures, Grove Park and the rest of the west side are the final bastion, and the cheap land, socioeconomic preconditions, and prime locations near Atlanta's urban center, next to Proctor Creek and the new Westside Park, and in proximity to the Bankhead MARTA station make the community a magnet for real estate speculation and increasing land and property values. Despite this historical context of racialized space, the City of Atlanta did not put adequate measures in place to ensure Westside Park would be a park for everyone. Out of this series of events emerges my assertion that green gentrification represents the latest form of place-taking along a long spatio-temporal continuum of displacement and erasure catalyzed by the development of conservation areas and other green initiatives. Green infrastructure planning positioned within a western and capitalist context is in direct contradiction with policies that build capacity and self-determination in marginalized communities. Capitalism coupled with racism and other social inequalities perpetually reinforce the existence of winners whose very identity is

constructed out of the subordination of losers, a zero-sum game. When this system of winners and loser interacts with the use and management of space, the place-making for some becomes dependent on the place-taking from others.

### *Implications for Climate Resilience*

In September of 2019, when Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms testified before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Climate Crisis, she said that "the climate crisis may well be the biggest equity challenge of our time" (City of Atlanta, 2019). The case presented by the development of Westside Park, whose very existence represents a past ravaged by environmental violence and a future shaped by climate instability, illustrates this statement could not be truer. Atlanta rates third in the nation for cities with urban heat island effect and first in the nation for cities with the highest income inequality. By 2050, the average summer high temperature in Atlanta is projected to jump 4.1 degrees to 92.6 degrees F, making droughts, as well as extreme wet-weather events, more frequent and longer-lasting, and increasing the amount of "climate refugees," who seek rapid resettlement in Atlanta after escaping sea-level rise in other coastal regions. All of these events will of course disproportionately burden Atlanta's most vulnerable residents. With this in mind, the Westside Park Equitable Development Framework needs to be created through a lens of climate resilience to bolster the capacity of vulnerable residents to withstand these impacts, or else running the risk of exacerbating current inequities.

## Alignment of Institutional Priorities through a Climate Resilience Lens

This analysis revealed the interconnectedness between housing, land use, transportation, and greenhouse gas emissions. Low density zoning and racial segregation go hand-in-hand in Atlanta, as city land use code developed without a climate equity lens eliminated dense and naturally affordable housing options to maintain racial and economic residential segregation. Today, at least 60% of the city is zoned for single-family use, and neighborhoods in Atlanta that are zoned exclusively for single-family homes have consistently less racial diversity (Bellan, 2021). Atlanta today ranks 316$^{th}$ in the nation for most dense cities, yet the population is expected to grow from just over 500,000 to 1.2 million just within the next few decades. Low density land uses without expanded transit coverage throughout the metro-Atlanta area also incentivize auto trips, further encouraged through the use of mandatory parking minimums. Metro Atlanta's inland geography, comprised of impervious roads and parking lots, contributes to poor ecological and public health outcomes, as well as decreased access as people have to drive more vehicle miles to access jobs, stores, and essential services. Energy usage from transportation, electricity, and natural gas is the largest single contributor to Atlanta's CO2 emissions, representing 95 percent of Atlanta's carbon footprint (City of Atlanta Mayor's Office of Resilience)

Therefore, strongly aligning the priories of Atlanta's transportation, housing, energy, land use, and climate sectors through comprehensive climate-friendly land use, transportation, and housing strategies will reveal action items that better achieve common goals for resilience and equity across these areas. For instance, a proposed Westside Park Equitable Development Plan initiative is the expansion of parking availability around the park to reduce spillover impacts from the park onto the surrounding communities. This

initiative could potentially work contrary to goals to effectively manage parking, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and toxic pollutants from transportation, and improve housing affordability and supply. The concept of induced demand posits that developments intended to improve traffic congestion, such as widened lanes and more parking capacity actually stimulate a feedback loop which induces more driving (VMT), which leads to more emissions and ultimately more congestion (Smart Growth America, 2020).

Therefore, adding more parking capacity perpetuates the land use and zoning patterns that favor sprawled single-family development and higher housing costs and disincentivize use of public transit and other forms of low-carbon transportation. In the same vein, the Atlanta Clean Energy Plan supports the expansion of electrified single occupancy vehicles as a climate change mitigation strategy, with no mention of changes in land use patterns to reduce the need to drive in the first place. Electrification, while reducing GHG emissions, does not fully address the equity and access issues associated with an auto-oriented landscape. Alignment of these plans reveals comprehensive zoning reform solutions that reduce barriers to building missing middle housing and accessory dwelling units in previously single-family zones and eliminate parking minimums. President Biden's proposed infrastructure plan will provide over $200 billion to increase housing supply and address the affordable housing crisis and a $85 billion investment to modernize public transportation (White House, 2021). The availability of this financial support for Georgia can provide funding streams to realize improvements to our current land use and housing systems that promote climate resilience for underserved communities.

## Renter Stability

### *Tenants Unions*

Over a third of housing units in Grove Park are renter-occupied, demonstrating the need for policies designed explicitly to keep renters in their homes. “Tenants' unions are renter-led organizations that advocate for tenant rights, build renter power, and push for renter-friendly policy change” (CREATE Initiative, 2020). A well-organized tenants' union can have the power to self-advocate regarding a variety of grievances. Organizing tactics can include forcing direct negotiations with building managers, filing collective complaints to city or state agencies, or even calling for a rent strike. In implementation, third-party dispute resolution and mediation between unions and landlords can help tenants’ unions meet their needs under tense circumstances. Additionally, code enforcement and inspection are a municipal tool that tenants can use to enforce legal living conditions and pressure unresponsive landlords. Unions are generally stronger when representatives are familiar with legal resources (both public and nonprofit) and have relationships with legal advisors; strategic and targeted recruitment of those with legal knowledge and skills are to the benefit of tenant’s unions. Organized processes and tracking of all documentation from negotiations with landlords, building inspections, and mediations can help renters better understand and assert their rights. Finally, tenants’ unions have strength in numbers. Supporting authentic interpersonal relationships, opportunities for leadership, accessibility and other factors will boost recruitment and sustained participation. (CREATE Initiative, 2020)

### *Rent Control*

Another strategy to promote housing security for renters is rent control. “Rent control refers to government-imposed regulation on whether and by how much landlords can raise rents” (CREATE Initiative, 2020). Rent control addresses housing unaffordability by directly regulating the existing private housing market. Rent control is a redistributive policy; when imposed, it offers direct and immediate reprieve.” (CREATE Initiative, 2020). Existing in direct opposition to the free-market capitalism that siphons labor and resources from disadvantages communities, rent control is an imposition on private property rights and is hotly contested by those who wish to maximize profits from housing. Through strict price ceilings or capping the amount by which rents can be raised annually (rent stabilization), rent control exists as one of the few mechanisms that secure long term financial stability among renter populations in areas where they would otherwise be displaced (CREATE Initiative, 2020). To address housing shortages, in 1942 the federal government initiated a national rent control program in which approximately 80% of the rental stock nationally became rent-regulated with enforced rental caps. This form of rent control stayed in place until the late-1940s / mid-1950s. Interestingly, the initialization of urban renewal corresponded with the removal of renter protections. Today, only six jurisdictions in the U.S. have some form of rent control or stabilization: California, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, D.C, and Oregon.

As of 2019, Georgia is among the 39 states with preemptive laws that prohibit the adoption of rent control mechanism. Implementing rent control to stabilize renters in Grove Park could be an effective mechanism in keeping renters in place, but would require an amendment of Title 44, Chapter 7, Article 1 of the Official Code of Georgia to repeal the decades old restrictive laws.

> "No county or municipal corporation may enact, maintain, or enforce any ordinance or resolution which would regulate in any way the amount of rent to be charged for privately owned, single-family or multiple-unit residential rental property." (Title 44, Chapter 7, Article 1 of the Official Code of Georgia)

The conversation of rent control reemerged in Georgia in 2018 when Atlanta City Council elected to send a letter to the Georgia Legislature urging state lawmakers to repeal the outdated language (Keenan, 2020). Increased pressure on the legislature and the coordinated action of allied groups to champion this cause could finally bring about change to secure stability for renters in Grove Park.

## Long-term Homeownership Among Black Residents

### *Community Land Trusts*

The Community Land Trust (CLT) model of land tenure emerges in direct contestation to the unsustainable, privatized, and speculative market that drives land and property values to a point of unaffordability. Carrying the assumption that land is a public, communal asset and not a private good (Choi et al, 2017), CLT's have been touted as an innovative solution to secure local control of land and housing affordability. In a CLT model, a community, often a non-profit organization, permanently acquires land, either through donation or purchase (Gray, 2008; Choi et al 2017). An individual then buys a house on the land and leases the property through a long-term ground lease on the condition that they must live in their home, preventing the absentee landlord problem (Gray, 2008; Choi et. al 2017). The separation of land and property ownership along with CLTs placing restrictions on the resale prices of their units help maintain affordability for low-income homebuyers. (Curtin & Bocarsly, 2008; Davis, 2007; Gray, 2008). Their membership follows an "open, place-based system, with the board of

directors including residents of CLT units, other community residents, and public representatives, to allow for a self-governing community" (Choi et. al 2017). This form of collaborative ownership and claiming the status of "stewards" of the land, echoes the calls of the Indigenous #LandBack movement, which emerged from Indigenous effort to resist colonial land theft and lifeway disruption and advance Indigenous land reclamation and collective self-determination. The City of Atlanta should thus aggressively pursue the Equitable Development Initiatives that promote the identification of all City and public-agency controlled parcels and dedication of these parcels to the development of long term affordable housing. These city-owned land banks can use their governmentally-derived powers to acquire foreclosed or "blighted" properties, and then sell the property to a land trust (CREATE Initiative, 2020).

*Preference Policy*

Considering the role of Urban Renewal in the devaluation and destruction of Black-owned policy, a radical solution to address the lack of Black homeownership would look to the mechanisms by which Urban Renewal operated as a legally sanctioned apparatus of place-taking. Because Urban Renewal used race as an indicator for the locations for redevelopment, it follows then that reparative and redistributive policy would use race as an indicator for preferential placement in housing. Such describes Portland Oregon's "Preference Policy". This policy aims to directly rectify the harmful impacts of urban renewal by giving preference to housing applicants with generational ties to North/Northeast Portland before applicants without a previous history of having lived in the area (City of Portland). Priority status is given to applicants who previously

owned property that was taken by Portland City government through eminent domain, and/or their descendants. Eminent domain refers to the right of a government agency to take private property for public use and relocate and/or compensate the owner of the property (City of Portland). The policy assigns a point system based on categories of residency. When applied to Atlanta, points can be awarded if a resident's current or former address falls within one of the identified areas within Atlanta where City plans resulted in gentrification and/or displaced households. Additional points can be possible if the current or former address of the resident's ancestor or guardian falls within one of the identified areas, for a maximum total of six points. Applicants are then sorted on a waitlist for housing in order of the preference points they received, from highest to lowest, with priority status applicants placed at the top of the list. (City of Portland). Additional screening mechanisms can help direct this resource to most impacted communities; While the application for the waitlist is open to all, residents must meet income qualifications to qualify for housing, regardless of preference points or priority status. For example, an Atlanta preference policy may mandate that resident are only eligible for affordable housing opportunities if their combined household income is between 30% and 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI).

**Connections to Place-based Culture and History**

*Grove Park Cultural Corridor*

Physical displacement and the disappearance of trusted and recognizable community institutions threaten to erase the culture and history of the historic Black community from the area in a targeted attempt at place-taking. Additionally, the lack of

widespread knowledge about the history of Bellwood Quarry among community members present an opportunity for creative programs to honor this history. The promotion of cultural corridors can function to uplift the cultural heritage of the community and contribute to "creative place-making," or the practice of intentionally shaping the physical and social character of an area (CREATE Initiative, 2020). These counter place-making initiatives can thus arise as acts of resistance that both increase community engagement and awareness of this history and preserve shared community identity. Educational-place-making such as symbolic community art installations can beautify public spaces while memorializing significant people, places, and ideas relevant to the area's history. Additionally, focusing particularly on the history of the quarry, an oral history project with descendants of quarry laborers in partnership with Atlanta Public Schools can elevate the stories of people with generational connections to the history of quarry as well as engage youth from an early age about the strong and resilient history of the community in which they live.

## Community Health and Safety Improvements

### *Improving Pedestrian Safety*

Atlanta Department of Transportation Commissioner Josh Rowan's stated that, "We're breaking records for pedestrian fatalities," on Donald Lee Hollowell Parkway. Crumbling sidewalk infrastructure and infrequent crosswalks make the 4 lane-arteriole among the most dangerous in the City of Atlanta. Development decisions have reduced commercial uses such as grocery stores, markets, and pharmacies to minimum. These conditions create to creating a dull, inactivated, and hazardous street façade that reduces

connectivity between residents as well as between residents and the public realm. The Westside Park Equitable Development Framework should thus seek to dramatically reimagine the public space along the Donald Lee Hollowell Corridor in a manner that increases positive engagement with space. The city should pursue traffic calming initiatives, such as tree lines, which slow speeds, beautify the community, and provide the ecological benefits of evaporative cooling. Furthermore, a road diet would dedicate existing car lanes for increase space for walking and bicycling infrastructure, effectively "peopling" the corridor and increasing interactions between residents and local public and private spaces.

*Community Social Health Centers*

The historical significance of the church to the local community should be leveraged as part of the equitable development plans; the city should look for avenues to partner with local churches and other partners to provide 24-hour community resource and information centers, instrumental in teaching the youth of the community education and life skills such as coping, problem solving and conflict resolution. As the severity of climate change has implications for resource scarcity, poverty, climate, and mental health, these socially oriented community development programs, in addition to Alternative justice programs such as the Policing Alternatives & Diversion Initiative (PAD), can provide critical non-emergency resources, services, and support that bypass interactions with the police.

**Questions for Further Research**

When considering the interplay of an impending climate crisis, Atlanta's racialized urban development history, and constructed conceptions of place shape, it is clear that the conditions present in Grove Park today exist along a long spatio-temporal continuum of environmental violence and exclusion. I assert that emergence of race and the creation of environmental racism and sacrifice zones is at the root of the proliferation of climate change, and that socioeconomic and environmental inequality are both driving forces and outcomes of climate related disasters.

Theft of land, labor, and resources from Indigenous communities worldwide provided the necessary resources for western countries to expand their means of production on a massive scale. The lives of the Indigenous caretakers, who know the land intimately and have lived sustainably for millennia, were and are blotted out, targeted for erasure, and replaced with new settler colonial lifeways of commodification, selfish individualism, utilitarianism, and apathy for the living planet.

The concept of race was created to justify the murder, the pillaging, and the exploitation that occurred and is still occurring on those Indigenous lands. Both inequity and the climate crisis know no political boundaries (Pellow, 2018) and so these histories of place and these outcomes of inequitable, racist, and environmentally unsound practices, become the driving forces of inequality in Grove Park. Over the next 30 years, the climate crisis will displace more than 140 million people within their own countries (Taiwo & Cibralic, 2020). Considering the results of this research, a question arises concerning the extent to which these estimations of climate migration account for the people and communities displaced due to climate mitigation and adaptation projects.

We cannot plan for climate resilience with the same worldviews that created the crisis to begin with. Thus, the elimination of race-based discrimination, and the return of land and resources and a status of humanity to the communities from which they were taken is necessary if we are to slow the climate crisis. Such describes the case for climate reparations (Taiwo & Cibralic, 2020). Further research should continue to examine how Atlanta applies a climate resilience lens to implement reparative policies that give back to communities that historically have has little contribution to the climate crisis. Research should continue to rely on the lived experiences of residents, and use lessons learned from the past to envision and realize a future of climate resilience for all.

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