THE RHETORICS OF COMMUNITY SPACE: CRITICAL EVENTS IN CHAMPAIGN-URBANA’S BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT

BY

MICHAEL STERLING BURNS

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Catherine Prendergast, Chair
Associate Professor Peter Mortensen
Associate Professor Rebecca Ginsburg
Associate Professor Clarence Lang, Kansas University
Abstract

Residing at the intersection of writing studies research that address public rhetoric, and Black Freedom Movement (ca. 1940-1970) scholarship that foregrounds local people and social movements, this dissertation narrates and analyzes critical events relevant to the Douglass Center, a community center in the historically black American North End neighborhood of Champaign-Urbana and argues that the role of that location is both the result of and the location for politicized rhetoric. The dissertation analyses a variety of archival documents from both traditional and nontraditional sources—letters and correspondence, newspaper articles, meeting minutes, proposals, maps—to offer both a rich history of the era and foreground the importance of conceptual space and material location in efforts toward more balanced social relations.

The Douglass Center has historically served as a location for members of Champaign-Urbana’s black community to confirm their connection to each other and convene beyond the white gaze. Yet to frame this study solely in terms of the establishment and maintenance of a recreational center obscures both the importance of the Center and the dissertation’s intervention, which is to highlight black community members’ rhetoric in their efforts to establish and maintain control over material and conceptual space. It argues that the tactics used by local actors evidences a critical awareness of the rhetorical (and, by connection, social and political) situation. So, while the dissertation is interested in generating a narrative account, it is more concerned with showing how community members’ rhetorics reveal their own understanding of power relations with the dominant public and demonstrates an awareness of how to improve the material conditions of the local community.
To Mom and Dad
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Chapter 1—Introduction

When I first arrived in Champaign-Urbana for graduate school, I immediately looked for opportunities to continue my previous work with adult learners in alternative educational settings\textsuperscript{1}. After some searching, I was introduced to the Odyssey Project, a free program that offers a humanities-based sequence of courses to working- and lower-class adults who want to take college classes. Odyssey Project classes were held in the library in Douglass Park, in the center of Champaign-Urbana’s historically black American North End community. The location of the program has been both practical and symbolic, as the North End has also traditionally been the community mostly inhabited by black Americans and the poor and working class of Champaign-Urbana (Stack). Initially, I was interested in research concerning the learning processes of Odyssey students who, while dealing with various life challenges, made their way back to the classroom. I conducted some initial classroom observations, spoke with students and instructors, and thought about ways that I could engage Odyssey and its participants in a substantive research project.

\textsuperscript{1} Admittedly, I may overvalue the ability of education to bring about more equal social relations (in itself a version of the “literacy myth” Harvey Graff and others have warned us of), though I firmly stand by the notion that language is the basis of social relations, and further, the more attention offered to understanding the function of language in social relations, the more likely we are to develop better understandings regarding how to use language in affecting positive change.
As I grew to understand more about the program though, I came to some realizations that led me to rethink how I wanted to relate to its participants. One consideration was that I wanted to more closely associate with Odyssey and its students in a formal capacity. Rather than use my engagement with the program as an opportunity to conduct research for my dissertation, recalling my prior engagement with similar populations, I wanted to assume a more agentive role in relating to the students. I expressed this desire to the program’s director, and I was offered a teaching position in the program for the upcoming fall semester. My motivations were clear. I was (and still am) interested in the positively affecting the educational experiences of students, I want to continually develop professionally, and I want to maintain my emphasis on improving my teaching practice. Still, I needed to conduct research and engage theoretical positions in support of my teaching practice and professional development. The dilemma I faced was one that often besets activist-researchers. How do I honestly justify research on the populations for whom I am an advocate (e.g., Cushman)? Would I not be commodifying our shared experience by utilizing my position as a member of the academy to better my own position? Turn the lived experiences of disenfranchised populations into cultural and eventually economic capital for me? Granted, by engaging in more critical research methodologies (for example, by sharing my research findings and data, offering community members access to university resources), there are ways to better balance the outcomes between participants and researchers. Still, I was troubled by the position, even more so when I considered that the Odyssey Project, while successful in its mission of offering access to the Humanities, rarely left students better off educationally or economically than when they started the program (Marsh). The generation of cultural
capital through Humanities-based studies holds potential social benefits, however, as John Marsh notes in his article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, the Odyssey Project (and adult education programs in general) can be understood as somewhat misguided when viewed in terms of the students’ immediate material needs. I wanted to enact a more balanced exchange between myself and the students while also finding some question or issue to explore that would also seem of value to the population under study.

As I shift my research focus from the classroom and students, I am not abandoning my concern for adult learners or nontraditional educational settings. Rather, I am viewing the work Odyssey does more generally in terms of one of several forms of critical literacy and educational activity that have taken place in Champaign-Urbana’s poor and black neighborhoods. It is my position that a more public focus on the literacy and rhetorical practices in the everyday life of the North End will better serve the community by revealing the work done in those spaces as connected to black Americans' experiences. By going public with my focus, I can address local experiences in relation to the broader discourse of rights struggles and the Black Freedom Movement while also contributing to the spatial turn in the field of writing studies that has coincided with works addressing more explicitly the relationships between space and literacy practices (e.g., Ackerman, Fleming, Reynolds). As Leander and Sheehy, state, “spatial research confronts the problem of how to explain political struggle in people's daily lives” (2). As I refocused from the classroom to the Odyssey Project’s surrounding environs, I realized that material space was an important consideration, not only for students, but also for members of the surrounding community. As I started to observe, some aspects of the
material environment became more apparent. The borders of the black community were clearly demarcated by railroad tracks and major streets, even as geographically this community encompassed both Champaign and Urbana. In the middle of this predominantly black American and mostly modest neighborhood, locally known as the North End, there is a 15-acre park (“Parks and Facilities”). In addition to the outdoor facilities—a basketball court, a baseball field, a playground, and a sled hill—there are three buildings: a senior citizens’ center, the public library (where Odyssey classes were held), and a community center. The park and the buildings are all named after the abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass. Here, on the upper margin of Champaign-Urbana, is Douglass Park, the geographic and ideological center of the North End. The Douglass Center is the middle of what in the broader geographic and political context of Champaign-Urbana, is essentially a marginalized neighborhood—what Michel Laguerre describes as “minoritized space […] the location where the identity of the minority person becomes spatialized” (9). The distinct boundaries that define the North End—busy cross-town streets, railroad tracks—serve to define the neighborhood at the same time the borders distinguish the neighborhood’s residents as “other” in the broader social/geographic context.

The importance of the Park and the Center became more apparent during my preliminary research. I noted that for black Americans, parks and community centers have often served as alternative sites for generating collective resistance to racist oppression in the 1930s through the Black Power Movement in the 1970s (Austin, Gregory, Pitts). Locally, Douglass Park and Douglass Center offered examples of such

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2 I will address the significance of naming in Chapter 2.
spaces. There has been a full range of engagements in the space; from occasional dances to Black Panther meetings, the Douglass Center was the location (“Douglass Center Files”, Urbana Free Library). The role of these spaces became even more significant for me as I noted that even as different individual leaders emerged from the community, community leadership was subject to frequent turn over as individuals moved on in different eras. In the midst of this frequent turnover, though, the Douglass Center was consistently the location where they met and organized. The Center was the location, it seemed, that was always adaptable to the needs of the community. I'm interested here, too, in the community center as a space that is both public and private. Public in that it serves as a space for community formation by offering a location for social and cultural activity (via dances, after school programs, the library, for example), and private in that the space is also constitutive of what Vorris Nunley describes as "hush harbor," a space for members of the black community to communicate with one another, via hidden discourse, beyond the gaze of the dominant white public. On some occasions, activity in the space was intended to be visible to a broader public. On other occasions, though, the focus of activity in the Center was to develop strategies to resist the impositions of the dominant white public.

Thus, I came to the question of how to account for the community’s use of the Douglass Center, how to account for the role that the space has served in local blackfolks’ struggles for more equal treatment in the Freedom Movement. Rather than focus on an historical account of the black community then, or view local struggles solely in terms of social issues, I instead compose a narrative in a way that accounts for both the people and the history while also remaining attentive to the rhetorical practices that
account for a specific location of activity. I am interested in the idea of spatiality, “[…]
the ways in which the social and the spatial are inextricably realized one in the other: to
conjure up the circumstances in which society and space are simultaneously realized by
thinking, feeling, doing, individuals” (Christensen et al., 142). Further, I want to relate
this notion of spatiality to literate and rhetorical practices toward a better understanding
of how disenfranchised people implicitly and explicitly utilize spatiality and rhetoricity to
improve their lived experiences.

**Race, Space, and Rhetoric in Conversation**

In attempting to relate race, space, and rhetoric, I am drawn to works that
potentially informs an understanding of how these tropes relate to one another.
Beginning with race, my main concerns are first with establishing a framework through
which to understand race in relation to spatial and rhetorical concerns, even as conceptual
and material shifts take place. To this end, I draw on Omi and Winant’s *racial formation
theory*. Beginning with a basic definition, Omi and Winant define race as “a concept
which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different
types of human bodies” (55). Viewed in these terms, race as a concept can be understood
as being socially constituted, and as such subject to change as political and social
relations change. Further, the references to *sign* and *signification* in Omi and Winant’s
definition of race acknowledge the role of language in the making and maintenance of the
concept. As well, bodies sign and signify relative to context. Frequently, as Omi and
Winant indicate, phenotype is most often cited as the essential component in the
signification of bodies. However, context is also determined by the space that bodies
occupy, such that bodies alone can racialize and engender space (Laguerre). Already,
then, this definition facilitates further investigation into the influence of language and space regarding how race is defined. As the central mechanism in their theory, Omi and Winant

[...] define racial formation as the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed [...] First we argue that racial formation is a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized. Next we link racial formation with the evolution of hegemony, the way in which society is organized and ruled [...] From a racial formation perspective, race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation. (55-6)

Here again, racial formations and projects can be understood as having spatial implications. The formation itself is described in metaphors that suggest materiality—“created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed”—and in terms of processes that can only take place in space. The first component of racial formation, the racial product, is both “historically situated” and connected to “bodies” and “structures.” The temporal component of the racial product is foregrounded, however the process is also related to bodies and structures. As a process, it can only take place in space, in locations where bodies and social structures create, inhabit, transform, and destroy the very notion of race. As Omi and Winant next “link racial formation with the evolution of hegemony,” I see their more open, if still implicit, recognition of the spatial. That is, social organization and rule, when directed toward the formation of race, is most often concerned with the demarcation of space (Weneyeth). Enslavement, legalized segregation, and the making of urban ghettos all share the process of demarcating space...
Omi and Winant’s third component of racial formation, which offers, “race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation,” further solidifies the relation between race and space. In terms of race relating to social structures, I see at least two notions at work. The first is the social as ideological, or informing the hegemonic. Here, the very misrecognition of the structure reinforces the social/ideological representation of race. However, another way to understand the function of the social structure in racial formation is at the very core of the materiality—and by connection spatiality—of race. Working from this second notion, cultural representations of race can both control—when deployed by dominant groups with a vested interest in utilizing race to maintain social and spatial order, and liberate—when used by racialized groups as they engage in the process of remaking spaces in their own terms.

So, while Omi and Winant historically (i.e., temporally) situate racial projects, I argue that there are also spatial implications to racial projects. As Omi and Winant cite “at least three other analytical dimensions” for racial projects, the parameters they set each fall within ideological, spatial, or temporal considerations (58). Again, both political/ideological and historical/temporal considerations are essential when considering racial meanings. However, it is what Omi and Winant describe as the “micro-level of everyday experience” that connects most directly to the relation between race and space in the context of this project. In presenting an alternative explanation, They state:

Racial projects do the ideological 'work' of making these links ['between structure and representation']. *A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, and explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize*
and redistribute resources along particular racial lines. Racial projects connect what race means in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based on that meaning” (56, italics in original).

Omi and Winant posit that race is not only constructed, but as a concept constantly changes in meaning with respect to time and place. Put another way, race constantly reforms in correlation to the social, cultural, political, and economic shifts in the American landscape. This noted shift corresponds to the new formations in black publics, not only in terms of the material means for those involved in struggles to mobilize nationally, but also in terms of how built environments take on alternate conceptual meanings in local black communities. Thus, I use racial formation theory as a basic paradigm for this project in order to consider both the changing constant of race-based oppression and resistance as well as the relationship between race and rhetorical activity as a response to oppression and a means to constitute resistance. It is my position that the rhetorical situation and racial forms are in direct relation with each other. In the least, race and rhetoric are correlative and potentially exist in a bi-causal relationship, such that the rhetorical forms that are deployed within that space directly constitute the racial formation within a given social context. As well, the rhetorical situation is constitutive of the racial landscape that is available in the social context throughout this period of the Black Freedom Movement. As well, understandings of race are conditioned by responses to localized conditions. Applied here, the local scale of this project allows me to focus on the relation between racial (re)formation and the re-conceptualization of space within the black community.
In further pursuing this question, my interest in relating literate and rhetorical practice (as a sociohistorical activity) to the material location of that activity necessitates more careful theoretical attention to the spatial. As Edward Soja notes, the tendency to “over-privilege” the social and the historical often creates a subjugation of space. In order to counter this imbalance, he proposes a “threedspace” approach to equally weight space and time. His goal is to reassert the spatial as a necessary component in what he calls a “trialectics of being” (Soja, “Threedspace” 3). Rather than rely on a single ontological field (the social-historical), the trialectic also accounts for interplay between the spatial/social, and the spatial/historical. In this way, an accounting of the spatial avoids the “false binary” that often limits recognition of a third figure in the relationship and facilitates the conversation among the three fields.3 Building on the ontological, Soja also accounts for a trialectic epistemology, whereby a “Firstspace” depicts a real or “perceived space”, a “Secondspace” focuses on “conceived space,” and “Threedspace epistemologies are understood “[. . .] as arising from the sympathetic deconstruction and heuristic reconstitution of the Firstspace-Secondspace duality, another example of what I have called threeding-as-Othering” (Soja 9). So, while accounting for the materiality of space and the built environment, Soja’s Threedspace is also attentive to the role of the artist, architect, and community member, each of which might have something to offer to the idea of how a space gets made or used. By accounting for the ways in which space is

3 In Poetics, Aristotle indicates the need for a constant introduction of a third figure into the dialectic, lest the relationship become stagnant. In a sense, Soja’s conception of threedspace is evocative of Aristotle’s conception of third figure, even as Soja draws on Lefebvre as a major influence for threedspace.
actualized through the relationship between the perceived and the conceived, thirdspace offers a way to understand the role of the rhetorical in the making of space. While in the context of this dissertation I make the distinction between material and conceptual space, my use of these terms is evocative of the thirdspace conception, in that actors’ use of the rhetorical situation can potentially alter both forms of space.

Soja’s Thirdspace has been integrated into research in writing studies that recognize that rhetorical situations have spatial dimensions, and that rhetorical agency includes the production and maintenance of social space (e.g. Ackerman, Leander and Sheehy, Reynolds). While this connection between the spatial and the rhetorical can be traced back to Greek ideas relating to governance of the city-state, most recently this connection has been attributed to theorist Henri Lefebvre, who offers that we view space as social, and that it can be measured multi-dimensionally according to three basic facts: “Every language is located in space. Every discourse says something about space (places or sets of places); and every discourse is emitted from space” (Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 132). This attention to the valenced relationship between language and space is central to the way in which I want to utilize the interdisciplinarity of writing studies to address the relationships among race, space, and language use. The rhetorical situation generally accounts for context, however it is the (perceptual and conceptual) location of discourse (and discourse about location) that further contributes to meaning making.

I want to know what the role of the Douglass Center has been in the context of these meaning-making events. Yet, to frame this study solely in terms of the establishment and maintenance of a recreational center obscures the breadth of my intervention, as I am equally concerned with the rhetorical activity among community
members in their efforts to establish and maintain the recreational center that has served such a central function in local efforts relevant to the black freedom movement. So, while I am interested in generating a narrative account, I am also concerned with the ways in which community members’ rhetorics reveal understandings of power relations relative to the dominant public and an awareness of the available means to improve the material conditions for the local community. I believe that the rhetoric employed by local actors evidences a kind of critical literacy (Freire) with regard to the rhetorical (and by connection, social and political) situation. My thinking here is responsive to Jacqueline Jones Royster’s use of sociopolitical action and Shirley Wilson Logan’s attention to rhetorical situatedness, particularly as they see black Americans’ use of rhetoric in the context of affecting more equal social relations. As well, I believe that the practice of critical literacy in the local context evidences attention not only to the pragmatic conditions in those local contexts, as well the practice evidences a broader awareness among African Americans of the *kairos*, the opportune space and time wherein members of a black community in a small urban area in the 1930s to 1970s were able to improve conditions for its members at the local scale.

As I conceptualize it here, critical literacy is tied directly to why I believe attention to rhetoric adds something new and significant to the study of local social movements. Certainly, it is important to uncover and make known local histories such as this one of the Douglass Center. Equally important, though, is the capacity of this project to bring attention to the functions that rhetoric and critical literacy have served in the Black Freedom Movement. Thus, a motivating question becomes, how do the rhetorical
and literate activities of black Americans relate to the shaping and reforming of peoples’
lived experiences?

Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as, "The faculty of observing, in any given case,
the available means of persuasion" is one place to start (Rhet. I.2, 1355b26f.). Given my
motivation to materially and socially locate rhetorical acts, I see that within Aristotle’s
definition the process of observing the “available means” can be understood as having
spatial dimensions. That is, where one observes the available means is directly relational
to what one observes. As such, rhetorical acts can be understood as occurring within
socially and materially constructed contexts. By Bitzer’s definition, this context can be
understood as a rhetorical situation that is comprised of

a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or
potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse,
introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring
about the significant modification of the exigence. (6)

Working from this definition, I read Bitzer’s situation as carrying spatial implications.
The “complex” is recognizable because of the proximity “persons, events, objects, and
relations” have to one another. Further, it is the proximity of actors, objects, and
occasions within a materially or socially constructed space that produce the exigent
situation. Bitzer also offers that, “An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive
modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by
discourse” (7). The exigence is rhetorical in the sense that it is alterable by persuasion.
Further, I view as exigence as related to spatial considerations by virtue of where
modifications are enacted as a result of discourse. Modifications, while operating via
discursive changes, also play out in the alteration of social conceived spaces and material locations. Positive modification alters the factors and locations for the next rhetorical situation. Further, I argue that space is just as meaningful a constraint as any other Bitzer considers in the rhetorical situation. Location is indelible from the situation, as the situation does not occur beyond the boundaries of space but is, fact, bound by the location (Lefebvre). As I am framing it here, location also informs the means by which rhetoric enacts persuasion.

I also want to note that my attention to the rhetorical work in this study serves several purposes. First, I understand my research as conversant with other scholars’ considerations of the ways local black Americans have used rhetorically framed responses for material and social gains (e.g., Asante, Baker, Gates, Gilyard, Jackson, McWhorter, Richardson, Rickford and Rickford, Smitherman). I suggest here that while the forms of rhetoric have changed over time, relative to the pragmatic goal of establishing a community center for the North End, the focus remained constant. As well, I see the Center as a space that has served as a location for members of the black community to convene beyond the white gaze-wherein black folks’ activities are openly subject to the approval or disdain of dominant white conceptions (Morrison)- and confirm their connection to each other. Viewed as such, the Douglass Center can be understood as both the result of politicized rhetoric and the location for politicized rhetoric. It is both a material location bound by geography, and a socially constructed space with the capacity to serve the changing needs of the community over time. Another way to think of the Douglass Center is in terms of its function as a “hush harbor,” a term used by
Vorris Nunley to describe both a location and occasion for black Americans to affirm their connection to each other. As Nunley points out,

Hush harbors […] are not Black cultural locations solely because they are situated where Black folks live and gather. Rather, hush harbor places become Black spaces because African American *nomos* (social convention, worldview knowledge), rhetoric, phronesis (practical wisdom and intelligence) tropes, and commonplaces are normative in the encounters that occur in these locations. (224)

In terms of material locations, church spaces are most often identified as hush harbors for black Americans. However, churches are typically founded on core ideologies that directly influence members’ worldviews that in turn serve to mediate engagements with the world beyond church space and church matters (and at times delay members’ engagements in addressing unjust social conditions). What I suggest here is that the church as a space holds the potential for less disruption in hegemonic social structures. The community center–due to its inherently secular foundation–potentially affords a more pragmatic relationship between the thoughts and actions of the people who closely relate to the space. My point here also speaks to the overemphasis of the church as the sole wellspring of activity in Black Freedom Movement. My intention here is not to deny the church and church members their rightful recognition in social movements; rather, in keeping with the work of Dittmer, McAdam, Morris, and others, I emphasize the importance of other spaces as locations of social and political action for African Americans.

A second consideration I make regarding rhetorical work relates to the attention local blacks paid to the political landscape, both at the national and local scale. Attention
to the national, the issue of regionalism, and the midwestern location of activity evidenced local actors’ awareness of their interconnected experiences. This awareness was also in response to the broader political forces with which black Americans were constantly engaged—forces that have included legally supported initiatives (such as Jim Crow, housing covenants, and segregated schools) that maintained black Americans’ second-class status (Baker, Dubois, Prendergast, Royster). As well, attention to local politics was also necessary to address and advocate for more immediate and substantive gains. Taken together, the local and the national constantly informed the political moves that black Americans made in the North End.

My claim for local blacks’ scaled attention to the political landscape relates directly to Champaign-Urbana as the site of this study. This Midwestern location has served as a confluence of the national and local in at least two ways. First, Champaign-Urbana emerged as the largest urban area in East-Central Illinois because of its location relative to Chicago to the north, Indianapolis to the east, and St. Louis to the west. Proximity to these larger cities was a major determining factor for the establishment of the state’s flagship university and the routing major rail lines. Thus, economic, cultural, and intellectual capital has consistently flowed through Champaign-Urbana since the late 19th century. Relatedly, C-U served as an important space for African Americans throughout the Great Migration, beginning in the latter part of the 19th century and continuing through the 1930s (Wilkerson). The prevailing migration narrative is that as opportunities diminished for African Americans in Chicago (and other larger cities in the region) and returning to south was not an option, black communities emerged in various smaller urban and rural locations. However, more recent research on the Great Migration
shows that black migrants also considered less populous locations as more desirable (Trotter *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective*). in downstate Illinois, those locations that developed a critical mass of black citizens included Champaign-Urbana, Bloomington, Decatur, and Danville. Rather than view this phenomenon as unique, I understand C-U as a case study of an in-between place for African Americans. Precisely because is it not a major urban center or a rural area, the location provides a different landscape (both literally and figuratively) upon which to investigate the black experience in America.

Pushing this attention to location further, the University of Illinois has also been variously positioned relative to the black community. At certain junctures, the University’s influence has been more implicit in its institutional function. In these instances, individuals from the University have connected with African Americans in the North End and offered support in limited but significant ways. In other cases, however, the University has engaged in more explicit forms of representation, both in support of and in opposition to the black community. Depending on the context, then, the University has at times placed its allegiance with the dominant political entities of C-U and the broader region, and in other cases offered support for the local black community on negotiated terms. While the primary focus of this dissertation is with the North End and the Douglass Center, I also consider the University’s intervention into those spaces. For example, In chapter three I take into account the Graduate School of Library Sciences (GSLS) initiative that both increased black student enrollment in its program and provided a context for the first discussions that eventually led to the establishment of the Douglass Branch Library, and in chapter four I consider the influence of the university-
supported community design center movement that served as a major influence in the building of the new Douglass Center. In each of these cases, the University’s involvement influenced the material and conceptual realities for citizens in the North End. The University’s influence also speaks to the ways in which factors beyond the immediate community can influence spatial realities at the local scale.

A third and no less significant factor in the C-U confluence is Chanute Air Force Base in Rantoul. The base was originally established in 1917, and in 1941 the location served as the original training location for the 99th Pursuit Squadron, the first African American flying unit in the U.S. Army Air Corps (Moye). Due to the enforcement of racial segregation in the U.S. military, black American servicemen were not allowed to utilize recreational spaces on the base. As a result, when they were off duty most black servicemen frequented Champaign-Urbana and in particular the North End. While the presence of the servicemen added to the cultural diversity of the community, clashes between servicemen and locals during social gatherings were frequent enough to cause alarm. The Negro Servicemen’s Organization (NSO), a group comprised of servicemen and community leaders was formed in response to these conflicts (Negro Servicemen’s Organization, “To whom it may concern”). The group organized events for the servicemen in various locations including elementary schools and church basements. However, as more servicemen came to C-U to take part in the events, space again was at a premium. It became apparent that the NSO needed a dedicated space for its programs, and the idea for the Douglass Center was born.

The Douglass Center was originally established as a dedicated space for the NSO. Thus, rather than challenge the racial segregation imposed on the military base, local
blacks placed their energies toward advocating for a dedicated and separate space for the servicemen. In a sense, the decision by the civilians to not challenge segregation was in keeping with the enlisted men’s approach to gaining social equality for African Americans. The idea, referred to as the “Double V” for victories in the war abroad against fascism and at home against racial oppression, was that black peoples’ willingness to enlist in the war was as expression of patriotism that would prompt white Americans to be more accepting of black Americans (Moye). The way to challenge segregation, the thinking went, was to show white Americans that black people were American, too. The display of virtue in a time of war, it was thought, would be enough to bring African Americans into the fold of full citizenship. Relative to this approach, the Douglass Center served an ambivalent role. On the one hand, it was a space that was intended to foster community in the North End. On the other hand, the Center could also be understood as a space of accommodation in that it reinforced the need for racially segregated space. These points will be taken up at length in Chapter 2. For now, I want to emphasize my articulated understanding of the role the Douglass Center has played in the North End. That is, depending on the rhetorical situation—that is, the tenor of the nation, the position of the state, the climate of local politics, and the needs of the North End—the Douglass Center, by necessity, has been constantly reconceived as a space.

Thus, understanding the DC’s original function solely as a recreational space for black servicemen belies a more complicated history of racial segregation in Illinois. The era between statehood in 1818 and the end of the Civil War in 1865 saw legislation that both supported the practice of slavery in what was ostensibly a free state and completely banned free black people from moving into the state (Finkelman, Jones). This legal and
social incompatibility continued after the end of the Civil War, when in 1865 the Illinois legislature repealed restrictions limiting black people’s moving into the state, while in 1927 during the peak of the Great Migration legislation was passed to limit African American population, geographic mobility, and economic mobility in terms of accessing jobs in emerging and growing industries (Drake and Clayton). While these housing restrictions were devised particularly for Chicago, there was also housing covenant legislation imposed by the local government in Champaign (Cobb). Simultaneously, as some African Americans left the south toward the prosperity of major urban centers, housing discrimination limited the residential mobility of black migrants in those centers (Wilkerson). A combined result was the drastic increase in population density in those cities and the growth of African American populations in smaller urban areas. Regarding Illinois in the 1920s and 30s, those areas included Bloomington, Decatur, Danville, and Champaign-Urbana (U.S Census). Still, even as the black populations increased in these smaller urban areas and black communities became more densely populated, local housing covenants dictated where black folks could take up residence, thereby limiting peoples’ access to the franchise.

The issue of housing has also figured significantly in the history of the North End and the Douglass Center. During the Great Migration, the population of the neighborhood increased as housing covenants limited black Americans’ access to residential spaces, resulting in increased neighborhood density (Patton12-15). Carol Stack, in her ethnography of the North End neighborhood, describes in detail how often multiple families packed into a single residence. These makeshift housing arrangements reduced the cost of living, however the practice also increased wear and tear on residential
structures. Many families did not have the financial means to conduct home improvements, such that by the era of Urban Renewal in the 1950s many houses were deemed uninhabitable and demolished instead of renovated (Patton). With fewer housing options in the North End, some individuals and families were forced to either relocate to other sections of C-U (many to Section 8 residences or public housing units) or leave the neighborhood altogether. While not as pressing an issue in the 1930s and 40s (because the local black population was still on the rise and there was more class diversity in the North End), by the late 1960s and early 70s the loss of so many residences brought on by blight and Urban Renewal correlated with the loss of longtime family and social networks in the North End (Stack).

Here again, the Douglass Center became the space wherein North End residents reformed community bonds around the issues that affected them by addressing children’s need for access to recreational and supplemental educational opportunities, and adults needs for space outside the home to remake community toward bettering their material conditions. Particularly in the early 1070s, with local activist John Lee Johnson’s call to consider the positive social effects of recreational spaces, the Center was re-imagined as a space for community activism and engagement with critical literacy (Johnson).

Champaign-Urbana presents an interesting case study of the effects of race and class on neighborhood and community formation. The options of living space in the 1920s and 30s placed newly arriving black migrants in close proximity to European immigrants, who either because of their lower class status or their being categorized as recent arrivals, were denied access to residences in white sections of town. Paradoxically, the housing covenants that were devised to enforce residential segregation
actually facilitated European immigrants’ and African American migrants’ co-residing in
the North End (Stack). By the 1940s the neighborhood had become overwhelmingly
homogenous racially, as more blacks moved in and European immigrants and their
descendants moved on to become white Americans. Still, that brief window of time saw
an extension of educational opportunities to women, black people, and poor people, and
set the stage for the first Douglass Center programs in the 1930s. I will take up the point
in chapter two that even as state and local regulations supported the practice of racial
segregation, in the North End there was a foundation of interracial work that offered a
different enough perspective for residents to encourage relations that blurred racial
borders. Part of my argument in that chapter is that local blacks were critically aware of
the distinctiveness in the local race relations, and as such these relations could be
interpreted as a rhetorical situation wherein black folks understood that an improvement
of social conditions might best be brought on by using methods other than public protest
and contestation as the available means of persuasion (Aristotle, Burke). Further, I
suggest that the rhetoric deployed by black folks evidenced attention to the occasion and
location of the discourse. Rather than performing a rhetoric of identity (wherein racial
identity mediates activity), members of the North End used a politically pragmatic
rhetoric that utilized the available means to improve their material conditions. In chapter
five I will spend more time with John Dewey’s distinction between a priori and a
posterior forms of identity. Briefly, though, where the former relies on socially
constructed identities (such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation) as the basis for
collaboration, the latter form takes advantage of goal orientations for coalition building.
As such, the social identities of individuals and groups become secondary considerations
relative to actors’ interests in particular social outcomes in which they may very well have vested interests, and social outcomes emerge as the basis for social identities. Relative to this project, even while the rhetorical forms of the discourse change, I understand those changes as pragmatic (as opposed to ideological) responses to black Americans’ experiences at both the local and national scale.

Method
Rather than take on the task of constructing a continuous narrative of the Douglass Center and its relation to the North End, I instead organize my three central chapters around analyses of the DC in the context of “critical events,” after which new sets of relations among local actors came into existence (Das). Part of my method is to place history in the service of revealing a better understanding of the Douglass Center in terms of the relationship between rhetorical activity and the reformation of space. Royster offers that, “a community's material conditions greatly define the range of what this group does with the written word and, to a significant degree, even how they do it” (6). Thus, rather than have history dictate the narrative and foreground the temporal, I am instead interested in the relation between the rhetorical (as spoken and written) and historical, spatial, and social considerations. Here I am responding to Edward Soja’s suggestion that better understandings of conceptual and material realities result from placing time in conversation with location and actors. Viewed this way, history, rather than just happening, is created in space by agents. Especially when considering ways of alternative tellings or recounting the stories of the disenfranchised, this approach of balancing the roles of time, space, and the social afford more nuanced through which to consider the role that people have in the making of their own realities.
This study is based on the premise that the historical moment and rhetorical situation inform each other. However, to view the relation as one continuous flow belies the nuances in each moment’s spatial and social relations by again foregrounding the temporal. One approach to more critically understanding the ways in which the historical and rhetorical relate to each other is through analyses of the discursive exchanges relative to a given space and time. That is, we can tell a lot by what people say. The moments in this study, while sharing some similarities with regard to addressing the relationship between black Americans’ experiences with racial disenfranchisement, are also distinct when more carefully considered. Certainly, blackfolks have always already been active in pursuit of enfranchisement. However, to view this pursuit as one long connected movement belies the nuances, shifts, and contradictions in the pursuit over time.

More recent works in Black Studies have been critical of a Long Movement thesis first put forth by Jacqueline Dowd Hall. While Long Movement approaches to black American history have served to critique “master narrative” approaches and expanded the locations of inquiry beyond the north/south dichotomy at height of the Civil Rights era, its critics suggest that the theoretical approach, in its attempt to connect movement activities from the 1930s and 1970s, “flattens” the ability of historical approaches to offer more full accounts (e.g., Lang and Cha Jua). To counter to this temporal flattening, while also foregrounding the rhetorical and spatial, I am interested in more localized perspectives to frame this study. Aldon Morris's Indigenous social movement theory is one such theoretical perspective that accounts for a more bottom-up approach to viewing social activism. Morris offers that, "The task of the indigenous perspective is to examine how dominated groups take advantage of and create the social conditions that allow them
to engage in overt power struggles with dominant groups" (282). The indigenous perspective informs my research here, to the extent that I consider the North End neighborhood and the Douglass Center as essential resources that unify the chapters, local actors’ relationships to the University and other major local institutions, and the role of rhetorical activity as the basis of local actors’ tactics and strategies that were “effectively employed against a system of domination” (282). While I do generally acknowledge the broader national context that potentially relates to local activities, my main focus throughout this dissertation will be with the ways in which this local case study reveals the complexity of rights activity from a local perspective. As well, I view actors as aware of a broader narrative of black struggle while also maintaining focused attention on the lived experiences of community members in the local context.

I am building this story from multiple sources as I focus on the relationship between the spatial and the rhetorical by considering texts generated in response to a particular space. The site itself necessitated this kind of work of moving between local archives because this story has not been well curated, unlike more urban civil rights stories and struggles. I incorporate some semi-structured interviews and participant observation, but at the core, my research is archival, in that I consider various documents— including but not limited to newspaper articles, organizational papers, letters, maps—to construct more coherent depictions of the establishment and changing role of the Douglass Center and how that space has related to the North End community. Of course, each archives has a particular character. Some of the archives I have accessed, like the University of Illinois Archives and the Student Life and Culture Archives are well organized and focused. However, they usually did not contain materials that might shed
some light on community reactions to university-sponsored activities, perhaps because those relationships were more vexed. The Urbana Free Library Archives, located in that city’s public library, holds the local newspaper archives on microfilm and one box of documents related to Douglass Park. The challenge with this archive was crosschecking the dates from newspaper articles with primary documents to get a sense of the historical narrative. The Champaign Parks District Archives are best described as a few boxes of papers that I got access to after weeks of back and forth over email and phone. For sure, I found some documents there that no other archives had, but they were not in an accessible location, and I only found out about the possible existence of the documents through a personal connection. English Brothers is a local contracting business. Their function as an archive is really a secondary consideration, and highlights the precarious existence of what might be some valuable information.

My approach to archival work is influenced by several factors. Beyond publishing the dissertation, I wanted to make the archive more available to the public. This decision is influenced by the realization that archival representations of black Americans’ experiences are often subject to similar forces that inform African Americans’ lived experiences. That is, archives are subject to the power relations that exist in broader social contexts, and such can be mediated by such factors as racial attitudes and perceptions (e.g., Derrida). Again, I have found the records of local blacks’ experiences to be incomplete, disorganized, and generally difficult to access. Thus, the form and content of the archives reveal some indications as to how African Americans’ have been positioned socially and politically. As Jacques Derrida offers, in looking at what and in what way the archives are constructed, we can say something about the
archivists themselves. So, as I have gathered documents, I have digitized and uploaded materials to eBlackCU – a site that offers a way for users to digitize and upload materials that they themselves understand as important to local black history. In the process of uncovering information for my project, I have in turn used eBlackCU to make the data publicly accessible. I consider this aspect of my methodology a form of curatorial activism, such that my research also serves as a libratory practice.

In addressing the politics of archival records and archivists, I would be misguided if I did not level similar considerations in my own direction. As I understand my role as researcher, I know that to even consider the archives as less than objective calls into question my own objectivity. Indeed, my attraction to conducting research on the black American experience is motivated by my personal connection to the topic through my racial and political orientations. This is not to say that my blackness grants me more (or less) affinity. If anything, my lens is less objective because I have a vested interest in expanding alternative representations of the black experience. Further, I am not from the time and space that I am researching. I am, for all intents and purposes, an outsider. To the extent that there really is no such thing as objective research, I cannot truly speak to the experiences of the actors that I encounter in this archival reconstruction. Rather than recognize this truism and set it aside, though, I take the position that it is my responsibility as black American researcher to generate knowledge about the black experience. And in approaching some understanding of this experience, these experiences, I am required to also be attentive to the ways in which my racial experience mediates my interpretations.
As this perspective attempts to account for the ways in which my positionality influences my research, I turn to Jacqueline Jones Royster’s call for more varied approaches to archival research to inform my approach to this project. Royster offers that, "To interpret evidence more fully, we need not just a long view but a kaleidoscopic view. We need a sense of the landscape, certainly, but simultaneously we also need close-up views from different standpoints on the landscape” (6). In response to Royster’s call, my study considers the materiality of the landscape and the ways in which this materiality informs and is informed by the rhetorical acts that constitute the very evidence that appears in the archives. As well, in the last chapter of the dissertation I locate myself in relation to a contemporary view of the landscape of Douglass Park and Center.

Chapter Preview

Chapter 2, “Making a Place for the Race,” explores the early foundations of the Douglass Center in the 1930s and 1940s. The chapter begins with a discussion of the Midwest as an important location to consider toward enriching understandings of local peoples’ participation in the Black Freedom Movement. Against a historical backdrop that saw the flow of the Great Migration slow to a trickle, and continuing through the end of WWII, many African Americans migrated out of the south. The negative forces of the Nadir, the rise in culture of white racial violence against black Americans, and the legal specter of Jim Crow segregation in the South combined with opportunities for African Americans to participate in the wartime economy and enlist in military to confirm their place as citizens of the nation. The chapter then moves to consider the affects of these national forces and trends had on the African American community in Champaign-
Urbana, taking particular focus on the significant role that the Douglass Center, as both a military and civilian recreational space, served in the development of the North End community. More than just a place of leisure activity, this chapter argues that community members used the establishment of the Douglass Center as a rhetorical situation within which a stronger sense of community was forged. This chapter concludes by taking the position that the rhetorical exchanges related to the Douglass Center offer some insight into always already shifting racial formations of the era.

Chapter 3, ““A Black Library for the Black Community,’ 1969-1972,” centers on the establishment of a locally and state-sponsored literacy activities in the North End. Beginning as a proposal put forth by members of the African American community and students in the Graduate School of Library Sciences (GSLS), the Douglass Center Library project connected the university and North End community via the goal of establishing a library in the neighborhood. This chapter places local calls for improvements in recreational and educational facilities in conversation with broader shifts in the political engagements of Black communities nationwide (e.g., Austin Allen’s documentary *Claiming Open Spaces*). This chapter also considers the changes in African American rhetoric in this era of transition between Civil Rights and Black Power and the effects those shifts have on that era’s racial formations. In accounting for the localized influence of national programs such as Urban Renewal and the Community Design Center Movement, this chapter argues that the processes (rhetorical, social, political) involved in creating space were just as important as material location for residents of the North End.
Chapter 4 “(Not) ‘Another Kent State’: The Construction of the New Douglass Center,” recounts events relevant to the demolition of the old Center and the construction of the new building in 1974-76. In offering this account, this chapter examines the rhetoric of demands, protests, contestations, and negotiations among groups with an investment in the outcome of the Douglass Center. As well, this chapter considers the ways in which local activity was reflective of more pragmatic approaches to bettering material conditions in black communities.

Chapter 5: “The ‘Post-soul’ Dewey: Pragmatic Rhetoric and the Future of ‘Black’ Politics” In this concluding chapter, I argue that “going public” with critical literacy can positively affect coalition building not only the North End but also other black communities. I engage this argument with attention to the changing racial composition of the North End, which is evidenced by the increased population of Hispanic/Latin@ immigrants. As an historical moment, I think the shift in racial composition and the persistence of class disenfranchisement in the North End, among other factors, hold the potential for the development of what Eddie Glade, Jr. refers to as a “post-soul politics” that places concern for redistributive justice before social identifications.
Chapter 2–Making a Place for the Race

This chapter begins with considering the importance of alternative locations and local people’s participation toward enriching the understandings of the Black Freedom Movement. My argument here is that spaces outside of the rural south and urban north have constituted landscapes that complicate both that geographic dichotomy and prevailing narratives of race relations in the Black Freedom Movement, which in turn complicate present understandings of race and space. Next, I draw on recent works in the field of writing studies in support of the idea that attentions to discursive and spatial considerations offer more nuanced approaches to understanding these relations. I then apply these movement and spatial considerations to an analysis of archival texts and other documents, toward reconstructing the early history of the Douglass Center in the 1930s and 1940s.

Movement, Migration, and the Midwest

The early part of the 20th century saw millions of African Americans leave the south. This historical period, which is often referred to at the Great Migration, was mitigated by several factors (Johnson and Campbell, O’Hare and Sawicki, Trotter). The more negative factors were the rise in racially motivated violence against black Americans at the end of Reconstruction and the increase in Jim Crow segregation, which provided legal support for racial oppression in the South. Positive forces included increased opportunities for African Americans to participate in the emergent industrial economies and, for men, the possibility of enlisting in the US military leading up to and during WWII. These factors contributed to millions of African Americans leaving the
south, in the process facilitating a significant shift in the racial composition of the nation. African Americans went to urban locations where the jobs and opportunities were available-places like New York, Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles. However, not all black migrants ended up in major urban areas. In fact, many migrated to smaller communities, either initially or in response to the lack of opportunities in their originally desired destinations (See Trotter’s edited volume for perspectives on this issue). For example, in Chicago strict race-based housing covenants were imposed during the height of the Great Migration in order to limit the number of African American migrants to that city. Rather than return to the south, where more explicit and legally supported segregation was the status quo, many African Americans decided to settle in smaller cities that were in proximity to Chicago.

While Aldon Morris’s local movement framework is immediately evocative of activity within a given region and time, the perspective gets pushed even further when considering the Great Migration, the mass movement of African Americans out of the Jim Crow south. My thinking here is that the Great Migration signifies various kinds of movement. In one sense, there was the physical relocation of African Americans from southern states to urban centers and rural regions in the Northeast, West, and Midwest. With the movement of black people came the reconfiguration of those urban centers where they relocated, either through geographic expansion of those communities or increased density in those neighborhoods where black folks already lived. The result was a literal shift in the location and density of African Americans on a national scale.

In another sense, the Great Migration also signified a movement in terms of a group’s response to oppressive social and political conditions. That is, the physical
movement was, in and of itself, a social and political movement. That response for many black people was to relocate rather than endure the oppressive social conditions of the south. As well, by physically relocating African Americans were engaging in a rhetorical act. Movement was a means of addressing power and advocating for substantive social change. In considering movement as a response to oppressive social conditions, a response other than struggle or resistance becomes available for consideration. To respond to oppression by moving away from its source is somewhere between conflict and accommodation; movement is neither an overt challenge to power, nor is it a complete yield to the forces of social assimilation. As this chapter on the formations of the Douglass Center will show, local blacks neither fully resisted racial segregation nor completely accepted it. Instead, they took advantage of the spatial and rhetorical situation to improve community members’ material conditions, and I think the racial ambivalence of the Midwest (and Chambana) presented fertile ground for this strategy of addressing racial oppression. My point here is toward offering evidence to the claim of an indelible connection between racial and spatial formations in the U.S. When considering the experiences of black Americans, an account of space only bolsters that consideration.

Recent efforts by Black Freedom Movement scholars have refocused historical treatments to more local scales to account for African Americans’ experiences in these alternate locations (e.g., Gregory, Lang). Other landscapes have been brought into the conversation as sites of significant political and social activity and as viable frames for historical inquiry. While the struggles in the Jim Crow south are distinct in their importance (and southern racism is a thing unto itself), questioning participation from other regions in the struggle is an important aspect of movement studies. Accounting for
the movement outside of the south shows the diversified goals of the Black Freedom Movement (BFM) beyond that of the dominant struggle for civil rights so often attributed to the south. Non-southern accounts of the movement complicate the picture of the struggle and reveal that there is more work to be done in terms of accounting for the many ways the movement means.

By way of example, Aldon Morris's *Indigenous social movement theory* both reframes the process of engaging BFM history and provides room for alternative narratives of the movement. Morris offers a theoretical lens that accounts for "bottom-up" activism, rather than strictly focusing on “great men” and legal battles at the national level. Morris states, "The task of the indigenous perspective is to examine how dominated groups take advantage of and create the social conditions that allow them to engage in overt power struggles with dominant groups" (Morris 282). In other words, the indigenous perspective views the dominated groups as agentive and actively engaged in finding ways to resist oppression, rather than limiting dominated groups to the positions of powerlessness. Further, the forms of resistance are based on the available means and resources as they relate to localized considerations. Morris’s theory also accounts for the presence of both material and personnel resources: "The indigenous perspective maintains that the emergence of a sustained movement within a particular dominated community depends on whether that community possesses (1) certain basic resources, (2) social activists with strong ties to mass-based indigenous institutions, and (3) tactics and strategies that can be effectively employed against a system of domination" (282). The bases of Morris’s theory form a *triangular* frame of resources, activists, and tactics and
strategies that outline the indigenous perspective and lead to the development of a “local movement center.”

As I view it, the movement center can also help inform a consideration of the role of material space in the indigenous local movement. Morris offers that “a movement center has been established in a dominated community when that community has developed an interrelated set of protest leaders, organizations, and followers”, and the center in turn reproduces and sustains components that are necessary to maintain the movement in the local context (283-284). The definition here presupposes a “dominated community,” however material spaces and locations in the community are also necessary to foster leadership, organization, and followers to support and carry out the visions of the movement. That space needs to be located beyond the gaze of the dominating group—both physically and conceptually—such that members of the dominated community can gather and communicate with each other on their own terms. This space is evocative of the “hush harbor” that Nunley deploys. It is a location for dominated groups to have open exchange in order to develop strategies and tactics to contest domination. In accounting for space, the movement center needs to be understood both in terms of its components and its location.

I emphasize the connection between the local movement and material space here to also suggest that creating a space can also be a goal of the local movement. That is, creating space for the local movement center is potentially an end in itself, as well as the basis upon which marginalized groups make other social and political gains. In keeping with the point made by Edward Soja, space has both conceptual and material implications that cannot be separated from each other. Considering the pragmatic focus of indigenous
local movements, the role that material space serves becomes all the more important, especially when considering the influences that material access bears on lived experiences of disenfranchised groups.

Effectively, the local movement approach is already suggestive of a spatial orientation to historical research. That is, the approach supports more nuanced and detailed analyses relative not only to variations in the forms and contexts of rights struggles, but also to actors’ tactics and strategies in response to particular social and political situations. Thus, the local movement orientation affords more diversity in considering the places where the movement took place and what it looked like in specific contexts. Instead of assuming that the presence of national leaders and organizations was necessary in order to bring about substantive social and political change, local movement studies are more descriptive in terms of what constituted a successful movement in a given location.

The Spatial Turn
Beyond simply being the place where a particular action takes place, location can also be understood as informing actors’ meanings. This take on location is where I place the local movement approach to black freedom studies into conversation with Writing Studies. In as much as attention to location emanates from Aristotelian rhetoric, attention to the conceptual and material location of rhetorical activity has also motivated some key recent works in writing studies (Leander and Sheehy, Reynolds). Indeed, the field is described as having taken a recent turn toward the spatial, both in terms of research taken up on literacy studies in communities and cities (Grabill, Long) and how these spaces relate to rhetorical activity (Davis, Cintrón, Fleming) and theoretical perspectives
entertained in the context of Composition and Rhetoric (see, for example, Soja’s engagement with Lefebvre). Location is indelible to the rhetorical situation. As well, rhetorical agents need to be viewed in terms of the material and conceptual spaces they occupy when performing rhetorical acts. This perspective becomes especially important when we consider the relative positions of power ascribed to rhetorical actors, particularly when those actors are members of disenfranchised groups working to improve their material conditions. My dissertation project resides at the meeting place between attention to local movements in black freedom studies and the spatial turn in Composition Studies. I believe that each perspective lends itself to the other in ways that potentially inform a better understanding of the relationships between rhetoric, space, and the black experience.

**The North End and Douglass Center Foundations**
Against this backdrop of migration and community formations, I now turn in this chapter to consider the relationships between these national forces and the foundation of the Douglass Center, a community center in the heart of the North End that has served as both a military and civilian recreational space. More than just a place of leisure activity, I argue here that the tactics and strategies used by community members to establish the Douglass Center created a situation in which a stronger sense of community was forged. This chapter concludes by taking the position that the rhetorical exchanges related to the Douglass Center offer some insight into always already shifting racial formations of the era.
Up to the Starting Line

The most significant factor contributing to the development of the North End community was the increased numbers of black citizens living in the area. This increase coincided with the first Great Migration, wherein the greatest number of African Americans migrated out of the south to others regions in the United States (O’Hare and Sawicki). For example, U.S Census data shows that between 1910 and 1960, the distribution of black Americans living in the South shifted from 89 percent to 59.9 percent (6-8). While the dominant narrative indicates that major urban centers in the north were most often the desired destination for black migrants in search of work opportunities, migration studies scholars indicate that other factors—including gender, family and friendship networks— Influenced black migrants to consider other destinations (Trotter The Great Migration, 1-21). Champaign-Urbana was one such location that did not constitute a compromise by black migrants from the south. Rather, Champaign-Urbana was attractive for various reasons, including job opportunities with the railroad and the University of Illinois (Thomas 25), and having enough residential opportunities for families to leave the south and maintain close ties (Stack 5). Located along a major rail line that runs from New Orleans to Chicago, and at a geographic nexus that placed it in proximity to major urban centers with emerging African American communities, C-U was among several smaller cities that emerged as important sites of relocation for black Americans in the Great Migration because they were neither a major urban centers nor in the Deep South.

Despite Champaign-Urbana’s status as a small urban area, the region’s population generally and African American population in particular increased significantly after the turn of the century. Champaign and Urbana were the most populous areas of Champaign
County, whose total population increased from 47,622 residents in 1900 to 106,100 residents in 1950 (Forstall). African Americans also saw their numbers increase during that same 50-year period, as the number of black residents in Champaign county grew from 551 in 1900 to 6770 in 1960 (Blackstone “The Demography of Black Champaign” 8).

As I take a step back and place the call for a recreation center in a broader social context, the first thing that comes to mind is the ways in which racial formations somewhat varied by region. In the south, and especially the rural south, Jim Crow segregation would have been alive and well. At the same time, though, the south experienced a great deal of emigration by black folks who looked to the urban north as a promised land full of jobs and a better standard of living. By the 1930s, emigration decreased and unemployment ballooned as the Great Depression limited economic opportunities regardless of race (Johnson and Campbell, 90-100). Researcher and North End resident Taylor Thomas noted, “[A]s a result of the Great Depression, we found that what we thought had been traditional Negro jobs were no longer Negro jobs; they had been given to poor and not-so-poor whites and to some foreigners who were also moving into the Twin-Cities” (27). Stepping closer to the window, I see Champaign-Urbana, located within a few hours train ride from Chicago, St. Louis, and Indianapolis, as one of these in between places. Closer still, I see the North End (a neighborhood that was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries populated by European immigrants a few generations away from being accepted as “white”) by the 1930s become home to black families that either did not have the funds to make it to a major urban center, or did make it and decided that a better life existed elsewhere.
By the time this window closed in 1948, WWII had ended and the U.S. entered into a period of economic posterity that was experienced even by African Americans, albeit to a lesser extent. It was in this era of postwar posterity that black Americans were able to extend self-help to the most disenfranchised in their communities. There was a burgeoning black middle class that, while distinguished in education and occupation, was still subject to residential segregation. Black doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs had little choice but to live in neighborhoods with median incomes way below theirs. However, in terms of fostering community across class lines, the practice of residential segregation served to keep black folks together, maintain a common culture despite the class distinctions. And as well, the mixed class status of black neighborhoods placed those who could give in close proximity to those who needed. The North End offered a perfect example of this cross-class proximity. Local blacks had their own business district on North First Street, where black business owners provided goods, services, and employment to North End residents. In effect, the community was self-sufficient, even to the extent that by 1944, community members purchased land that extended the borders of Douglass Park and became the site on which to build the Douglass Community Center.

This chapter is concerned with the origins of the center, its conception and development as an indelible part of Champaign’s North End community. Pulling on theory and research that takes up the intersections of space and rhetoric, I will begin an investigation into the relationship between a group and the space it occupies, both in terms of how a group can define a space and how a space can shape and inform the realities of a given group. From there, I will apply a more specific focus, via primary source documents, into how the Douglass Center has addressed (and been addressed by)
the spatial needs of the black community. Initial academic and independent research on
the Douglass Center, newspaper articles, documents from the local parks district,
government documents, library archives, and maps are utilized here to connect the theory
to practices specific to this space.

So too, then, does this moment become a part of the study. The lens that I as a
researcher use to view these documents will bear influence on what they say. As Ralph
Cintrón offers, “This sort of memory or character or ethos that helps to verify and shape
knowledge is, in part, autobiographical and, similarly, that the fieldsite in very subtle
ways, not literally so, is also biographical” (8). Applying his thoughts to this brief study,
these texts don’t “say” anything; they have to be read. Thus, this is an open
acknowledgement that an investigation into the Douglass center’s past historical,
political, social, indeed spatial and rhetorical foundations connects to my long-term
interest as a researcher in developing tools to understand experiences of African
Americans that have historically, spatially, and rhetorically not been within the purview
of white mainstream consideration, and yet present ways to work within and beyond
oppressive and exclusionary systems of organization in an effort to engage with the
dominant society.

While this struggle can be viewed as continuous, this chapter will take up two
temporal moments in the early history of the Douglas Center, the first of which is in the
mid-1930s, before the center as a structure was build. It is in this moment that the name
Douglass becomes recognized in mainstream discourse as connected to the North End.
The second moment is in the 1940s when the establishment of a social and recreational
space for black soldiers stationed in the area becomes a primary consideration, as area
blacks develop a relationship with locally stationed servicemen. This space becomes the first Douglass Center. A closer look at these moments can reveal connections between the physical, moral, and rhetorical realities that express the community’s attempts at self-definition.

In the struggle to belong to a place and have a place to call one's own, the North End community--the name ascribed to the black neighborhood located “in an area of the northeast corner of Champaign and the northwest corner of Urbana”--has engaged in many battles to have the Douglass Center to be that space (Andrews 2). As David Fleming offers, “When given the opportunity to be something other than the object of a dehumanizing gaze, …residents become the subjects of their own sentences, the verbs of which are…remembering, choosing, acting, arguing, and dreaming” (232). The North End has itself been taken on as part of the community's definition, part of a long history of action and resistance in part defined by using the rhetorical practices of the would-be oppressors as tools in the struggle to resist historically imposed definitions on the one hand, and generate rhetorical self-definitions on the other, of what it means to be black in segregated America.

There is no history of Jim Crow laws in Champaign-Urbana, however the broader community has practiced de facto segregation--a spatial system that has been supported by what Robert Weneyeth refers to as "behavioral separation" (23). This "strategy was to delineate appropriate from inappropriate activities when a place was theoretically open to both races." Absent de jure mandates, then, there exists the possibility of a community and its members self-identifying as belonging or not in certain spaces- a pattern maintained through the now legally abolished spatial relations that persist via the group's
rhetorically constructed reality. This behavioral practice appropriately identifies the racialized space in Champaign-Urbana in the 1930s and 1940s:

Housing conditions have been an acute problem for members of the community, but especially for the Negro population. Many Negro families have had to live in small crowded homes without the modern conveniences of running water or bathrooms. Several small houses can be seen standing on one normal sized lot. These conditions make it difficult for the children and young people to have the necessary space in which to carry on their few activities. (Andrews 2)

Presently, railroad tracks form an understood barrier between the lower and working class black neighborhood to the north, and the more affluent university and white neighborhood to the south. As is evidenced in this quote, not only were substandard housing conditions were one aspect of a multi-faceted issue. Not only were the homes crowded and lacking modern amenities, they were also crowded relative to each other in terms of the way lots were configured. As Andrews notes, “these conditions made it difficult” but not impossible for younger residents. Upon closer reading this quote suggests at least two ways that the spatial arrangement of North End housing correlates with activity in the black public sphere (‘publicity’). First, the spatial arrangements blur the public/private division that most often coincides with living in a single family home. Yard space, rather than being demarcated for each home and family, became communal space within the shadow of the home. While on the one hand the cramped conditions made living in those spaces less than ideal, there was very little chance for neighbors to not be familiar with each other as people and families (e.g., Stack). Second, because the cramped conditions limited play space for children, public space, and in particular public
parks became all the more important in the North End. In later, chapters, I will explore Douglass Park and its role as a material and discursive space. For now, I will highlight that even in the 1930s conditions are in place that contributed to Douglass Park’s importance in the North End. As a spatial practice, the North End has constituted distinct realities for both local blacks and administrators of university-funded building projects. Moreover, that reality is constitutive of the how the perspectives taken on by members’ positionalities within the dominant or subaltern sphere in form their ability to define space for its members.

Implicit in the discussion of parks and services for the black community is the idea of legal, political, economic, and social agendas in support of segregation as a "spatial system" (Wenyeth 11). While this discourse could be understood as a product of times past, the North End still persists as a distinct space in the Champaign-Urbana metropolitan area. Just as there is evidence of the university supporting this spatial system, so too are there instances of local blacks' negotiation of the de jure mandate.

While the neighborhood itself was not dubbed the "North End" until after the 1950s, there is earlier mention in the 1940s of the "negro community" in the north part of Champaign-Urbana.

Within the twin cities the majority of the Negro populations live in an area of the northeast corner of Champaign and the northwest corner of Urbana. The area extends north from Washington Street, Champaign, which becomes Beslin Street in Urbana to the city limits about seven or eight blocks, extending ten to twelve blocks east and west. (Andrews 2)

This description further emphasizes how the maintenance of a segregated space for
blacks transcends even the de jure divisions established by the twin cities. The North End is simultaneously situated within both towns geographically, and yet it belongs to neither ideologically or rhetorically. The name North End, an unofficial rhetorical designation that labels the black part of town, trumps official designations of municipalities. You have Champaign, you have Urbana, and you have the North End. The geography itself has informed the process of the community's defining its relationship to that space, in a relationship both “physical and moral.”

Moreover, this physical and moral struggle has been marked by an inconsistent naming of the public park on which the Douglass Center sits, as to whether this park is named (along with the center) for Frederick Douglass or for Stephen A. Douglas. All throughout newspaper records and other archival material, the name of the center and park alternate between Douglas (with one "s," an area name historically connected to Stephen A. Douglas) and Douglass (After Frederick A. Douglass). Both have connections to the local area. Douglas County, IL was founded February 8, 1859 and is named for Stephen A. Douglas. Douglas was elected to the US Senate in 1858 after he defeated Abraham Lincoln in a series of debates that centered on the question of slavery. Stephen A. criticized Lincoln in the debates, interestingly enough, for having an ally in Frederick (wikipedia.org, “Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858.”). Frederick’s local connection, in addition to being an icon for folk and blackfolk everywhere, is that he supposedly made at least one local stop while on lecture tour (champaign.org).

Whether this “one s or two” is a typographic error or an intentional oversight is moot in its effects. If indeed the missing “s” is typographical, it is an error that persisted for some fifty-three years. If it is intentional, the result is still a rhetorical undermining of
the choice made by area blacks to name the space for themselves. Even if locally and orally within the North End the name was connected to Frederick, as discourse on localized area activities reached the wider area (via white owned written media) the name was co-opted and rendered an altogether different meaning. This broader naming, which was at best inconsistent, in turn affected the power dynamic between local blacks and Champaign-Urbana, where localized naming practices are “infiltrated” by the dominant discourse (Foucault 216).

Land that eventually became part of Douglass Park was sold to the city of Champaign in 1931 (Document from the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Champaign Co.). According to interviews conducted by Melinda Nichols, in 1933 the Park Board left the naming up to community members: "[T]he decision was left up to the people of the community. They made a survey of the residents of the area, which were predominately black, and the general consensus was in favor of naming the Park after Mr. Frederick Douglass. The park board accepted this choice and officially named the park.”

This is an example of what Fleming notes as a “narrative” strategy of self-representation, one that states, “We are people with histories” (233). Records indicate, though, that the referent “Douglass” that was chosen by the community has often been glossed as “Douglas,” a name that also has historical and political connotations (as in Stephen A. Douglas) for locals who might be aligned with the latter’s anti-abolitionist views.

According to the Champaign Public Library website, "The Library was named for Frederick Douglass, the American abolitionist and journalist who escaped from slavery and became an influential lecturer — including at least one stop in Champaign" (champaign.org). The library is housed in the center and takes its name. Of the three
spaces, library, center, and park, the park is the oldest. By this account, there is a rhetorical connection between the parks commission and the local neighborhood in the naming of the space, a connection Ralph Cintrón refers to as "circuity". He states, "The city proper, by using the names of its founders for parks, streets, and certain buildings, assures that its history stays present. Of course such naming came into being through rivalry and malice as well as honorable intentions..." (20). While park officials were in contact with the local community as early as 1933 and were sensitive to the issue of naming the space, official city-issued maps first name the park in 1950 as Douglas ("one s"), and continue for thirty years with the "one s" spelling (Schlipf, Champaign-Urbana Atlas, 1937, 1943, 1950, 1053, 1956, 1976). It was not until the 1980 atlas that Douglass Park was identified with "two s's" (Champaign-Urbana Atlas, 1980). Even as one official government organization appeared sensitive to the naming of a space within a community/neighborhood with a distinct identity, another government organization lacked the same sensitivity. Also important here is that local government agencies address the North End as a community distinct from the rest of Champaign-Urbana. There is more effort put toward further defining that neighborhood as a "black space" than there is toward disintegrating those barriers.
The origins of what is now the Douglass Center date back to 1937. In that year, two educational/recreational centers were opened for the purpose of serving the African American population. The first in the Champaign-Urbana area, which opened in May of that year, was "an adult education center sponsored by the office of the county superintendent of schools" ("Adult Center Opened Here"). The program was run from a refurbished eight-room house just south of the local public park. While financial sponsorship of the space was attributed to the local government, organization of the center's programs was credited to "the efforts of an advisory board consisting of" local community members, all of who were women. The classes originally offered through the
education center included "cooking, sewing, dressmaking, French, reading, writing, arithmetic, English, Negro History and Hygiene." These programs, organized by and for adults, and catering to women, exemplify efforts in developing programs that served the area residents and form a continuous thread of a relationship between government, community, and space, at times thick and others frazzled, that connects present activities at the Douglass center to its past.4

Later that same year, both local papers reported on another center scheduled to open in December. Pre-school and athletic programs that were previously run out of local area elementary schools were moved to a new site "located close to Douglas Park" ("New Recreation Center Planned at 601 Fremont"). Sponsored by the Champaign-Urbana Junior Woman's Club and the Recreation Commission, the new center was explicitly referred to in the white owned media as "the new Douglas center," and was described as being under the direction of the "Douglas area committee" ("New Recreation Center to Open"). Here again, local government and a women's organization entered into a relationship with local blacks. In this case, "The program in the new center will consist of crafts, social activities, music, dramatics and other leisure time activities

4More specific research needs to be conducted into the literacy practices of women both historically and contemporarily. Already, there are obvious parallels between the influence of women in this historical context and the high levels of participation by women in adult education programs in my immediate experience. Typically, adult women attend educational and literacy programs in greater numbers than men. Women with the same level of education have historically had more difficulty making a livable wage compared to men.
for all ages." While the committee directing the center's activities was ascribed a name that connected the center to the park, the first appearance of the organization’s name that established an association to Frederick Douglass is misspelled. In the initial mainstream media representations that name the groups and the activities serving the black community, there was still an implication of white control via the rhetorical misrepresentation of those practices.

In the 1940s, the de jure practices of segregation meshed with the de facto mandates of the United States military toward creating a need for services and spaces to serve black military men in the civilian realm. The military started the process of desegregation in 1948 with President Truman’s Executive Order 9981, but, as has been the case among civilians in the wake of the Civil Rights acts of 1965 and 1968, additional legislation was required to achieve a semblance of an integrated military (“Desegregation”). At the start of World War II, there was a bolstering of the numbers of soldiers in the area surrounding Champaign. With that rise in general numbers came an increase in African American servicemen, including those stationed locally at Chanute Field (Andrews 11). All the spaces and structures that related to military training were provided, albeit separately and unequally, for black troops on the bases. However, entertainment and recreational opportunities were lacking. As a result, the North End of Champaign became a local destination for African American enlisted men during “rec time.”

A group of community members, along with the Champaign Playground and Recreation Board, sponsored a Servicemen’s Center to provide organized activities for soldiers who made their way to Champaign-Urbana from the local military bases
This service center was opened on March 26, 1943 with an attendance to date of 8,000 service men and hostesses to bring the total attendance to 12,500 and average attendance of 2,500 per month” (Negro Servicemen’s Organization, “To Whom It May Concern”). The attendance records in the first year of opening vastly exceeded the operational space “in the basement of the Lawhead School, Champaign, Illinois in two rooms twenty-two by twenty-five each…” In an open letter, the Negro Servicemen’s Organization, a group “composed of civilians of Champaign and Urbana, Illinois, representing the entire Negro population request[ed] that consideration be given to the erection of a building to be used as a Servicemen’s Center in our community, as the present facilities [were] inadequate…to carry on a complete and successful program.”

The document is critical in that it effectively serves as a rhetorical introduction of concerned citizens who form a chorus of “the entire Negro population.” This identification entails informed consent, or at least compliance, on the part of other citizens from the community. The document also evidences the unification of various communities for the sake of presenting a unified front to those who have the means to help the organization achieve its ends. The organization claimed to represent the “entire Negro population” of Champaign-Urbana. This rhetorical self-identification transcends the civic border inscribed by the town line to constitute a unified front in the face of segregation, effectively turning a system a disenfranchisement into a source of empowerment (Fleming 232). Would be citizens, denied full rights by virtue of their “race,” here elected to represent themselves collectively by the thing that makes them separate. Full members of neither Champaign, Urbana, nor the military, they become part of the “entire Negro Population.” While this strategy has its shortcomings,
p potentially homogenizing the group’s identity, for the purpose of calling attention to the need for space it was an effective rhetorical strategy that contributed to the presentation of a unified front.

Another community formation occurred as civilians choose to take on a name that connected them to the military. Electing in this case to elide the civil/military divide, the civilian group took on the name of the “Negro Servicemen’s Organization” and broadened the meaning of the “entire Negro population” of which they were members. Rhetorically, this document attempts to speak for all blackfolk, transcending geography and civic status. The naming projects the idea of a collective understanding among African Americans of the time. This was the moment when demands needed to be made, and in this case the demand was for space to provide services that the local government and military do not.

To this end, rather than negotiate for more space within the present structure, or move the Servicemen’s center program to more spacious, pre-existing confines, the Servicemen’s organization presented the idea of building a new structure specific to the program.

In such a small amount of space it can readily be seen that the facilities are inadequate to carry on a successful and complete program, therefore we are requesting that a building of suitable proportions be created for such a purpose. We will do all within our power to promote and assist in any movement that might be taken in erecting said structure.” (Negro Servicemen’s Organization, “To the Budget Committee”)

By this description, the space provided for the program in the basement of the Lawhead
School was “inadequate” on at least two counts, both of which relate to limits of spatial practices. First, the space was borrowed. The lack of ownership of the space no doubt had an effect on the practices therein. The times the program could operate, the types of programs that could be run, and who had access would be necessary limitations. Second, the physical space was small. That the document even mentions only two rooms in the basement were accessible to the program implied that there was discussion and negotiation for even that amount of room. Where the program could operate no doubt placed limitations on the types of activities that they could sponsor. The goals participants identified for the program could not be met in borrowed space.

The letter closes: “We will do all within our power to promote and assist in any movement that might be taken in securing said building.” Nowhere in the letter, marked by the greeting “To Whom It May Concern,” are there are demands or requests made of the reader. Instead, this text serves to define who the group is (ethos) and what they represent. It offers up the group’s main material focus of concern (kairos), and puts forth an ideal suggestion to solve that problem (logos). The affirmative language, “We will do all within our power…” frames the group as holders of their own agency, as assuming responsibility to make their request a reality. It is an act of self-empowerment, one where “residents represent themselves as rhetorical agents, that is, as speakers, writers, arguers, and critics” (Fleming 234).

However, the Negro Servicemen’s Organization also revealed through the letter a recognition that even the “entire Negro Population” needed to make requests beyond the immediate local black public in order to access resources necessary to get the new building. This was the impetus of a campaign in response to two previously denied
requests for federal funding.

The city of Champaign made application to the Federal Works agency in both 1942 and 1943 for funds from the federal government (with a local contribution added) to erect a similar building for Negro Service men. After the war, it was proposed that the space would become a community center. However, the Federal Works agency and the U.S Army rejected both these pleas on the grounds that there was an insufficient number of black soldiers and sailors stationed in this area to justify the expense (“Chest May Make $15,000 Gift to Colored Center”).

The denied requests of the city provided the impetus for a different approach, one where those who served to gain the most from the building took on more agency in making the new center a reality. Funds for construction had been raised in conjunction with the two previous applications (“Chest May Make $15,000 Gift to Colored Center”). In addition, “The colored citizens also acquired land … two lots at the northwest corner of Sixth and Grove streets, adjacent to Douglas Park, as the site for such a center.” Other funding sources for the building project were also sought out. In 1944, the Servicemen’s Organization asked the Home and War Chest, a major local charity in Champaign County, for funds that totaled half the cost of the building project. The War Chest had previously agreed to contribute funds as part of the initial requests to the federal government. In the 1944 proposal, however, they were identified as the main funding source that was representative of more than 13,000 contributors to the fund.

Requesting the majority of funds from the Home and War chest was not only a financial move on the part of the Servicemen’s Organization, it was also a way to ensure that people beyond the North End were supportive of the project. It was necessary
cautionary move for the Budget Committee of the War Chest to seek approval of its contributors before funds were distributed. In a form letter to Home and War Chest subscribers, the organization’s executive secretary outlined the various contributions of local blacks to the project, and the support of the War Chest’s Executive board (Negro Servicemen’s Organization, “To Whom It May Concern”). Still, it was iterated, “While your board has approved this project, it felt that it should not expend one-half of the Chest surplus for this purpose unless you and the other 12,500 subscribers has an opportunity to express yourselves.” In a parallel move to that of the Servicemen’s Organization, the Chest’s Executive board also sought to unify its members before committing not only financially but also ideologically to the Douglass Center project.

Thus, the Chest letter attempted to connect its subscribers to a broader process: “For many, many obvious reasons, we are sure you can recognize why this building is a necessary one and in building it with these funds, it becomes paid for by the WHOLE community” (emphasis in original). The “many, many obvious reasons” are not explicitly stated in the letter. However, there is an implication that the War Chest and its members had previous discussions about offering financial support for the Servicemen’s Center. As well, there is an attempt in the letter to identify the groups involved in making and granting the request. The letter states, “Your board wishes to point out to you that the 2,800 Negro residents of Champaign-Urbana have raised $3,000 for this building among their own people” (Negro Servicemen’s Organization, “To Whom It May Concern”). Here, the executive board engaged in a second-person conversation with its subscribers while othering the black residents who took part in raising money for the center. The use of the phrase “their own people” distanced the Chest subscribers from
those requesting financial assistance. As such, the Chest identified racially as white by defining itself by what it was not. The comparative expression of “our own” is implied but not stated. While the executive board was sensitive to the needs of the black community and the soldiers who would be served by the Center, there was still an intentional distinction made between the two groups.

While the Servicemen’s Organization was representative of the “entire Negro population,” and the Home and War Chest was representative of mostly whites, there was a third non-government organization that expressed interest in the Douglass Center:

[T]he Twin City Community Committee [TCCC], a newly formed organization to promote the broad community needs of the Champaign-Urbana community, expressed its interest in the Douglass Community center and wanted to cooperate financially and in any other way they could. The joint Advisory Council of the Twin City community committee was made up of both Negro and white members. (Andrews 15)

The TCCC’s contribution to the Douglass Project was conditional, however. There was concern in the organization that ownership of the building, once completed, should remain within the black community. This view was in conflict with the proposed plan, where the building was to be deeded to the city and the upkeep maintained by the Champaign Recreation Department. The TCCC felt that if ownership and maintenance responsibilities were relinquished, the Douglass Center could potentially become enmeshed in local politics. Thus, the TCCC took the position that black control of the space was necessary if it was to serve the goal of community improvement.

We renew our previously reiterated conviction that the greatest need of the Negro
minority is for an organization of its own which can meet to discuss without interference its major problems, and to seek their solution through existing agencies. (qtd. in Andrews 15)

To bolster its stance, the TCCC sought and found further confirmation through a local survey that offered evidence that “a definite need for such a center existed and that people in the community were anxious to take responsibility for its progress.” The TCCC went on record “in firm opposition to the plan presented by the Negro Community and the Servicemen’s Building Committee.”

Favoring a self-help plan in which ownership would rest in a joint bi-racial commission and management would be in the hands of the colored group with advice of a bi-racial group the Twin City Community Committee and its advisory council have opposed the Chest arrangements. (qtd. in Andrews 16)

In what would appear for the black community as a more favorable arrangement, one that would foster independent practices, the Servicemen’s Committee opposed the TCCCs “self-help plan.” This position was essentially a clash between ideology and practicality, such that the concept of black ownership and management surpassed the financial capability of the black community to sustain ownership of the space. In an effort to clarify the issue of ownership, the Servicemen’s and Douglass Community Service Organizations published a statement in the Champaign-Urbana Courier to make their position clear.

Some think that they are to decide as to whether they wish the proposed Negro Community Center building to be owned by the city Recreation Commission or whether it shall be privately owned and controlled. This is not the case. As it
appears to us there is no alternative. The only question is to whether we have a
city owned building or no building at all as there are no other provisions made in
the money already raised or that offered by the Chest providing subscribers agree.
(cited in Andrews 17)
The TCCC’s concern was based on a conceptual idea of the space. By comparison, the
Servicemen’s Committee was focused on the material space needed before other
considerations of social and political change could be taken into account. In this
instance, the concern for material space was the most important concern. A place for
words needed to exist before ideological discussions could take place.

The distinction made by the two organizations relates to the jeremiad that is ever-
present in the experience of black Americans. As Adam Banks notes, in continually
“argu[ing] for a genuine inclusion in technologies and the networks of power that help
determine what they become…African Americans [in their] rhetorical practices call
attention to the way that the interfaces of American life…have always been bound up in
contests over language, and have always been rhetorical-about the use of
persuasion…toward demonstrably tangible ends” (45). The Black jeremiad is one such
rhetorical practice that has been “about achieving both access and transformation,”
beyond a choice of either one or the other (56). As far as the Servicemen’s Organization
was concerned, the proposed center needed to be built first (with ownership and
maintenance assumed the city) before any discussions of social transformation could take
place. Indeed, the construction of the space was in and of itself a form of social
transformation by means of and alteration of the physical landscape.

To further emphasize support for this position, the Servicemen’s Organization
referenced its first letter: “While the Twin City Community Committee’s letter may meet unanimous approval of the five white and five colored members of its advisory group, the Chest proposal meets the approval of the masses of Negroes who are served by it…” Here again the blackfolk was in agreement with the original plan by far outnumbered the “ten committee members” who proposed an alternative strategy. The “masses of Negroes” in favor of the original plan, at least symbolically, numbered beyond the immediate space of the Douglass Center and the North End to include a national black public.

On January 16, 1945, the Champaign Civic Foundation “resolved to accept the title of the building that was to be the community center” (Andrews 19). And “[o]n the first of February, the Recreation Commission formally passed a resolution to accept the responsibility of the operation and maintenance of the Douglass Community Center” (20). The first spade of dirt was turned in a ceremony a few weeks later on February 18, and the building was officially opened on Sunday September 23, 1945 (Andrews 20-22).
Figure 2. The Douglass Center, 1948
In this chapter, I have focused on representing the Douglass Center as a space that served as both as location for and a motivation for rights activity in the North End. Materially, the establishment of the Center granted black citizens in the North End community and beyond a shared location for meeting and activity. Much as the Servicemen’s Organization argued, it was the physical location that provided space for conversations of resistance to white racism. And it was these conversations that facilitated black people’s thinking of different and more libratory futures than the ones offered by the then-present oppressive social reality. In a sense, though, the Douglass Center also moved the activities of the black public out of the hush harbor and within the view of the mainstream. As will be discussed in chapters three and four, the building altered the material landscape of the neighborhood, as it also informed (and help reform) the rhetorical and conceptual realities for citizens in Champaign-Urbana’s North End.
Chapter 3—“A Black Library for the Black Community,” 1969-1972

This chapter centers on the establishment of a locally and state-sponsored library in The Douglass Center. Beginning as an informal collection of donated books other materials, and then later supported in a proposal put forth by African American students in the Graduate School of Library Sciences and local community members, the Douglass Center Library project connected the university and North End community via the shared goal of founding an officially supported library in the North End community. As well, this chapter views local calls for improvements in recreational and educational facilities as conversant with shifts in the national discourse concerning political engagements of black communities. More broadly, this chapter considers the changes in African American rhetoric in this era of transition between Civil Rights and Black Power and the affects those shifts had on that era’s racial formations. In accounting for the localized influence of national programs such as Urban Renewal and the Community Design Center Movement, and initiatives to increase enrollment by people of color in post-secondary education, this chapter argues that the conceptual (e.g., rhetorical, social, political) processes involved in making the Douglass Center were just as important as the material location for residents of the North End. And furthermore, attention to the conceptual and material reality of the Douglass Center affords an occasion to reconsider the relations between space and literacy.
The assassination of Martin Luther King in April of 1968, as much as any “critical event” (Das), changed the tenor of the black freedom movement. Even in the years prior to King’s death, there was evidence in black communities nationwide of an emergence of other approaches to social equality. The presence of nonviolent and integrationist movements were a more palatable alternative for the dominant white society during a time when black power and black nationalist movements were becoming all the more visible and vocal. Not to espouse to the “great man” theory here—in keeping with my position that it is local people who are the catalyst for social movements--but King’s presence was a floodgate that held back the burgeoning tide of disillusionment generated by the most disenfranchised. When he died the levy broke and a wave of discontentment was let loose.

This is the broad context for the Black Freedom Movement (the window that I’m looking through) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Black power, itself a term that altered the rhetorical and political landscape, was being taken up by activists who did not prioritize the rhetoric and strategies of nonviolence. There was a shift in the way that many black Americans related to mainstream America, and that change in relations was more than apparent in the rhetoric. For example, for many people, “Black” and “Afro American” became preferable to “Negro” as a racial self-referent. More than just a

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5 Indeed, even King’s more open disillusionments with the U.S Government’s national and international policies brought him closer to aligning with black political stances that were all but removed from the leader’s formerly patient approach to achieving social equality.

6 Stokely Carmichael is most often cited as the originator of the term.
change in nomenclature, the move away from “Negro” (as least as a positive referent—the
term took on negative use in some black communities) to Black and Afro-American came
from black people themselves. The conscious decision to name one’s self, instead of
accepting the name that was granted by would-be oppressors, was just one indication of
the emergent agency of the time.

Further, the era revealed a diversity of political ideologies and visions both in the
global context and for the future of black Americans. The perception a single movement
dominated by one leader with one approach and one goal shifted toward a more open
acknowledgement of other discourses regarding the way forward for black
Americans. Too, the diversity within black America became more visible to the broader
dominant public, revealing class differences, sexism, and even colorism that had
previously been hidden inside the barriers supported by racial segregation.
Eventually, the sheer variety of social, economic, and political views within black
America lessened the intensity of the movement, even as political discourse in late 1960s
to early 70s presented a balance that approached true democracy. The dramatic increase

7 Granted, changing the name of the condition does not change the condition, but it does
alter a group's expectations for itself in terms of how much power the group has to
influence its own reality. The ability to name is a form of control (Foucault). For a
disenfranchised group to assume the capacity to name itself indicates potential for the
group to alter other forms of social relations.

8 Local activism was widespread in this era, and the black public was no exception. For
example, the Black Panthers framed themselves in the discourse of citizenship first, and
in African Americans’ participation in electoral politics in this era occurred alongside local movements that were also having direct and profoundly positive affects on the lives of the most disenfranchised.

In looking at this historical moment, I want to show how this broad shift in black America played out in a local context. Where other local researchers have considered the ways in which The University of Illinois was altered in response to changes in the racial and spatial landscape (Cobb, Lamos, Williamson), I am concerned with the community response beyond university space. Where other research has focused on representatives of the University, local governments, and state-sponsored organizations engaged in activities that related to the black community of Champaign-Urbana, I am more interested in the role that material and conceptual space plays in those relations. The fact that this local movement centered on a space in the form of a community center, I think, makes the space all the more viable for careful consideration in a period when such state-supported structures as racial segregation, urban renewal, public housing were so much a part of local peoples’ lived experiences. I approach a consideration of the Douglass Center in the late 60s and early 70s with this national landscape in mind. The major social interventions I consider in this window were all local articulations of national efforts toward more black equality.

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blackness second (e.g.. Bobby Seale’s famous quote: “We don’t hate nobody because of they color. We hate oppression.”)

9 Deirdre Cobb’s research addresses local race issues in the interwar period. Steven Lamos and Joy Williamson engage Project 500 and the University of Illinois’ efforts to respond to increased rights advocacy by local blacks.
Toward the goal of addressing this continued inquiry, this chapter will play out in front of the theoretical backdrop outlined above. With attention to Royster’s call for alternative perspectives on African American rhetorical activity, and Lefebvre’s claims regarding the relationship between discourse and space, I will engage a tight spatial-temporal frame: The Douglass Center Library will be the main cite of focus, as it is contextualized as part of the Douglass Center and situated in Champaign-Urbana’s historically black North End. Temporally, I will focus my analysis on relevant events from April 1970 to the first quarter of 1972. The first section, “Groundwork,” will recount and analyze various groups’ and actors’ investments in making the Douglass Center Library (DCL) a site for literate activity in the North End. “Grounded,” the second section, will address the Library Joint Board’s (LJB) attempts to limit community-based definitions of the library space. “Ground Up” forms a close reading of local activist John Lee Johnson’s “Recommendations to the Champaign District for the North East Champaign County.” I argue that Johnson’s “Recommendations” offered some perspective on the relation between space and social justice in both the local context and beyond. The chapter’s conclusion, “Ground Down,” engages a brief discussion of the activist “foregrounding,” as it were, of Johnson and the first Douglass Library Director Marian Butler.

**Groundwork**

There were several factors that contributed to official support for the Douglass Library, all which related to addressing issues of access for black Americans. In the wake of Martin Luther King’s assassination in April 1968, the University of Illinois admitted 565 black and Latino students as part of the Special Educational Opportunities
Program (SEOP) or “Project 500” (Williamson). The increased presence of black and brown students on campus not only drew attention to overt and hidden systems of disenfranchisement on campus, as well more attention was cast on the continued disenfranchisement of the local black community. One of several approaches addressing inequalities beyond campus, in April 1970 a group of students from the Graduate School of Library Sciences (GSLS) at the University of Illinois participated in a class project that directly addressed the longstanding practice of denying black Americans access to the other local public libraries in Champaign-Urbana (Crowe, Nelson and Weibel). The class was indicative of more progressive understandings of the role librarianship in fostering social equality. Following up on Project 500, which addressed a general increase in the enrollment of black and brown students, the first African American students were admitted to GSLIS in the Summer of 1970 as part of a minority recruitment program funded by a grant from the Carnegie Foundation (Crowley 225).

The “Proposal to Prepare Disadvantaged Students for a Career in Librarianship” was one of the first of its kind in the nation. Program administrators’ initial concerns with having to offer “remediation” services to students were very quickly put to rest. In fact, the initial treatment of black students may have facilitated their radicalization, thus laying the seeds for their participation in the creation of the proposal for the Douglass Library.

The combined factors of increased minority enrollment and focused attention on the lack of library services in the North End fostered students collaborating with members of the local black community to form The Douglass Center Library Advisory Committee (LAC) to transform the project into a proposal and submit it to the
Champaign and Urbana Public Libraries and the Lincoln Trails Library System ("A Black Library"). The purpose of the proposal was to garner support and funds for a library project at the Douglass Center. The Center had “long been a hub of activity in the Black community of Champaign-Urbana,” however the “[n]umerous attempts […] to include library services in the facilities of the Douglass Center [were more] characterized by collections made up of books contributed from various individual and organizations and serviced by volunteers” (Butler, “A Statement of Progress for Phase I”). Advisory Committee member and then-future Library Director Marian Butler’s comments here evidence both the importance of the Center as a space and a more expansive conception of a library and library services. In her terms, the Douglass Center and the North End never had a library of its own. The proposal, entitled "A Black Library for a Black Community," became a catalyst for a more self-determined approach to literacy-related activity at the Center.
Figure 3. Map included in "A Black Library for a Black Community" Proposal
Initially, all concerned parties agreed that a library in the North End was a good idea. Representatives from Lincoln Trail Libraries, Champaign Public Library, Urbana Public Library, and the Champaign Parks District, after some contractual clarifications, all agreed to lend their agencies’ resources to the Douglass Library project (Local library directors Baldarotta, Rosenfeld, Toalson and White all forwarded letters to Alphonse Trezza, the director of the Illinois State Library). Each organization offered some form of financial support for the Douglass Library after funds from the federal Library Services Construction Act were expended (Douglass Center Library Advisory Committee “A Black Library” 1).

Here is another instance (the other noted in Chapter 2 regarding the establishment of the original Douglass Center) where federal funding was used to create material space for black Americans–albeit in the context of maintaining racial segregation to counter the history of exclusion–rather than using the available energy and resources to racially integrate Urbana Free and Champaign Public Libraries. The locations of the libraries and the North End were highlighted on the map in the original proposal to stress the proximity of the locations. However, a library located centrally in Douglass Park would be more both more conceptually and geographically accessible to local blacks. Thus, a North End library that catered to African Americans was the most pragmatic response to bring more equal access to resources to an already racially segregated population.

In addition to the financial arrangements, the libraries formed a joint committee consisting of two representatives each from Urbana and Champaign Library boards and one representative of the Lincoln Trails Library Board (Baldarotta). The purpose of the Library Joint Board (LJB) was to offer “governance over the Douglass Center Branch
Library […].” However, while the “joint committee [would] also have the benefit of advice from the Douglass Center Advisory Committee,” the later group did not have a vote in joint board decisions. As the joint board accepted the terms of the Douglass Committee’s proposal, this formative governance arrangement was sufficient. However, as the conceptual understandings each group held regarding the Library altered under the influence of material needs and spatial practices, the Douglass Committee’s lack of voting power would prove problematic.

In April of 1971, a year after the receipt of the initial Douglass Library proposal, the Douglass Center housed a funded library (Trezza, “Letter to Mr. John V. Clements”), and in a meeting on 3 June 1971, the Screening Committee of the Library Joint Board recommended and hired Marian Butler as the Douglass Center Library’s first director (“Douglass Center, Meeting of Joint Board”). Butler held meetings with directors from the other libraries to clarify procedures, and by the end of June she was issuing correspondence from the DCL (Butler “Letter to Mr. Peter Neimi”). In August, Butler submitted her first monthly report to the LJB. Before addressing the content of Butler’s letters, I first want to offer a reading of Douglass Library’s stationery itself, which included a logo:
Butler’s (and implicitly or explicitly the library board’s) decision to include this image on the official DCL letterhead, I argue, served as a claim for space, an effective demarcation of the library. The image constituted a display of “rhetorical agency [which] depends on the strategic application of a range of representational devices, whether the goal is to continue a given spatial tradition or to sponsor a counter-discourse via a counter-site” (Ackerman 86). I interpret this image as both maintaining a “spatial tradition” and offering a “counter-discourse” through its utilization of both visual and textual rhetoric to define the DBL. It is interesting to note that one of the first public actions by the Douglass Library board utilized a visual rhetoric to establish a spatial ethos. There might have been a mission statement or other public document, but “bookfist” sent a clear message to audiences receiving written correspondence from the DBL. Considering the official position of the audience/recipient of DBL correspondence, the letterhead represented a way for the library board to represent its ethos to a dominant public as a
counter-discourse that both used publicly available channels and infiltrated otherwise hard to access sites.

The image of an open book borrows its text from the title of the original report submitted by the advisory committee with one change. The original proposal was “A Black Library for a Black Community.” On the DCL letterhead, the slogan appears as “A BLACK LIBRARY FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY” (“The following report,” italics added for clarity). The change from the article “a” in the first title to the article “THE” in the second title functions dually. In one sense the North End is THE community of African Americans. As such, the text signifies a continuation of the spatial tradition that has historically located black folks in the North End. As well, the article change serves as a “counter discourse” sent by the authors, signifying that this is not just any library. This is a black library. And it is not just any black community. The library is designated as addressing the needs of a specific black community. As the library was tied to a particular community, it was also beholden to address the specific needs of that community. Additionally, the rhetorical shift resulting from the change in articles also indicated an understanding of the library as belonging to the black community. FOR THE BLACK COMMUNITY marks a claim to ownership of the space, situating the Douglass Center Library as both in and of the community, spatially and conceptually distinct from either the Champaign Public or Urbana Free Libraries. Further, image’s text placed the community and the library into conversation as spaces. The library was not just located geographically in the community; the two spaces were rendered constitutive of each other.
Beyond the text, the images used in the logo are also important, in that they were conversant with the broader discourses of literacy and Black Power that were prevalent in the era. The slogan appears on the pages of an open book, with the text referencing the library on the left page, and the text referencing the community right. A black forearm and a balled fist of a right hand juts out of the book’s spine. The raised fist, particularly in the space and time of a disenfranchised black community in the early 1970s, was representative of the Black Power ideology that was very much part of the national discourse. The position of the raised “power fist” above the text of the community and library suggests that both spaces were part of an ideological cultural-symbolic representation that further connected the local to the national.10 The logo/letterhead image, as a document from and representative of a space, is in itself an indication of agency and an expression of self-definition. The move here also evidences more community control of its public representations, countering the “One S” issue that signaled more outside control of community space that included naming practices. As Ackerman, drawing on Lefebvre, suggests, “Social space […] is understood through its comodification and through the documents and images that produce and represent a given locale” (Ackerman 85). The more agency the local community had in controlling its public representations, the more potential the group had to positively alter the social space.

10 For an in-depth discussion on Black Power imagery, see Tim Lake’s “The Arm(ing) of the Vanguard, Signify(ing), and Performing the Revolution.”
Moving to consider the text of the letter, Butler’s report also supports a rhetorical marking of the DCL. She was appreciative of the “cohesive atmosphere” that had been achieved “thanks to the final completion of the physical plant” (Butler, “The following report”). She also notes the modifications that she herself made to the space that were not part of the original plan: “The director’s office has been converted to a private study room with typewriter, because of an obvious need of people during specific task [sic] to have a more isolated area in which to work. The room is adequately filling this need, however, complete enclosure would make it more functional.” By converting her office to a space for “private study,” Butler acted as a sponsor for “free floating literacy” (Logan) by actively fostering a space that addressed their specific needs of community members to engage in literacy activities. As well, the presence of a study area redefined the types of literacy activities that could take place in the library. The reallocation of space to support a variety of literacy events effectively served to redefine the space conceptually. I find it interesting that Butler was able to utilize both material and conceptual alterations of the Douglass Center to foster the library. Her actions evidence an understanding that material changes alone would not convince the community to embrace the library. As well, there was a need to reconsider the concept of what a library was, such that the community’s needs were addressed by the space.

As the DCL was redefined as a space, it was also an agent in the redefinition of the North End community. In this same correspondence, Butler also states the need to "reach the young adults who were hesitant to come to the library because of their own negative concepts about such a place" (Butler, “The Following Report”). The primary method of this outreach was the operation of what she describes as the
‘if you won't come to us, we'll come to you library.’ A library corner was set up in the Black Coalition office and the Neighborhood Youth Design Depot, both favored hang-outs for young Blacks. The library area includes books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, records and posters. The leaders were conferred with, made to understand their responsibility for the loaned material, and success has been phenomenal. (Butler, “The Following Report”).

By taking library materials to “favored hang-outs,” Butler was in turn altering those spaces by converting them into locations for “free floating literacy” to occur (Logan 11). Where in the case of converting her office Butler situated herself as an agent, in the case of contacting and converting other spaces, the Library became the agent. In effect, the Douglass Center Library, functioning in a makeshift space within the Douglass Center, set up other makeshift satellite library centers in other “favored hang-outs.” Attention here to the agency of space is an extension on Logan’s conception of free floating literacy, where people are solely implied as agents.

As well, the leaders became agents in sponsoring youths’ literate activity. In a sense, Butler was able to extend the capacity of others to be agents of literate activity. The goal shifted from the library being the central focus to literacy being the focus. This transformation was a significant, in that even as the creation of material space for literacy was important, so too was access to literacy materials. Butler understood that while the library itself was a step in the direction of more access to literacy as a concept, the literacy practices of local youth could only be altered if they had access to literacy materials. In order to foster this material access, other agents and other spaces needed to
be incorporated. This was a network of literate activity (See Banks’s taxonomy of access 41-43).

Butler’s utilization of alternative spaces was not only fostered a conversion of social spaces into locations of *free floating literacy*, it was also a rhetorical renegotiation of what a library could do in response to the past experiences of local youth. Recalling Ackerman’s term, the local hang-outs were already agentive as sponsors of a “counter-discourse via a counter-site” (86). Library representatives taking materials to spaces identified as youth hang-outs potentially countered the counter, as it were, with at least two results. First, the presence of library materials on-site converted those hangouts into centers for literate activity. Effectively, local space was redefined to account for literate activity. Second, the move altered the stereotypical perceptions of youth who, at best, had ambivalent conceptions of libraries and literate activity. Both cases exemplify Lefebvre’s method as construed by Ackerman, whereby “history [is pitted] against material context so that physical locations are viewed through their evolution” (Ackerman 90). The altered physical reality of those “hang-outs” not only changed the space, but also potentially changed local black youths’ stereotypical (yet historically justified) perceptions of the library.

A month later (on March 12), Butler submitted “A Statement of Progress for Phase I of the Douglass Center Library Project,” a document drafted to comply with continued state funding. Much of what she included was an extension of her earlier report, yet still, throughout this text Butler made the point that the library is a space made for and by the community. The opening paragraph of the statement situated the Douglass Center as a long-time “hub of activity in the Black Community of Champaign-Urbana.”
In so doing, Butler evidenced her understanding of the reciprocal relationship of the Center as a place of cultural significance in the black community. Her acknowledgement of the DC in this instance reflects Ackerman’s observation that, “All the places we live, play, and work can be read as signs signifying cultural values and dominant practices” (Ackerman 90). Butler offered evidence for the DC as a local site of literate activity by noting that patrons engaged in such activities as “Culture studies, group discussions, use of all equipment, use of the library room for group meetings...providing newsletter and private study room...” (Butler, “A Statement of Progress for Phase I”, 3).

The description of the “Physical Facility” in the report was the first account I noted that described the dimensions and physical attributes of the space: “The Library is located in a room of some 900 square feet at Douglass Community Center” (2). Physically, then the DC served as a spatial sponsor for the DCL, as the Center’s original structure was renovated to accommodate the library. In turn, the center was spatially and rhetorically redefined to include a library.

Butler included a more lengthy discussion of other services offered by the Douglass Center Library in the section of her report entitled “Outside Library Services.” As the title suggests, there were several spatial extensions of the library beyond the DC site. One way the DCL acted out its role of sponsor was by "Presenting stories and culture studies for class rooms and day-care centers" (Butler, “A Statement of Progress for Phase I,” 5). These literary and cultural offerings to pre-school and elementary students were attempts to foster the relationship between the library and younger children who had not yet established negative beliefs about the library evidenced by older youths, and as well preempt negative attitudes held by local youth regarding the library. Here
again, as was discussed above, Wilson’s concept of “free floating literacy” can be applied here; as the DCL was “externally sponsored” (by the Library Joint Board), the space was also a sponsor for external literacy practices within the North End community.

Sponsorship also took other forms. For example, the library did not charge fines for overdue books, but instead “found that our practice of going to the home to pick up a late book is most effective [as it] affords us an opportunity to promote the library, talk with members of the household about other matters which might be of concern to them and attempt to negate old stereotypes” (Butler “A Statement of Progress for Phase I,” 5). Here, Butler acknowledged that there had not only been a scarcity of library services within or for the black community, but also that what few services were previously offered yielded experiences that discouraged residents from the North End from utilizing library services.

The "Statistical Report" in the “Statement of Progress” offered a quantified picture of the North End community’s reception to the DCL. Therein Butler stated, "Circulation for our first month of operation was thirty-seven, present circulation for one-half of the month of August is two hundred and twenty-two volumes. Attendance at special programs is always high. To date, 'A Soul Experience', has the greatest attendance with 358 people" ("Phase I" 7). Not only were materials circulating (an indication of patrons entering the space and acting as their own agents in literacy events in other spaces), but program participation was also such that attendance overfilled the space designated for the library within the Center, exemplifying another instance of the blurring between the conceptual and material spaces of the DC and the DBL. Effectively the two spaces overlapped, such that the community reconsidered Douglass Center to be
more than just a place for physical recreation, and the Library was in the process of becoming more than just a place where books were kept.

With all of the processes of defining and being defined, the Library, Butler and the Advisory Board were still engaged in negotiations of agency and power relations with the Library Joint Board. Where the LJB functioned from its position outside the North End as an “external sponsor” that was affirmative in its support, later the Joint Board attempted to enforce its limiting definition of how the DCL should function spatially.

**Grounded**

Butler’s decisions and use of resources as director of the DCL were not well received by the Joint Board. On October 7, 1971, four months into her directorship, she issued a report that was decidedly tighter in tone (Butler, “September Statement”). There she wrote, “It has become increasingly clear […] that the definition of successful growth and development may not necessarily reflect those same terms as defined by others” (Butler “September” 1). Within the DCL and the North End, Butler noted a positive change in the literacy practices of the community, such that, “People who have admitted not ever having been inside a public library [were] coming in regularly to check out books, newspapers, and magazines […] And most importantly a people who for various asundery [sic] reasons have never had an opportunity to read, listen, and learn so much about their own people now have this place” (1, italics added). The DCL was becoming a source of empowerment as a spatial “[facilitator] of actions-particularly those associated with language and literacy” (Cushman, “Opinion” 14). In protest to her negative reception by the LJB, Butler refused to "supply further monthly reports until specific guidelines agreeable to all concerned are drawn up to show those things
necessary to report in an agreed upon format for that report" ("September Statement"). Her position here reveals the power dynamics in a rhetorical situation that initially seemed to foster more equal relations between the DCL and the JLB as interlocutors. Here, I take Butler’s expression as attempt to challenge this power relation by writing herself into the discursive practices of the LJB in an attempt to turn a situation of disenfranchisement into a source of empowerment (Fleming 232).¹¹

A week later, on October 14, the Library Joint Board issued a set of “Administrative Guidelines” that essentially dictated to Butler what her responsibilities were and how the library as a space was to be used (Champaign Urbana Douglass Center Library Joint Board, “Administrative Guidelines”). Neither Butler nor the Douglass Advisory Board had any input in outlining the guidelines, thus they were excluded from setting the terms of their representation to the dominant public. For all the good that the Douglass Library was doing to respond to the needs of the community, the Library Joint Board represented itself as not completely interested in returning the favor. David Fleming reminds us, though, that this is not an unfamiliar issue.

The trouble of determining the public is doubly vexing, however, because the determination is itself typically a matter of public discourse. In other words, we often decide whom we will treat as equal partners in talk through talk itself, excluding people from deliberation by representing

¹¹ Another example of “writing oneself in”: In the minutes from the LJB meeting from the following day, October 8, DCL Advisory Board member Mrs. Clark “suggested that the advisory committee would like one member of the advisory committee to sit as a voting member on the joint board for Phase II of the project” (“From Jt Bd Minutes”).
them as deserving of that exclusion. What is so troubling about this, of course, is that those excluded from the public are also excluded from the deliberations that exclude them. (Fleming 207)

Fleming’s observation here offers an appropriate frame for the situation of the Library Board in its dealings with the Douglass Advisory Committee. For so long, North End exclusion from conversations pertinent to its existence had been the norm. While the Douglass Advisory Committee, which was comprised of University and community members, started the conversation about a library in the North End, the space for the library was carved out the Douglass Center, a space that had a long history of negotiation informing its existence. The Advisory Committee, similar to the organization’s previous incarnation that helped establish the Negro Servicemen’s Center in the 1940s, never had a vote of controlling interest within the Champaign Parks District. So there was no expectation on the part of the Library Joint Board that the Douglass Advisory Committee would want some say. Historically, groups that represented the interests of the black community usually contained those representations to the discursive space of the North End.

However, there was always a recognition by black citizens in North End that any improvement in their material conditions required some negotiation with the dominant white public for resources. This local case was indicative of a shift in the more broad rhetorical situation as it related to black citizens in the nation. In the 1940s the practice of racial segregation dictated that any contributions to the improvement of material conditions in the North End needed to both support the local community while reinforcing racial segregation. By the 1970s, racial integration and more equitable access
to the franchise were facilitated by the presence of interracial groups. However, as Butler’s exchanges with the LJB evidence, even efforts to facilitate more racial integration were founded on racist and power-based premises.

The “Administrative Guidelines,” as I read them, were both a direct response to Butler’s correspondences, and designed to move the Library along the path toward becoming a branch of the Champaign Public Library, or some combination of the two. My claim here is that the document served to clarify the Library Board’s strategy to “exclude” the Douglass Advisory Board “from deliberation by representing [it] as deserving of that exclusion” (Fleming 207). For example, the first guideline stated: “The Project director is an employee of the Champaign-Urbana Joint board and shall be known as the Douglass Center Branch Librarian” (Champaign Urbana Douglass Center Library Joint Board, “Douglass Center Branch Administrative Guidelines” 1). This statement rhetorically limited the directorship for which Butler was first hired. From Butler’s own account of her activities, she operated beyond the scope of what could have normally been considered a librarian’s duties. The first guideline also included the directive that, “The Director of the Champaign Public Library will consult with the Director of the Urbana Free Library on a regular basis concerning Douglass Center Library operations.” This guideline reduced the position of DCL director from a place of little agency to a position of no agency whatsoever. The Champaign and Urbana Library directors (who maintained their director status) were to consult with each other regarding Douglass Library operations but not with the Douglass librarian, whose power was almost completely diminished in the decision-making process. Granted, Library Board was interested in helping the Douglass Library attain branch status. But who better to offer
suggestions on how to improve the DCL than those who worked in the library and with community members who utilized the library?

After listing the “Chief Responsibilities” for the “Douglass Center Branch Librarian,” the Guidelines stipulated, “Other activities not directly connected with generally accepted duties of librarians or principles of librarianship will be restricted to personal time for which of course no monetary compensation will be given” (Champaign Urbana Douglass Center Library Joint Board, “Guidelines,” italics added). Rhetorically, the “Guidelines” not only attempt to limit the practices of the DCL librarian to what its authors consider acceptable forms of librarianship, the document also implied that “other activities” were not only out of place in the library, as well these activities were of suspect value. Compared to the original Douglass Center Library Proposal, which hoped to “[e]stablish service on a basis that would not duplicate traditional library services but rather […] be flexible and innovative expressing the life style of the people to be served,” (Douglass Center Library Advisory Committee 5) the Guidelines prescribed by the Joint Library Board instead offered predetermined limits for the Douglass librarian.

There are other points of comparison between the two documents. For example, the original library proposal did not describe the lead position as “librarian.” Instead the “Project Director” was described as heading up efforts to intentionally alter and expand the definition of the library space. The Joint Board’s Guidelines, rather than outlining a response that would indicate a more conversant tone to the exchange between itself and the Douglass Advisory Committee as two representative groups, instead assumed the default power position in the rhetorical exchange. Where the “Black Library” proposal functioned from a framework of reciprocity with the North End community, the
“Guidelines” dictated prescribed measures that were not responsive to the material and conceptual realities of the North End.

The document went further into defining practices. For example, where non-related duties were “restricted to personal time,” the “Guidelines” also framed spatial expectations for “Employees of the Douglass Center Library: a) Loyalty to the Library; b) Desire to promote the interest of the Library; c) Concern that all patrons be treated with courtesy, consideration, and tolerance; d) Cooperative spirit toward fellow staff members and other employees” (4). What these expectations all share is an internalization of the focus on library functions, in contrast to Butler’s reciprocal conception of the space, where the community was always considered in a determination of the library’s functions. In effect, the Guidelines attempt to distinguish the DCL from the community, both conceptually via the rhetorical use of such affective terms as “loyalty”, “desire”, “concern”, and “cooperative spirit”, and materially in terms of dictating the spatial limits of library-related practices.

The DCL Advisory Committee refused to go along with the stipulations in the “Guidelines,” and chose instead to “represent themselves as rhetorical agents” (Fleming 234) by responding to the Joint Board in writing the very same day (Townsend). The main motivation for contesting the Guidelines was clear: “That we the members of the Douglass Center Library Advisory Board were not consulted or directly involved in the drawing up of the aforementioned regulations” (Townsend). Rather than debate the terms of the Guidelines, the Committee instead refused to be “excluded from the deliberations that exclude them” (Fleming 207). What’s at stake here, in the exchange between the Joint Board and the Douglass Advisory Committee (a group constituted by
and representative of the North End) was the issue of self-determination via rhetorical agency (This rhetorical situation brings me to a theoretical question: Is a relation hegemonic when the oppressed cannot see the oppressive nature of the relation, or when they cannot act against it? Evoking Gramsci, I think that it is the invisible forces in a power relation that serve as the basis of the hegemony. Once the forces of oppression are made apparent, they are no longer hegemonic. Further, once the sources/mechanisms of oppression are apparent, the issue becomes whether and how oppressed groups make their understanding of said oppression known, both to the group and to the oppressor).

In comparing this rhetorical situation to the exchanges of the 1930s and 40s addressed in Chapter 2, I think the earlier instance offered no challenge to dominant and black public relations. The Negro Servicemen’s Organization and African American community in that period understood the mechanisms of racial oppression, however, they also understood the extent to which the dominant public would allow for, accommodate, or be receptive to alterations to its material and conceptual boundaries. So, all challenges to the racial order were best conducted within the borders of the black public (Squires uses the term “enclave”). There was not attempt challenge the racial formation of the era beyond the black public in the same way that Butler and the Douglass Committee openly critiqued the discourse of power. Rather, the NSO took advantage of spatial segregation to get the funding for the space. It was almost as if integration was held up as a warning to those who were investing in maintaining a racially segregated status quo. In the exchange between the Joint Board and the Douglass Committee, however, the challenge was at the level of the discursive, such that the Douglass Committee was able to take advantage of a decidedly different rhetorical situation. For the Douglass Committee, the
Douglass Center was already established as a raced space in the North End. The challenge then became altering the conceptual space for discourse, addressing community members’ lack of access to not only decision making processes, but also to definition making processes. By the late 1960s the interracial conversation was already taking place in the context of public discourse, such that the task was to address the location of the conversation by altering the reality of the rhetorical situation. Moreover, there was enough discursive space available to challenge the boundaries of interracial discourse. Not only did the reply evidence awareness of the rhetorical situation, the reply also represented a critique of and challenge to the situation.

In discourse regarding the Douglass Center in the 1930s and 40s, the main concern of the Douglass Committee was to get the Center built; they were making a practical and pragmatic claim to physical space. There was very little interest in taking on a controlling interest in administrative duties of the Douglass Center. As the Douglass Center evolved as a physical location, though, the practices specific to the space changed in many ways. While social, recreational, and literate activities had historically taken place in the Douglass Center, it was in the 1970s when part of the center was dedicated to the DCL that literacy became a more essential component of the location’s identity.

One community member who was particularly attentive to the changing role of the Center as responsive to the changes taking place within the North End was John Lee Johnson. His critique of the Champaign Parks District’s (CPDs) response (or lack thereof) to the changes in the North End evidenced his attention to space and time, in that he noted how the needs of the community had changed faster than the Center’s address of them.
Ground Up

By 1971, the Douglass Center was recognized as an indelible part of the North End. Debates and heated exchanges over the library continued, though the DCL did become an official branch of the Champaign Public Library in 1972 (“Our History”).12 With that change in status, the Library also became an important space in the North End, signifying a space of relation between the North End and if not the whole of Champaign-Urbana, then the local governments.

While the space within the Center was renovated to accommodate the library, the rest of the structure had been sparsely maintained from its opening in 1945. The Urban Renewal Project of the late 1960s directed no immediate funding for structural renovations to the Center, which by this time had seen almost daily use for over 25 years (Johnson “Recommendations”). However, some Urban Renewal funds granted by the federal government in 1968 were set-aside in a 5-year bond that reached maturity in 1972. Local activist John Lee Johnson, who was aware of the available funding, submitted recommendations to the Champaign Park District regarding how those funds might be used to improve material and social conditions in the North End.13

12 However, in 1975, the Library was moved out of the Center and would not return to Douglass Park until 1997 (“Our History”).

13 The Neighborhood Design Depot and Community Advocacy Depot, the presenters of the document, were local “hang-outs” that served as unofficial branches of the DCL. The Depots were two spaces that served as physical locations of the Community Design Center Movement, which offered various resources to local communities. In addition to
document, entitled "Recommendations to the Champaign District for the North East Champaign Community, presented by the Community Advocacy Depot and the Neighborhood Youth Design Depot," was delivered to the Champaign Parks District in late October 1971 (Johnson). The document called "upon the Champaign Park District to assume a greater responsibility in solving problems which have not traditionally been seen as a park recreational function" (Johnson 1). Johnson called on the CPD to engage the North End community by recognizing the “evolution” of the “physical location.” Johnson acknowledged that parks and recreational spaces had been offered in the past as solutions to problems in the black community. He suggested, though, that if recreational solutions were going to be offered to social problems, there needed to be a “a new concept and goal if Parks and Recreation [were] to be seen as a social conclusion to the leisurely expressions of Black values" (Johnson 1). For Johnson, “play,” more than just a form of recreation, was a signifier of values and cultural practices (Stuart Hall, Representation). Johnson’s move to spatially and rhetorically redefine play altered the values and practices that corresponded to the space.

Johnson referred to the available forms of public recreation as narrow, not reflective of original community values, and imposed upon the North End community by the Parks Department. He also suggested that there should be a reciprocal relationship between leisure time and the development of values, and that leisure could be productive offering alternative spaces for youth-centered activities, the Depots were also the place where youth could get library materials and engage in other literacy activities such as newsletter production. (University of Illinois Archives, Moyer Files)
as well as produce values. For Johnson, space was both a location for and a significant
determiner of activity. He expressed that the parks had not offered any "avenue of
programmatic political expression [...] which has served to compound the problem"
(Johnson1). Here, he offered that recreation could also be connected to political activity.

Johnson went on to propose short-range and long-range goals for the CPD to
consider, wherein park space was situated as a key component in the improvement of
social conditions in the neighborhood. He criticized the Park District’s investment in
landscaping for Douglass Park "when in fact the Park needed more creative facilities for
toddlers and Youth" who lived in the area and needed the space to play (2). He
advocated for local representation on "park facilities neighborhood committees" to liaison
between the CPD and the community. Johnson continued toward his redefinition of
recreation, which he offered, "must combat the problems of drug usage and abuse [...] We cannot turn our backs upon drug addiction by handing a kid a basketball" (3).

Literacy instruction was also part of Johnson's conception of recreation. He
recognized the problem of “School children at all levels who are unable to read,” and
further offered that, “[…] problems again will not be solved by a bigger gymnasium […] Slow readers must be countered with leisurely Rec room programs that will improve their reading” (3). Johnson’s rhetorical agency in the document suggested possible practices in the “Rec room” that connected more broadly to improving the lived experiences of youth who engaged in those practices. His point corresponds to Royster’s conception that literacy events do not necessarily emerge on their own, but are instead created by actors in space. In a sense, by working from the ground up—using the literacies and practices
already in place within local communities—Johnson was responsive the idea that spaces can be re-constructed and re-conceived to address peoples’ lived experiences.

**Ground Down**

At the same time Johnson’s and Butler’s activist work in the North End expanded the possibilities for the kinds of exchange between the dominant and local black public, they also brought attention to how rhetoric could be used to address material conditions. Johnson’s call for "a new role for urban recreation," (5) and Butler’s call for a new conception of the role of a library balanced material and conceptual concerns. Both took on activist roles that used rhetorical approaches to address issues related to literacy and the re-definition of space. The conversations that they initiated in the early 1970s contributed to a change in the local rhetorical situation as the issue of the physical structure of the Douglass Center came to the fore in the mid-1970s—the moment when the very building and the ground it occupied became contested space.

Butler and Johnson’s reconceptualization of space foreshadowed the changes to come in the North End community. Further, they altered the rhetorical landscape in their dealings with power, fostering the creation of more conceptual space for others to challenge imposed ideas regarding the role of the Douglass Center in the North End. While their activity (and the activities of others of the time at local and national scales) fostered more space for disenfranchised populations to speak and have an audience, more space also meant room for other voices to drown each other out. This latter point is the central theme of the next chapter. More open discursive exchanges between the black community and the mainstream political public produced ambivalent results, both in terms of the alteration of the rhetorical situation, and in terms of the ways that discursive
exchanges led to the alteration of physical space. The Douglass Center struggles in the mid 1970s spoke directly to the changing racial and rhetorical relations in the national context. Put another way, the Center was a metonym for the coming shifts at the national scale that both brought black people into the mainstream and compromised black political power.

There were various groups with vested interest in the outcome of the Douglass Center Library project. And while there was no overt opposition to the idea of a supported library in the North End, there was evidence that even as community and outside groups worked to make the library a reality, there was also a constant refiguring of the terms of the engagement. Recalling the framework from the previous chapter, as the rhetorical situation altered, so too did the forms and boundaries of language utilized by the actors and relevant groups. Whereas prior to the library issue, there was no regular communication between outside groups and the North End, the very act of collaboration and contribution to making the space evidenced the need for a common language. As each group considered the space, they also had to consider how to represent their ideas about the space to the other party.
Figure 4. Douglass Park Site Plan, 1972
Chapter 4—(Not) “Another Kent State”: The Construction of the New Douglass Center

This chapter recounts events relevant to the demolition of the old Center and the construction of the new building in 1974-76. In addition to offering a narrative account, this chapter also examines the rhetoric of demands, protests, contestations, and negotiations among groups with an investment in the outcome of the Douglass Center’s reconstruction. As well, this chapter considers the ways in which local activity was reflective of more pragmatic approaches to bettering material conditions in black communities. In a sense then, the conversation that follows is about a space within a space, or better yet, a space that scales down the more pervasive struggle of black Americans during the Black Freedom Movement to a consideration of local spaces that were representative and reflective of the people that inhabited them. By placing specific attention on recounting the North End community's struggle to claim material and conceptual control over the Douglass Center, this chapter offers resources useful in questioning how a consideration of space informs an understanding of the Black Freedom Movement broadly and the changing conceptions of community through the eras of Civil Rights, Black Power, and beyond.

I will engage the idea of black space in this chapter in an attempt to understand the North End, Douglass Park, and Douglass Center, as marginalized spaces situated relative to center spaces in the Champaign-Urbana micropolitan area. By black space, I mean locations (for example, neighborhoods, parks, community centers, churches) that
serve racial/spatial relations in at least two ways. On the one hand, these spaces are
normative locations for black folks to engage and exchange with other black people. On
the other hand, black spaces are also positioned relative to white-dominated locations and
serve to essentialize white-dominated social positions. Within to this local spatial and
temporal context, the negotiations and other forms of responses issued by members of the
black community convey an understanding of the ambivalent positionality of a black
space. Understood from this perspective, The Douglass Center represented for the
citizens of the North End an opportunity to not only build a space, but also build an
identity, such that the space is reflective of the people who helped make it. In architect
and theorist Craig Wilkins’ terms, the Douglass Center can be understood "as a space that
allows visions both inside out and outside in, [and as such] can create a place to hold onto
the 'downhome' while seeking new knowledge and developing alternatives to cultural
exploitation" (104).

I want to further Wilkins’ both/and position here by including a consideration of
the rhetoric that facilitated the negotiation of space. More than just a means of
‘developing alternatives to cultural exploitation,’ the Douglass Center struggle was an
occasion for redefinition of the community’s identity. Understood from this perspective,
The Douglass Center potentially represented an opportunity for the community to not
only build a space, but also to reconstruct an identity, such that the space was reflective
of the people who helped make it.

**Recap of the Early Center**

The first DC (whose early history I discussed in Chapter 2) was originally
conceived as a recreational space for black soldiers stationed locally in the buildup to the
United States’ entrance into WWII. Recall that black Americans enlisted in the U.S. military were still subject to nationally supported racial segregation laws prior to the federal government’s issuance of Executive Order 9981.

To recount, while efforts and resources were in place to construct the Center as early as 1943, the construction of the servicemen's center was delayed due to the United States’ entrance into World War II and then resumed in the post-war era ("FWA Approves Negro Center Here"). As the numbers of servicemen in the area declined, however, the Center was re-conceived (and renamed) with a civilian focus and opened as a community center in 1945 ("Douglass Center Hails Sponsors at Dedication"). Until 1950, "the building was entrusted to the Civic Foundation—a non-profit corporation, with the idea of keeping it as free of politics as possible" ("City Takes Title Reluctantly"). The Civil Foundation was dissolved, however, when the IRS disallowed the DC "[...] tax exempt status of gifts. Without such a ruling, the foundation [had] little prospect in fulfilling its original purpose as a vehicle by which gifts could be made to the public for charitable, educational, religious, and civic uses" ("City Takes Title Reluctantly"). While the original point of the civic foundation was to keep the space "as free of politics as possible," the transfer of the DC title to the city only more closely engaged the black and white political spheres that had up until that time functioned according to a code of de facto segregation ("City Takes Title Reluctantly"). Such language as “reluctant,” “fear,” and, “resentment” that appeared in a newspaper report on the transfer belied the emotions involved in the shifted relations.

As the ownership of the Douglass Center came into the city's mandate, so too did the concerns of the black constituency that exclusively utilized that space gain more
visibility in the dominant political sphere. The change in ownership of the Douglass Center relocated the concerns of the black community (at least in part) from a position outside the center into marginalized location within the dominant political sphere.

Through the 1940s and 1950s, most local accounts regarding the DC focused on a constantly shifting black middle class leadership (e.g., "Diffay, Scott are Re-elected," Urbana Courier, 30 April 1947; "Douglass Center Post to Nelson," Urbana Courier, 5 October 1948). It was not until the late 1960s that issues related to the physical space of the Douglass Center became explicit in the popular discourse. The shift toward broader discussions about Douglass Park and Center turned evoked concerns for space and control that were conversant with the national discussion of desegregation, Civil Rights, and by the 1970s, Black Power. Whereas early the early history of the DC located supporters of the space as encouraging organization and funding that was separate from dominant political entities, the DCs later history, especially leading up to demolition of the old center and the building of the new DC, challenged that relationship and drew attention to the positionality of the black community toward making more direct demands to the dominant power structure for recognition.

**Ruminations**

By 1971 the Douglass Center, as a much-utilized space, was always in the process of defining and being defined by the North End community. While the space within the Center was renovated for the library project in 1968, the rest of the structure had been sparsely maintained from its opening in 1945. The Urban Renewal Project of the late 1960s directed no funding for structural renovations to the Center, which by this time had seen almost daily use for over 25 years (Johnson, “Recommendations” 1).
In his recommendations to the Parks District in October 1971, Johnson set the stage for the conception and construction of the new center in several ways. First, his document drew the attention of the Parks District to the need for renovation of park spaces in Champaign, including the Douglass Center. As well, Johnson indicated a need for “park facilities neighborhood committees [to] serve as liaison between the directorate of the facility, the user and the park board” (“Recommendations,” 3). His recommendations for more neighborhood involvement foreshadowed the founding of local branches of the Community Design Center movement (CDC), a "collaborative [that] worked to empower marginalized people by helping them to recognize the value of the social, political, and economic capital in their spatial environment and employ its physical manifestation-architecture-to develop and create spaces that represent this power" (Wilkins 69).

CDCs were founded to address issues particular to their locations: in Harlem to fight freeway construction; in Tucson to remove privies and install bathrooms in barrio homes; in Cleveland to remodel hospitals and group homes; and in San Francisco to address issues in that city’s Chinatown district (Sanoff). Drawing on this energy at the national level, Professor Fred Moyer of U of I’s department of architecture, along with students and staff from urban planning, law, commerce, social work, recreation, civil engineering, interior design, and art, in conjunction with local community activists John Lee Johnson and Richard Davis of the Concerned Citizens Committee, established the Community Advocacy Depot (CAD) in March of 1969 at 118 North First Street in Champaign (Moyer “A Community Advocacy Depot for Champaign”).
The formation of the Community Advocacy Depot exemplified an understanding among those involved of the importance of defining spaces for, with, and by residents of disenfranchised communities. I also want to draw attention here to the strong connection between rhetorical and spatial agency, in that discussions of the community's needs were the catalyst for the project. As will be discussed later, questions raised by those involved in the new Douglass Center’s design not only related to the physical structure of the building. There were also questions regarding what constituted the community. Thus, the CAD represented a broad range of inputs, such that questions and solutions were granted multiple perspectives.

All parties agreed that the old Center needed to be improved in order to address the changing needs of the community, and, as the Douglass Center Steering Committee suggested,

The new center as planned would correct the serious deficiencies. The new center would allow for participation of senior citizens whose very presence would assure a new decorum at Douglass. It would give staff opportunities to expand programs to lifetime recreational habits. When the only recreation learned is physical activity, the child when he grows past the physical, can only turn to barrooms later in life. (Douglass Center Steering Committee “Douglass Being Shorted”)

The Steering Committee’s recognition of the potential for the new Douglass Center was reflective of the positive attitudes of local blacks, as they actively engaged in the Community Design Center movement and other advocacy efforts in response to the shortcomings of Urban Renewal programs. In geographer and urban planner Edward
Soja’s terms, the CAD fostered a thirdspace relation, wherein people actively engage in the re-imagining of conceptual and material realities (Thirdspace).

Through this combined effort with CAD, citizens of the North End were able to offer their own ideas for the new Douglass Center. A letter to the editor authored by the Douglass Center Steering Committee stated that "[f]or at least six months during 1973 the park manager, the architect, staff, park commissioners and the Douglass community met developing program needs in order to give the architect direction to develop a plan for building the center. A list of 36 program needs was accepted. The architect developed five plans to satisfy these needs" ("Douglass being shorted"). Here, the DC Committee’s efforts, as supported by the CAD, suggest recognition of Wilkins’ the idea that "[...] architecture and urban design are not viewed as having the power for social change, just social control, not only of space, but of identity and basic humanity" (Wilkins 69). This form of collective participation was indicative of the community's attempt to control the construction of the space. Indeed, the space was conceived of in the terms established by the community and reflective of the demands and needs of the people utilizing that space. The control was also indicative of the community’s having a voice in the dominant discourse. Moreover, project architect Ernest Hedric Clay’s proposed designs conveyed the potential activities that were to take place in the space. Again, here was an inside-out move, in that the activity in this instance revealed the potential to control and construct space–instead of those activities being limited, confined, and defined by the space. The Community Design Center’s interests in the Douglass Center project conveyed an understanding of the importance of defining spaces by and for residents of the community. The DC Steering Committee, black American architect Ernest Clay, and
other public entities at least informally represented a "collaborative... [that] worked to empower marginalized people by helping them to recognize the value of the social, political, and economic capital in their spatial environment and employ its physical manifestation-architecture-to develop and create spaces that represent this power” (Wilkins 69).

Rhetorically, the CDC and other involved groups appeared to problematize the distinctions between civil rights and black power. On the one hand, the terms of the exchange between the black and dominant public resided well within the boundaries of a civil rights discourse. As such, the political systems that were in place, while maintaining dominant-marginalized relations, did afford a place for marginalized groups to speak directly to power in a forum that took their demands into account. In this sense, the center acknowledged the place of the marginalized within the whole. Simultaneously, the community also resided within a marginalized space that existed outside of and in opposition to the center. Ideally, a civil rights response would situate the marginalized group within the whole, whereas a black power response would situate the marginalized group in opposition to the dominant discourse.

The varied responses issued by the North End community to this show of power by the Parks District and local governments evidenced the black community’s understanding of its position relative to power. This situation—one that utilized public resources and was effectively a public project—required the input of the dominant political and economic structure. Even as the community found a way to have its demands addressed, there was no way the old DC would be demolished and the new DC built without addressing the dominant political structure.
Too, this balance between Civil Rights and Black Power rhetoric evidenced the ability of North Enders to set ideological positioning aside in order to advance the project in a materially substantive way. In John Dewey’s terms, this was an *a posteriori* move, in that political and even socially constructed ideologies were put aside in order to facilitate community control over material space (*The Public and Its Problems*). In so doing, the community showed its ability to re-imagine and remake conceptual space. (I will explore this distinction more in the next chapter, however for now I’ll suggest that this capacity to work from an *a posteriori* orientation is one of the main takeaways from this research.)

After receiving the plans from the CAD, the Champaign Parks Board attempted to reframe the terms of negotiation. Based on the claim that ”25-40 per cent of the participants at Douglass center [were] from Urbana,” and citing past instance of cross-city cooperation, in December 1973 the CPD tried to acquire more funding for the project from its sister city (”Urbana's Park Board snubs Champaign”). However, the request revealed the ways in which the North End was still perceived as a separate municipal entity that was considered neither part of Champaign nor Urbana, even as geographically the neighborhood was located in both cities.

Despite the efforts of the DC Steering Committee and its advocates, in September of 1974 the park board approved a plan that did not comply with any of the plans developed by the Community Design Center, and the old DC was slated to be demolished in April 1975 (“This Douglass center will be torn down”). In fact, “compromises were made and the plan that would have satisfied all 36 program needs was dropped in favor of a plan that included only 15.”
Rather than accept the compromised plans, "Black residents of Champaign's North side formed a committee [...] to protest the demolition of the Douglass Center and to seek alternative ways of building a comprehensive recreational complex [...] Nearly 200 persons attended the meeting Tuesday night" ("Panel to Protest current Douglass Project formed"). While fewer than half of the original program needs were being met by the Par Board-approved design, particularly at issue was the fact that, "No Library or senior citizen's room was included in the final plans." The original center was not originally constructed with a library and space for senior citizens, but the old DC was adapted to accommodate for these practices. The practices in the old Douglass Center that were implemented and developed despite spatial constrains were now framed as part of the community's attempt to control the make-up of the new space. The attempt by the Parks District to not account for these considerations as part of their proposal was essentially a denial of the importance of these spatial practices to the people of the community.

In addition to the formation of a protest committee, local community activist Henry Matthews filed an injunction against the CPD to halt the demolition of the old Douglass Center. Matthews' injunction, while utilizing the rhetorical and legal tools of the dominant discourse, situated the CPD’s actions outside of the power relations that the organization itself established in the initial conversations about the new DC. As Matthews’ injunction stated, "[...] it has been brought to the attention of your undersigned organization that the Champaign Park District has or is about to undertake the project which is in violation of the goodwill of the community and the goals established by all members of the community including the Champaign Park District" (Mathews
"Injunction," 2). Thus, Matthews took the position that the CPD, by its actions, was in violation of its own goals. Matthews went on to cite the library and space for senior citizens as a "priority item" in the construction of the new Center, and as such offered further confirmation of the importance of those spaces for members of the North End community.

While Matthews' injunction poignantly, but briefly, called attention to the contradictory position of the park board, the position of the black community and supporters was much more fraught. For lack of a better phrase, this ambivalence became clearer at the next park board meeting. It was there that Angry Blacks and an angry park commissioner [...] threatened the Champaign park board with a confrontation if the present Douglass Center is demolished. About 50 blacks and park commissioner Richard Davis Jr. walked out of the park board meeting [...] to protest plans to tear down the present structure and replace it with a gymnasium. The blacks have been asking for a comprehensive recreational facility, but the park board has said it can provide only a basic building containing only a gymnasium because of lack of funds. Davis told the park board that he would be the 'first one to go to jail' if the contractor appeared at Douglass Center to tear it down. ("Confrontation threatened over Douglass demolition").

The position of Davis and the other protestors was interesting here, as it exemplified a stance to refuse compromise when control over the space was a possibility. On the one hand, Davis was a member of the board. As such, even though he was marginalized as the only black member, his participation was more than symbolic. While his presence on
the Parks Commission was probably not wanted by at least a few of the other white board members, his presence was necessary for the park board's holding some ethos as it attempted to address to the interests of the North End. Without Davis, the park board was easily situated outside of the North End public. With Davis, the relationship between the center and margin became more representative of a racially integrated social whole. Further, members of the black community were present at the meeting. By walking out, there was a symbolic claim to both relational status (as constituents) and marginal status (as marginalized players whose demands did not have to be acknowledged). Evoking Fleming again, walking out was a way for black folks to refuse the discourses that refused them.

The next time Davis returned to a park board meeting, he claimed membership with the Douglass Center Steering Committee (DCSC), a group that issued "a 'position paper' [calling] for the construction of a comprehensive recreational center" ("Group demands complete center"). The DCSC position paper outlined the basis for the protest and demanded a space that was in keeping with earlier conceptions of the Douglass Center. Among the "contentions" offered in the paper were

[t]he northeast section of Champaign and especially Douglass Center has had to exist with less than adequate recreational programs, less than adequate recreational staffing and less than adequate physical facilities; [...] The original charge of the 1972 bond issue committed the park board to building a recreational facility fully adequate to meet the needs of all the citizens of northeast Champaign. ("Group demands complete center")
Each of the contentions related to spatial issues and patrons' needs within the DC. There was also a move, in keeping with Matthews's injunction, to hold the park board accountable to its commitments as expressed in official texts. The position paper went on to make some demands: "The only acceptable facility for northeast Champaign will be a complete one; There will be no demolition of Douglass Center until a complete one is promised; 90 percent of the workers on the Douglass Center project shall be black" ("Group demands complete center"). While two of these latter demands were expressions of a desire for space, what "complete," meant to the park board, the DCSC, and the black community became more contentious as the conflict progressed. The Demand for a 90 percent black workforce was interesting in that it reflected an understanding of the construction of the building itself as a process that had the capacity to inform community members’ identification with the space. DCSC member Roy Williams summed up the long-term cultural significance of a predominantly black workforce: "[...] if the building was built by a black labor force the kids in the neighborhood could have pride in the building and point to it and say, 'That's the building my daddy helped build'" ("Douglass panel, park board deadlocked"). Beyond any financial stimulus for the neighborhood, a representational memory of literally making the space held as much—if not more—significance.

(Not) "Another Kent State"

The park board's response to the DCSC position paper was to issue a contract for the demolition of the old DC ("New Douglass demolition contract is approved: Community leaders angry, threaten violence"). The response from members of the black community was a picketed protest that carried various messages. For example,
[DCSC Spokesperson Kenneth] Stratton reminded park commissioners of the Kent State University violence saying, 'We've been patient, and you are trying our patience. The day you send the bulldozers to Douglass Center, it will be the day we will be beyond our patience. You're creating another Kent state.' (qtd. in “New Douglass demolition contract is approved”)

Here, Stratton clearly connected the demolition of the old Center to an act of violence. More ambiguous was how he was relating that violence. Other protestors were more direct: “Another resident who protested the demolition told the park board that there are ‘going to be shots fired’” (Stratton qtd. in “Douglass demolition”). This protestor’s comments predicted the violence directed at the offices of McCabe Brothers Construction, recipients of the demolition contract, who had their offices picketed for weeks and had the widows of their offices shot at ("Windows Get Bullet Holes at McCabe's"). John Lee Johnson, who was both on the Champaign city council and the co-chair of a citizens advisory group, took a more moderate approach by pushing for a joint meeting between the two organizations to look for alternate funding. The co-presence of these positions revealed the varied political ideals that existed among those who shared the position that the old Douglass Center could not be demolished until the Park District met the community’s needs. Put another way, the pragmatic need for material space was enough to unify black people of varied political leanings.

Once again, rather than grant the demands made by the DCSC for a complete center, the park board voted to have the project architect revise the plans such that the new center could be built without demolishing the old one ("Douglass Center site shifted"). This vote was an attempt by the park board to move the location of the
unwanted center rather than compromise with black community members. In maintaining its demands for the "complete center," though, the DCSC fulfilled the role of "ungrateful recipient" by refusing to accept the building it did not want. Once again, I understand the stance taken by the DCSC here as one for control of the space. The old center was remodeled so that it could hold a library. The Douglass Center Annex was formerly a grocery store that was partially renovated into a Senior Center (CPD website). The new DC represented for the community a chance to have some control over the making of the space, rather than an instance of social/spatial change that required further adaptation by the users of the space.

It was in this moment that the architect, Ernest Clay, took on an advocate for the project. The park board chose not to select a plan that exemplified the architect's response to the community needs, and instead utilized a plan that fell short of both the architect's and the community's envisioning of the new Center. The park board's request to reconfigure the location of the center such that the old center did not have to be removed also revised the role of the architect in the project.

Because of the park board's requests, Clay—African American architect, UIUC alum, and retired emeritus faculty—came to represent another ambivalent voice in the settling of the DC dispute. Where the park board essentially issued a rhetorical threat in its proposal to build the new center without razing the old building, Clay was beset with the task of exploring this possibility through a consideration of both material and conceptual constraints. And while his race was explicitly mentioned by a park board member as a potential factor in lengthening the DC ordeal, until that mentioning Clay's race remained not so much as absent as invisible.
This move by the Park Board to relocate the Douglass Center also represented one of several instances in which the group simultaneously used its power to control space while rhetorically positioning itself as powerless to amend decisions because of legal and financial constraints. By way of example, the park board's attorney French Fraker offered justification for the park board's decision to change the cite on legal grounds. He offered, “It involves a substantial amount of money [...] You'll be in default of your own contract if you don't build it and the public stands to lose a substantial amount of money” (“Park Board Votes to Build New Douglass Center,”). At the same meeting park board Commissioner Donald Bresnan lamented, “I have no choice [...] I have done all I could. There is no other choice (except to move the construction site) to prevent losing a substantial amount of money.” While Fraker and Bresnan both framed the position of the park board as one of "no choice," they never considered the obvious choice to build the "complete center" that the community advocated for (“Group demands complete center”). Thus, the status quo served those already in power.

After being requested to do so, Clay "outlined to the CPD building and grounds committee three options in placing the building on the new site, just west of the old center" (“Architect: Don't Move Douglass”). However, he did not support that move, and took the stance that, “I, as your architect, cannot recommend moving the building." Further, "He criticized the park board for making the decision without first consulting him and getting a detailed appraisal of the problems in moving the site." Whether Clay's lack of support for not relocating the building came from a professional obligation or not, he still used his position within the discourse regarding the Center to counter the dominant narrative. He recognized his position as architect on the project as a platform
to disagree with his employer and implicitly side with the marginalized community.

Additionally, he called the park board out for making claims that they had no authority to make. Rhetorically, Clay affirmed his capacity to make logical claims by implicitly calling into question the ethics of the park board’s manipulating space, a power they did not have without access to an architect.

All of the three options Clay proposed for moving the building were fraught with problems. In the first revision, "A 12-foot alley would be created [...] the rear entrance would be here and thus could cause major supervision problems [...] the front entrance [...] would face the back side of the annex with its trash cans and the like" ("Architect: Don’t Move Douglass"). This first option would also only afford expansion of the DC if the annex were torn down. As well, “Placing the building on the new site [would] create additional flooding and water seepage into the [senior] annex.” That the senior annex may have been affected by the relocation of the Center was possibly the issue that drew senior citizens into the conflict, as the efforts by the DCSC majority effectively disenfranchised part of the constituency, causing a margin within the margin.

The second option would situate the DC such that it would "overlap the outdoor basketball court, which would have to be moved or taken out [...] It would also straddle a sewer line, which would create additional problems [...]" Option three "would be to simply flip the building [which would] take a considerable amount of time and cost much more money, since most of the building plans would have to be redrawn." Clay further replied that any of these options would delay the beginning of construction by two or three months. Thus, there was a marked difference in the considerations of material contexts and environments by the park board and Clay. The site for him was more than
just an isolated location—the building contributed to an existing relationship between the space and pre-existing infrastructure.

Within weeks of Clay's presentations for moving the DC (against his better professional judgment), the park board, in "what was the first unanimous vote in connection with the project," agreed to allocate an additional $100,000 to the DC project for the purpose of including the senior center that was part of the original request ("$100,000 move voted for Douglass Center"). The money was a surplus from another major park project that came in under the proposed bid. In what was labeled a "fine gesture" by Commissioner Davis, the park board diverted the money to the DC project. While the additional money left the board another $100,000 under the original budget estimates for the complete center, it seemed for a moment that the funds would be enough to move the park board and the DCSC beyond the impasse. One board member committed to make a motion that the original location for the DC be reconsidered. Reports also indicated that funding analysts had been contracted by the board "to look for extra funds from local, state, or federal sources" with a report due on the findings in a matter of weeks (ibid).

After consultation, however, DCSC spokesperson Kenneth Stratton conveyed that the $100,000 was not enough to construct the additional space needed to house proposed Center activities, and he argued for $50,000 in additional funds that was originally offered as a plea to call of protests. Board President William Helms, who originally made the denied motion, replied to Stratton that that money would not be offered again. This meeting between the two groups ended without another being scheduled, however exchanges continued ("Impasse over Douglass Center remains/$100,000 offer fails").
Rather than contact the DCSC directly, or call a meeting between the two groups, board President Helms instead composed and then read a statement verbatim over the phone to the two local papers (“Parks won't ask city for more money: Helms,” “Pledge Douglass Site-Helms”). In his statement, Helms outlined for the general public his criticism of the DCSCs rejection of funds for the senior citizens space for want of more "quiet space" in the new center, and that the funds were inadequate to meet the spatial demands. He also conveyed that city council and Mayor William Bland were unwilling to offer more funds for the project. So, even though earlier claims stated the park board had no additional funds, the park board came up with more money. Helms had to get the Mayor to validate the claimed lack of funds the second time, as new monies were allocated. Helms also called on the DCSC "to pledge its support for building the planned recreation center on its original site" (“Pledge Douglass Site-Helms”). As Helms did not directly inform the DCSC of the statement, there was no response issued by the group. And while Helms did not offer this information, the report notes that DCSC "halted picket lines around the firms involved in the construction project during talks with the Park District" (“Parks won't ask city for more money: Helms”).

While the park board President Helms offered indirect comments to the DCSC as a group (even as it became apparent that senior citizens might constitute a special interest group in this conflict), Vice President Patricia Leonhard was more personal with her criticisms. She composed an editorial that was particularly critical of Stratton and Davis for, among other things, taking "devious" vacations and calling off picket efforts while the DC conflict was still at a high point (“Park Board Officer Replies”). Leonhard also took liberty to diagnose Stratton with "instant gratification syndrome" which she
described as "a social pattern easily explained in terms of the historical subjugation of black people, [as] one of the major roadblocks to the current social progress of disadvantaged black persons" (ibid). And while Leonard was negatively critical of Stratton, Davis, and black male members of the DCSC, she was more sympathetic to role of women and the elderly in the struggle. Whether Leonhard’s comments here initiated some internal conflict in the DCSC or merely served as a more public comment on her position in the conflict, significant shifts occurred in Stratton's expressed position from his seat on the steering committee.

A week later (on August 1, 1975), Stratton penned his own editorial, wherein he urged the DCSC to take the park board's offer of the additional $100,000 ("Steering unit should cooperate with board"). Those funds, he suggested, "Could possibly be used to buy about 2,000 square feet of extra space or could reasonably remodel the Douglass Annex." He acknowledged that the original allocation of the 1972 bond had been doubled to more than $800,000 for the new center. By taking this more moderate position, Stratton was trying to garner DCSC support to build on the old site and thus maintain the possibility of expanding the Douglass Center as future funds became available.

I interpret Stratton’s move here to be a shift from a rhetoric of control to one of opting for change over time. That is, rather than continue to push for exactly what the community requested, he considered the possibility of gradual modifications to the building. Too, he may have been attempting to bargain in order to get results, in a move evocative of the NSOs use of accommodation that I discussed in Chapter 2.
Three days after Stratton's support of a settlement, the park board reported the findings of the funding analysis, which revealed nearly $200,000 in uncommitted funds from the 1972 bond (“Park Board has $194,576 left in uncommitted bond funds”). That this much money was unaccounted for until then suggests that there might have been funds to build the "complete center" in the first place. As well, the timing was uncanny.

Be that as it may, within days, the DCSC "formally dropped its opposition to tearing down the older dilapidated structure in northeast Champaign. The citizens' group urged the Champaign Park Board to 'build on the present site of the Douglas Center,'" which a local news report suggested "is what park commissioners have wanted to do all along" (“Douglass Center Impasse Ends”). This phrasing misrecognizes both the inadequacy of the park board's initial building proposal and the DCSCs reasons for protesting the demolition of the old Center. Yet, the committee's agreement with the park board did not come without stipulations, one of which stated, "The work force to be used on the Douglass Center building should reflect the racial character of the neighborhood surrounding the proposed facility." This stance harkened back to the demand for a 90 percent black workforce outlined in the original position paper. Roy Williams, who continually expressed support for this measure offered, "We hope to get as many in the neighborhood involved as possible. Douglass stands as a symbol of what blacks can do when they come together." That DC committee requested majority black employment revealed their recognition of the multiple implications for the Center, including economics, community empowerment, and the connection between the materiality of the space and the ways in which that materiality might be conceptualized in the community.
This move was important not only in terms of programming and building design, there was also potential here to control the terms for the building contract and employment.

And while another stipulation outlined by the DCSC called for quiet space for the elderly in the renovated DC plans, a group of senior citizen activists expressed their discontent with the plan. Rather than have a wing added on the proposed Center, Helen Hite (a representative for North End seniors),

"...said members remain adamant in seeking a place for themselves […] Mrs. Hite said, 'They [the DCSC] are using us to get what they want. The park board gave us [Douglass Center senior citizens] the $100,000. Now the committee wants to add it to their building. We want to be to ourselves and not be bothered by kids running through." ("Douglass Center impasse ends")

Hite's statement, in offering an expression of senior citizens’ wanting for their own space, also revealed a rift within the DCSC. Her use of “they” in her statement distinguished the interests of the seniors from that of the DCSC, and her phrasing “their building” differentiated seniors’ material and conceptual connection to the space. At the same time, her use of “us” situated seniors as the direct recipients of funds from the park board, and her desire to “not be bothered by kids running through” conveyed a clear difference among involved groups regarding the proposed kinds of spatial practices.

I understand her statements here, which appeared in the context of an article reporting on the ending of an “impasse,” as offering some evidence of a shift in the rhetorical situation as it concerned the dominant public and the black community. Whereas past public expressions regarding the Douglass Center revealed a consensus position among North End citizens, Hite’s comments both evidenced and revealed to the
dominant public a lack of unity in the black community. Of course, this is not to say that there has always been consistent agreement within black communities regarding the most effective tactics and strategies for gaining social equality. Rather, this moment was an indication of a public disagreement that until that time was usually expressed in the “hidden discourses” within black publics (Squires).

This more public evidence of a failing consensus within constituencies was also apparent among the Park Board and the DCSC. Even as the Park Board took the position that it would only ensure compliance to affirmative action laws and could not guarantee 90 percent black employment, the board in turn insisted on "a firm commitment from the Douglass area community to allow demolition of the old structure" ("Douglass center demolition OK'd if...Board requires protests must end"). Interestingly, both the DCSC and the park board claimed no authority to enact specific demands made by the other group: DCSC could not guarantee a protest-free demolition, and the park board could not guarantee a 90% black work force. So while each group was representative of a constituency, that representation stopped short of claiming the ability to mobilize a representative constituency that, in fact, not a constituency at all. In fact, each group grew more transparent with regard to how much supporters on each side agreed with their respective organizations’ positions in the conflict. In the most pragmatic sense, the DCSC could not control the black community any more than the park board could control white contractors' hiring practices.

The DCSC, in its efforts to comply with President Helms's request, submitted their reply to the board's demands in writing (“Douglass committee responds to board”). Commissioner Leonhard offered a response that made clear the options for the DCSC:
"The committee can either acquiesce or we can build the new center on the new spot. We have no choice." While Leonhard stated, "We have no choice," her meaning came across as, *You have no choice*. In keeping with her earlier editorial criticizing Stratton and Davis, her framing here still misrecognized the issue that was most important to the DCSC—getting the space that best served the community—while also absolving the park board of any responsibility or agency to grant that space.

As each group was dissatisfied with the other’s positions, another meeting was called in the third week of August 1975 (“Douglass expansion in jeopardy”). This meeting, the most contentious by far, offered an even more public display of the emergent rifts within and between concerned groups and resulted in flared tempers among the most cool, including "Commissioner Donald F. Bresnan [who] raised his voice for the first time since the controversy began. 'I made a pledge that I would attend every meeting that I'm invited to. I hereby withdraw that pledge. I see no sense in any more meetings. I've had it. There isn't going to be a building if this continues.'" The final location of the new center was still unsettled, as the dispute remained over whether to add the senior center to the new DC plans or remodel the annex. In addition to Bresnan's refusal to attend any more meetings (that is enter into a space and engage in discourse), both President Helms and DC committee chair Williams walked out of the meeting (that is, changed their physical location as a form of protest and expression of a refusal to engage in further discourse on the issue). In a reprisal of sentiments, the news article reported,

> [a]n internal split […] among the black interest group when Mrs. Hite accused the committee of leaving the senior citizens out of decision-making. […] She said
that she had not been invited to the meetings and 'our opinion has not been asked.'

Stratton told Mrs. Hite: 'I don't like to express disagreement in a public arena.'

("Douglass Expansion in Jeopardy")

Again, Hite, as a spokesperson for senior citizens, continued to advocate for the group even in the face of presenting a less than united front within the black community. As elderly, and mostly female, this group was even further disenfranchised in this discussion where voices were raised and people were storming out of the room. As such, could they be viewed as being out of line by taking the money offered exclusively to them by the park board? Relative to Stratton's reply to Hite, when was it permissible for a disenfranchised group to express dissent? When is it okay for inter-group conflict to be expressed? (If you asked Stratton, he might say, not in front of white folks.) Stratton also accused the park board of “deliberately dividing the steering committee by offering the $100,000 project to the senior citizens” ("Douglass in Jeopardy"). Although there was no proof of this strategy, given the timing, Stratton had cause for concern. The 90 percent black work force issue was also on the table, a measure supported by DCSC member Roy Williams as a mark of tradition at the DC: "The staff at the park has, as long as I can remember, always been black.' He said the board would be going against its own tradition of an all-black work force and staff at the park if it does not agree to the 90 percent request" ("Douglass Panel, Park Board Deadlocked"). At the time this article was published, no new negotiation meetings had been scheduled.

The fallout from this meeting took place four days later with the reorganization of the DCSC ("Douglass committee reorganizes"). Ken Stratton announced that he was stepping down as spokesperson of the committee to be replaced by Roy Williams. In
what amounted to a closed meeting (a return to the “hush harbor”), Williams refused to talk to reporters who waited outside for comments on the closed meeting. Only Stratton addressed the crowd, albeit briefly and generally, about the internal shakeup, which he suggested was “in the best interests of the community,” all the while offering his “[...] hope [that] the new members will be able to get the job done” (“It's 'Go' on new Douglass Center/Park board approves bid, changes”). No members of the newly reformed DCSC attended the park board meeting the following week. In that meeting (and in the absence of any members of the Douglass Center Steering Committee), the board approved building the Douglass Center on the new site while leaving the old DC standing. Richard Davis, who held a position on the park board member and was former member of DCSC, refused comment and no other DCSC members were available to reply to the decision. However, the interests of the North End did not go unrepresented at that meeting. John Lee Johnson, author of the "Recommendations" paper outlining an earlier reconceptualization for a new Douglass Center, was as a member of the Champaign Council. Johnson issued an "apology' to all the people who had been involved in the Douglass Center controversy. He said he saw no reason why anyone in the black community would prevent the demolition project. He asked the board to reissue demolition orders" (“It’s ‘Go’”). Initially, Helms and the park board appeared unaffected by Johnson's apology. However, with construction of the new building looming with no set agreement in place, a prospect that neither the DCSC or the park board wanted, a special session meeting of the park board was called to discuss the possibility of building on the old site (“Douglass Center plans may be changed again”). At that meeting, park district General Manager Robert Toalson confided that he
"received word that there would be no problem' with interference of demolition crews [and] declined to comment where the assurances came from except to say 'from various sources"" ("Douglass Center to be built on old site/Toalson says blacks promise 'no interference'").

This news of clearance for the demolition came to fruition the week before work was to begin on the revised new site. Clay, who had by this time drawn up plans for both sites, "told the park board that the contractor will now prepare the site for the demolition by putting up fences around the building. He also said pupils in nearby Washington Elementary School [would] be reminded about safety" ("Douglass Center to be built"). In a fitting gesture that at least ensured black employment in one phase of the project, English Brothers Construction, the lead contractors, arranged to "subcontract the [demolition] project to Pelmore Excavating Co., 406 E. Columbia Ave., a black contractor."

In an editorial piece, Urbana Courier Reporter Les Somogyi offered some poignant remarks:

Five months and about $30,000 in extra expenses later, the plan is the same […]

The park board, new in leadership and inexperienced in dealing with crisis situations, had its hands full […] 'Tragic' is the word most often used in connection with the Douglass Center troubles. (Somogyi, “Commentary”) The commentary conveys some facts of leadership: Bresnan had been park board president for 12 years and resigned in April, when Helms–a member of the board for two years–took over leadership. Davis "charged Helms' leadership was unable to cope with a black situation. Helms said simply, 'It's a lie'" (Somogyi). Com. Leonhard offered,
I feel sorry for the black community. They've been deprived of the best use of the building. The rank and file of the black community suffers because the leaders were not effective. If everyone worked with the park district instead of against it, the building would have been built by now [...] This ‘Burn, baby, burn’ type of leadership has gone out of style with the 1960s [...] Some of the things the blacks have said were extremely distructive [sic] [...] There is an element in the black community that doesn't want us to do anything. Because if we do, they won't have a platform. (Somogyi, “Commentary”)

Davis referred to Helms as "a stubborn man," And suggested that, "when Helms showed up at a negotiating session with a police escort, it was a gesture of no faith and contributed to prolonging the impasse” (“Commentary”). In response, “Helms said he feared for his safety." Further, "Helms said he thinks the biggest mistake was starting the Douglass Center issue out on a 'racial tone.' He said, 'Dick (Davis) was in charge of it and we hired a black architect, and that was a mistake.' A more composed "Bresnan concluded, 'The main thing is that the building is going to go up and the kids will be able to use it. Too bad it will take a year to build.'"

Some analysis of Somogyi's summation might grant some insight into what this five-month long conflict at the end of a years-long project meant in the context of a racial-spatial understanding. First, the change in park board leadership did prove to be a major factor. Helms' words and actions did lack evidence of compromise. Why go through the motions of considering community input if in the final result you don't take that input into account? His “you're making me do this” rhetoric hid the ways in which his framing of the conflict was in and of itself a form of agency. Due to white privilege,
he had the power to “make a world” that conformed to his perceptions. Any worldview presented as oppositional to his was considered ill founded. As patronizing as Leonhard was, her comments should be taken to heart. 1975 was a little late for the rhetoric of Black Power, and this situation was very different from the conflict at Kent State. As such, the use of such rhetorical gestures was at best mistimed, and at worst misappropriated. The fact that there were black members of the park board and local city councils nullified a rhetorical strategy that situated participants as excluded, even as they were marginally positioned within the dominant public. In the least, Leonhard's comments recognized that there were multiple perspectives in the black community, and as such, community did not always imply consensus. Further, for the North End neighborhood, the issues that arose out of the DC struggle indicated that there was a changing understanding of blackness, and the position of blackness relative to the white center. There was simultaneously a contrastive and complementary relation to power, such that blackness as an identity functioned variously depending on location within the socio-political sphere. Helms' use of a police escort was whitely (that is, taking advantage of white privilege) and signified that law (and law enforcement) was on his side. His criticism of the hiring of Clay as a racialized move loses impact both by his misrecognition of the role of whiteness in the affair, and by Clay’s steadfastness (and reluctance to resort to using a race as a determining factor) through this whole ordeal. If anything, Clay took the position of Architect first and black American second.

Following Somogyi’s editorial and in the first major statement after the DC demolition was carried out, another editorial view was published in the local papers.
This past week the old center was demolished, literally clearing the way for a new Frederick Douglass Community Center where it was intended [...] Commissioner Davis must take considerable responsibility for the delay. Clearly he did some organizing in the black community to protest the plans, to rightly demand a suitable senior citizens center. He started out doing what he thought was right, but after a point it appeared that the protest was out of hand, and not suitably representing the community in which the center will be built. (Schumacher “Park board unity now is question”)

The right to protest and make demands of power is acknowledged here in Schumacher's editorial, however the representation of the community's wants was still an issue. The editor's point here speaks to the changing rhetoric and identity of the black community that manifest in this conflict. If space is constitutive of identity, then the ways in which claims for space are made are constitutive of a collective voice. Even though the new DC was built on the site of the old one, that space, and the role it plays in the North End, has changed since the 1940s. It is a new space that is still an indelible part of the community; however not in the same ways it has been in the past. Thus the claim for space in the conflict raises at least a few questions for the North End: What does the DC mean to the community? Who can claim membership to the community? How do we, as those in disenfranchised positions, successfully make demands of a power structure (or alternately, make claims to the center) of which we are a part?

As a way to transition into the last chapter, I think the dual positionality of the North End community, as simultaneously on the margin and part of the whole, represented not so much a crisis of identity, but a recognition of the shifting position of
black folk in America. It was not so much progress as it was a re-figuring. There was a black member of the park board, a black city council member, and a black architect. While the numerical representation of African Americans on this project was still not reflective of the society as a whole, black folks were coming to a place within the center while maintaining a marginalized status. As the relationship between margin and center shifted from relational to compositional, it did so for both black people and white people. The rhetorical representations and spatial claims of Civil Rights and Black Power, while still valid, had to be amended in order to be reflective and representative of the altered position of the black community as both outside and inside.
Figure 5. Demolition of the Original Douglass Center, September 1975
Figure 6. The New Douglass Center Under Construction
Chapter 5—The “Post-Soul” Dewey

The final chapter of my dissertation focuses on recent critical events that foreground the continued significance of material and conceptual space in North End. I will first present some discussion and personal reflections on Douglass Park and the surrounding community in order to frame the present moment. Then, I will offer some analysis on how I see pragmatism—as articulated in John Dewey’s *The Public and It’s Problems* and taken up in Eddie Glaude Jr.’s *In a Shade of Blue*—as a real means of understanding and addressing the most pressing problems in disenfranchised communities like the North End. Next, I will recount and analyze some critical events in the North End related to educational and residential spaces as I argue that these events, while offering evidence of the continued racial and class inequality for residents of the North End, also reveal the presence of alternate strategies used by residents for contesting those inequalities. In the conclusion, I will re-enter a discussion of what connecting race, space, and rhetoric means for the field of writing studies.

On The Park
Douglass Park still serves as an important social and recreational space for residents of the North End. As well, residents from other neighborhoods in Champaign-Urbana continue to utilize the park space, the Douglass Center, the Douglass Branch Library, the Senior Citizen’s Annex, the playground, the basketball courts, the community garden, and the baseball fields. In a sense then, the park offers access to a material location and activities that afford a shared sense of community among people who come to Douglass Park from various locations, within and beyond the North End. In keeping with the past
practices I address in previous chapters, those who use the space have continually reconceived Douglass Park. However, class and cultural distinctions, which have always been evident to members of the black local public, are more visible beyond the immediate space of the park.

Champaign-Urbana Days (C-U Days) is an example of this coming together across space. Since the 1960s, current and former residents of the North End have attended this weekend-long event. C-U Days is an opportunity to reunite with friends and family while sharing and participating in performances, cultural presentations, sporting tournaments, and food. A documentary produced in 1986 for public access television entitled *Champaign Urbana: A Day in the Park* offers some images of the event. The film features Erma and Cecil Bridgewater—longtime residents and involved members in the North End Community—who offered some reflections on the origins and motivations for C-U Days. Cecil stated, “In the beginning they called it the ‘Old Timers Picnic’” (*Champaign Urbana: A Day in the Park*). He suggested that the event was an occasion for former residents of the North End to return to the neighborhood to see friends and family. Erma countered that the celebration was a response to peoples’ being scattered after Urban Renewal and wanting to maintain a sense of community after social displacement: “It was right after the Urban Renewal Project was completed. And people were scattered, and some had left town. So there was the feeling of wanting to get back together again.” Erma’s comments here evidence that, despite being dispersed geographically, former residents still made and effort to maintain a connection to the neighborhood.
In the beginning, the event was completely run by community members. By the
1980s the Parks District became more involved, and community organizers for C-U Days
initially welcomed the support. However, more recently the Parks District has dictated
the scheduling and the community's participation in the event. North End resident and
local business owner Seon Williams, in a 2007 interview stated, “They [The Champaign
Parks District] came up with a program for us, instead of letting the community come up
with a program for itself” (“Toxic Tour, North Champaign”). Williams used to organize
a basketball tournament as part of C-U Days. Over time, the tournament grew in
popularity. The director of the Park District offered to help Williams by covering the
tournament organizers and participants under the Park District’s insurance policy.
Initially, Williams saw the offer as a show of support for the tournament. However, the
next year the Parks District cut the tournament down to one day, making it difficult for
Williams to accommodate all the participants. Then, in the following year, the Parks
District assumed full control of the C-U Days program and dropped Williams’
tournament altogether. Williams took up the issue with the director of the Douglass
Center, to no avail. In fact, Williams stated that the Parks District took the rims off of the
goals on the outdoor basketball courts to ensure that neither he nor others would try to
organize basketball games during C-U Days. As well, he noted the increased numbers of
corporate vendors that predominated the space. Williams’ comments lend support to the
idea that as the success of C-U Days grew, the Parks District saw the need to more
directly influence the direction of the event.

Williams was not alone in his view that the shift in control of C-U Days to the
Parks District was a blow against community agency and further increased dependence
on government agencies. However, others saw the Parks District's taking over the event as helping bring on a broader sense of community. Longtime resident and local entertainer Gerald “Candy” Foster, in an interview conducted during the Digital Memories Project states,

Again, this is my opinion. When we got to the point where we...we as people in the area, especially the ones that were involved in Champaign Urbana Days, uh, couldn't always see eye to eye, about what goes on and who should be doing what and where and when and how, and then when you start... having the meetings...which is very good, to get community, community input...well, in my understanding it's how it got out of hand [...] I worked in [...] government just about all my life [...] I know that when they get involved in things, they have to...If they, if you complain about...this street being bad enough, the city gon' have to respond. But, so they have a meeting, right? All right, but if you think "do you want it blacktop or this or uh," they fightin' and arguin' about it. Then finally the city gonna do what they want to do to it. Because they give you the opportunity to be smart about it and pick your own medicine, but if you can't come to no conclusions, they have move on. (Gerald Foster, “Champaign-Urbana Days Digital Memories”)

Foster’s comments address a tension within the local community, and offer evidence of a shift in political relations both within the black community, and between the black and dominant publics. Whereas during the Civil Rights Era the main (but my no means only) point of conflict was between the dominant and local black publics, the situation that Foster describes suggests black people constitute the main source of resistance to
improving black people’s lived realities. On the one hand, Foster sees the need for meetings and organizational plans within the community. On the other hand, he also takes the position that meetings get in the way of action, ultimately resulting in the city’s taking control of the decision-making. Given the opportunity to “be smart about it and pick your own medicine,” community members’ internal disagreements absolve those with the power to positively alter material conditions from having to respond to the community’s needs. As I will discuss in more detail below, these differences that play out at the local level reveal the misrecognition of how the present political moment differs from the Civil Rights era.

Reflections
While my research has focused on the Douglass Center and Park in previous eras, I also have firsthand experience with the spaces. For the last three summers, my oldest son has played baseball in Douglass Park’s “First String” Little League. While my main role has been as a coach and fan, I have observed firsthand some of the consistency and change in the North End. The most apparent constant is the instant community that is formed at game time. Many people walked to the games, coming over from Dunbar Court—the (former) low-income housing complex just east of the baseball field—or came across the park from the west or from Eureka St. on the north side. They are members of the mostly working class and poor communities surrounding Douglass Park. Others are from predominantly black and working class neighborhoods to the west of the Illinois Central Railway that runs through Champaign from north to south (Wikipedia, “Illinois Central Railroad”). Dubbed Bristol Place and Garwood, these neighborhoods are part of the North End, however their location on the other side of the tracks placed the
neighborhoods out of the reach of the massive Urban Renewal Projects that altered the residential landscape around Douglass Park in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g., “Bristol Park Neighborhood Plan”, and “Northeast Neighborhood General Renewal Plan”).

As well, there are visible distinctions in the people and place. Many people drive to the games, using street parking and filling the parking lots to the east and south of the field with their late model cars and work trucks—evidence of class diversity among those whose families have left the neighborhood. These are the vehicles of former residents who have moved out of the neighborhood years or generations ago. Those who have left the neighborhood reunite with those who have stayed—a brief glimpse of what C-U Days must have looked like. They share affections and well-told stories, catch up on personal and family news, express hopes and dreams for their children’s futures.

Also present are members of the emergent Hispanic population, who are mostly residents of Shadowwood—a mobile home community located northwest of Douglass

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14 The Urban Renewal projects of the 1950s and 60s might have overlooked Garwood and Bristol, however there are presently discussions about demolishing and rebuilding the neighborhoods, even as the Dunbar Court and Joanne Dorsey Homes cites lay vacant (“Champaign County Housing Authority Considers Demolishing a Third Black Neighborhood”).

15 This scene is also a reminder of my growing up and spending time in “The Park” with family and friends and people who didn’t know my name but did know me and my younger brother as “Pop Burns’ boys.” I am reminded, too, of the importance of park space for black Americans in the Black Freedom Movement (e.g., Allen’s documentary film Claiming Open Spaces).
Park (Petrella). In numbers of five or ten, they watch the games, too, but from a distance to the west of the baseball fields. If a basketball court is available, they play with a high level of energy and a low level of skill. Blacks and Hispanics are both present, however they rarely share the same places within the park, choosing instead to tolerate (but not encourage) each other’s presence from a distance. As the Hispanic population in the area increases, the racial composition and prevailing notion of the North End as a black community will alter. These racial, spatial, and conceptual changes will result in a redefinition of the local community and require a reassessment of the tactics and strategies needed to address power.

There are a few attending the game like me, transplants with primary associations to the University. In my case, I have used my position to make connections to people and organizations in the North End (Recall that my first connection to the park and the North End came through my involvement with the Odyssey Project). By virtue of my blackness and academic status (blackademic-ness?), I am variously accepted, tolerated, or openly dissed by residents of the North End. I note that the level to which I am accepted as a temporary member of this community is a function of the type and location of the relation. Some North End residents still make the distinction between those black people who live on the North side (or have lived there), and those who are not residents or do not

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16 From 2000 to 2010, the Shadowwood community saw a 317.1% increase in Hispanic population (US Census tract data). By 2010 over 70% of the 850 residents identified as Hispanic. The large increase in the Spanish-speaking population has also changed the demographics of the North End and Booker T. Washington School in particular, were Hispanics comprise 46.8% of the student body compared to 35.9% black students.
have local connections. As well, identification with the University can influence one's relations with North End residents. Where for the most part, older residents of the North End are receptive to my presence because of my connection to an adult education program and the University of Illinois, any cred I have with the younger residents is usually earned through my actions and interactions in the park space. I am reminded that this social positioning and placement was also evident in the neighborhood-university relations made during the Community Design Center Movement in the 1970s. I am reminded that being black is not enough to win residents’ trust. More important is evidence of concern for black people, regardless of race. The very kinds of personal interactions that take place in Douglass Park evidence more concern for improving the lived experiences of people in the community.

Where people come from (geographically and ideologically) informs the substance of the social relations made and maintained in Douglass Park. So too does the space itself provide a material and conceptual context for those relations. Let me offer an example. During games there was a strictly adhered-to policy for parking in the lot between the baseball field to the west and Dunbar Homes to the east. Officially, the lot straddles the municipal boundary between Champaign and Urbana. The lot has about 20 parking places, and there is one entrance/exit to the lot at the south end. Half of the spaces were on the Urbana/Dunbar side and half were on the Champaign/Douglass western park side. The spoken agreement on the use of the lot was that only Dunbar residents could park their cars on the east side of the lot, while spaces on the west side of the lot were available for use by those needing a parking space so they could attend the games. I never saw or heard of anyone intentionally violating the policy or being towed
for doing so, but I heard both park volunteers and Dunbar residents issue the warning. It was as if there was a mutual respect for space that was also a demarcation of ownership (or at least temporary possession). The parking arrangement also evidenced the capacity among users to share space in a way that overrode the official, but conceptual, boundaries that divided the lot\textsuperscript{17}. As well, the parking lot practice shows the ability of people to negotiate differences in class status and users’ relationship to the material space, even as there is an apparent distinction in the conceptualization of the space as simultaneously recreational and residential.

**Setting up the post soul**
Beginning in the summer of 2011, demolition was started on Dunbar Court, a 26-unit housing complex just east of Douglass Park, and Joanne Dorsey Homes, a 67-unit housing complex northwest of Douglass Park (Bauer, “Grant sought”). The removal of these housing projects is part of a larger plan the city has to drastically alter the residential landscape of North Champaign (City of Champaign, *Bristol Park Neighborhood Plan*). Before construction has even begun on either site, evidence surfaced that the city of Champaign had plans to level a third neighborhood of mostly

\textsuperscript{17} Local residents’ ways of negotiating the space is particularly interesting in light of the deals that have been made at the municipal level. As part of the proposed redevelopment of Dunbar Court, The Benoit Group (winners of the redevelopment bid) and the Housing Authority of Champaign County (managers of the Dunbar site) negotiated a land purchase and rezoning deal between Champaign and Urbana in order to expand the site location for the redeveloped Dunbar site (Urbana Department of Community Development Services, Plan Case 2157-M-11).
black and Latino residents (Dolinar, "Champaign County Housing Authority Considers Demolishing a Third Black Neighborhood."). Knowledge of these plans became public when investigative journalist Brian Dolinar issued a Freedom of Information Act (FIOA) request for email exchanges between local Housing Authority members and the Housing and Urban Development office in Chicago. Local residents’ response to the proposed demolition of the Bristol, Garwood, and Shadowwood neighborhoods has been mixed, though the Champaign government and HACC have been placed in the position of being more transparent as they try to gain public support for the redevelopment plan.

The demolition of Dunbar Homes came within months of the completion and reopening of the newly renovated Booker T. Washington Elementary School (BTW). While the demolition and proposed replacement of a fifty-year old low-income housing complex and the building of a state-of-the-art magnet school might suggest material improvements in the North End, the reality is that the drastic material changes in the local landscape have resulted in various responses by the local public, revealing a range in the responses from community members who have chosen to redress their grievances with governmental entities.

Before I address some aspects of the housing and schooling issues in the North End and offer some analysis of local residents’ responses, I will first reset my frame of reference. I am broadening my view to North End locations other than the Douglass Center in order to trace more textured discursive activities and material alterations of the community. As a recreational space, the Douglass Center and Park are still important locations in the neighborhood and, as I alluded to above, the spaces might revisit their roles as a central location for North End residents as they re-imagine community. More
apparent, though, is the drastic alteration in the material landscape of residential and educational spaces in the neighborhood. These major material changes have resulted in an alteration in the conceptual center of the neighborhood, and as a result the North End has been de-centered spatially. In keeping with the connection I am making between the location and motivation related to space, it makes sense that I look to events wherein there is a connection between changes in the material landscape and rhetorical responses from the local public.

As I offer a reading of these events, my interest is with the ways in which current activity related to race and space evidence what Eddie Glaude, Jr. refers to as “post-soul politics” concerned with the organization of an emergent local public (132). Glaude, rather than suggest resorting to the tropes of the Black Freedom Movement in ways that use inscribed responses to oppression that are oriented in the social and political landscape of the 1960s, recognizes “that we have witnessed the eclipse of a black public and need to devise means and methods of organizing an emergent public” (148). Drawing directly from John Dewey’s *The Public and Its Problems*, Glaude resounds the call here to search for and utilize more pragmatic approaches to foster a community-based orientation of local publics.

While acknowledging what Glaude views as the lack of a visible national black public, I argue that there have been responses from local contingencies acting in the interests of black Americans in ways that diverge from prior conceptions of a black public based on the premise of a shared racial identity. In keeping with Glaude’s acknowledgement of Dewey, this emergent public is not necessarily based on racial or class affiliations but is instead concerned with the formation of publics around issues
of social justice. One point that I want to make more explicit in this shift is the necessary foregrounding of shared space as a factor in the formation of emergent publics. In this way, the notion of "the public"—rather than being based as an abstraction, or based on an ideological orientation—emanates instead out of the necessity of a shared location. By situating the North End as this location, my goal in this chapter is to address the question of whether these responses are exemplary of a viable response to power from a localized public that might foreshadow some alternative approach to political action. Thus, I will first look to Glaude’s idea of the “post-soul” as a means to understand the current state of black political engagement, then apply Glaude’s framework to a reading of the BTW and Dunbar events. In keeping with the notion of ambivalence in the changes that have occurred in the North End and Douglass Park in the local context, and the uncertain future of black Americans nationally, I think it makes sense that I call on blues.

**Pragmatic Blues**

“Why should the blues be so at home here? Well, America provided the atmosphere.”

-Gil Scott-Heron, “Bicentennial Blues”

Gil-Scott Heron’s resounding question and answer offers a way to get at the essentialness of the expression that is the blues. The blues, at its core, is that condition caused by the simultaneity of so much possibility and so much oppression (e.g., Murray, *Stomping the Blues*). The blues speaks from the necessary chorus of blackness being in conversation with lyrical individuality that is American-ness. In similar ways, the co-presence of so much possibility and so much oppression has also
served as the foundation for the emergence of another American tradition–pragmatism. Cornel West recognizes this ambivalence emerging from this co-presence in the American philosophical tradition. He offers,

[American pragmatism's] basic impulse is a plebian radicalism that fuels an antipatrician rebelliousness for the moral aim of enriching individuals and expanding democracy. This rebelliousness, rooted in the anticolonial heritage of the country, is severely restricted by an ethnocentrism and a patriotism cognizant of the exclusion of people of color, certain immigrants, and women yet fearful of the subversive demands these excluded peoples might make and enact. (West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, 5)

At the same time pragmatism is rebellious, then, it is also concerned with suppressing the rebellions of those already situated as disenfranchised. When uncritically applied, the philosophy re-inscribes the limitations it originally sought to destroy. Upon closer examination, it appears that the blues and pragmatism share more than a place of origin. They are, effectively, responses by distinct members of the populous that have made the most of the available intellectual and cultural resources. They are those who have made lemonade from lemons. Where West has done work toward making connections between pragmatism’s role in maintaining exclusions and informing critiques of those exclusions (particularly as West places W.E.B. Dubois in the canon of American pragmatists), Glaude looks to turn a pragmatist lens on the political and social problems consistently faced by black Americans. Glaude argues that,

[...] Pragmatism, when attentive to the darker dimensions of human living (what we often speak of as the blues), can address many of the conceptual problems
that plague contemporary African American political life. How we think about black identity, how we imagine black history, and how we conceive of black agency can be rendered in ways that escape bad racial reasoning—reasoning that assumes a tendentious unity among African Americans simply because they are black, or that short-circuits imaginative responses to problems confronting actual black people. (x)

By combining pragmatism with an attention to the blues, we gain a means to both conceptualize and address issues relevant to increasing black equality. Glaude makes room for the distinction between the ideal of blackness and the realness of black people’s experiences. Here pragmatism serves as a means to not only clarify the distinction between the ideal and real, but also as a way to productively address the issues that impact people's lived experiences. As such, pragmatism is a means to equally weight the conceptual and the material, by working through the understanding that the conceptual and the material are inseparable. Further, Glaude, in evoking Ralph Ellison, takes the position that American pragmatism is in part informed by and a creation of the black experience (Glaude 5). Framing this relationship between the creation of the philosophy and the reality of the black experience in terms of language and culture, it makes sense that black peoples’ survival upon entrance into the American social and material landscape required that the present condition—the right here, right now—always inform black peoples’ actions and reactions to the white supremacist power structure.

Glaude’s framing of pragmatism also lends itself to the idea that fixing race as the starting point for identity limits the scope of what blackness or any racial
identification—as a performance or enactment—can entail. Rather, to think of identity (and knowledge of one’s self, one’s world) in terms of a response to lived experience makes possible an array of ways of being in the world. In Deweyan terms, the distinction here is between the *a priori* and the *a posterior*, where the former fixes an individual or public orientation that prefigures any engagement or transaction by a person or group, and the latter figures engagements by individuals and communities as situated responses to experienced conditions. Why does this distinction (between the priori and the posterior) matter? The distinction is the basis of the *post-soul* formation that Glaude speaks to, where “[he argues] that the conditions that called the civil rights movement into existence have been fundamentally transformed by that very movement, and that continued uncritical reference to it as a framework for black political activity blocks the way of innovative thinking about African American politics” (131). The Civil Rights Movement can be understood as an *a posterior* response that focused on improving black Americans’ lived experiences. Glaude offers that the conditions that necessitated the Movement as a response have, in turn, been altered by that response. As such, it is no longer practical (or practicable) to use the same types of responses to address present conditions of racial inequality, as the conditions of those inequalities differ from the socio-historical and political contexts in which those strategies were first devised. The conceptual landscape has changed. Power occupies different territory differently. Further, it is at present all the more difficult to rely on racial identification as a point of unification to address inequality at the present. This is not to say that racial oppression does not exist. To the contrary, the continued presence and entrenchment of black and brown poor in urban contexts (in Champaign-Urbana and
elsewhere) offers ready evidence for the continued presence of racial oppression. However, the successes of the civil rights era occlude the persistence of racial oppression.¹⁸ To continually rely on the tactics and strategies borne of the movement not only proves those approaches incompatible with present forms of oppression and exclusion, to rely on those tropes also serves the misrecognition of gains made in the past. In other words, to rely solely on strategies born of the civil rights movement in the present belies the gains made by those strategies. Yes, problems still exist. However, they are new problems that require new approaches to finding solutions.

The post-soul represents an alternate means of both representing and responding to the post-civil rights era. In rhetorical terms, it is recognition of *kairos*. As both a description of an historical period and a reference to sets of “conditions and sensibilities,” the post soul offers a means to both critically understand the current state of black politics and develop strategies for improving people’s lived experiences (Glaude 132). In describing the ambivalence of this present, Glaude offers,

> that the new phase was marked by both many African Americans’ experiencing unprecedented inclusion in American society, which altered the nature of their

¹⁸ This occlusion is furthered by the questions of who is black or what blackness is.

Obama’s first presidency was heralded as the beginning of a post-racial period in America. However, his second presidency has been met with an increase in anti-black feelings by a majority of whites (e.g., Associated Press, “Racial Attitudes Survey”). As well, there are presently more people who identify as black but do not carry associations to a legacy of anti-black oppression and white racism (e.g., Robinson, *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*).
political commitments and obligations, and by heightening levels of poverty and unimaginable violence, which circumscribed the life changes of large numbers of African American men, women, and children. (132)

Glaude’s description here is supported by my brief analysis above and in-depth discussion in Chapter 4 that address the fracturing of political unity in the local black public. Further, the variety of black political positions (always present but hidden from the dominant public) started to come into view at the end of the Civil Rights era. Locally, for example, this variation manifest as some black citizens withdrew their support during the Douglass Center standoff, while others maintained their support for a black space. It is important to note, though, that the more public display of black political opinions, at least at the local level, was a result of the gains made in the previous era. Further, as Glaude notes, as of many those who benefited the most from civil rights gains left black neighborhoods or became more conservative politically, so too did the capacity to rely on blackness as a point of unity and shared struggle decrease. Rather than concede in the face of this evidence, though, below I address some of the ways that local people have responded in this post-soul era via a more pragmatic engagement with the issues that directly affect black people’s lived experiences.

**Booker T. Washington**

Booker T. Washington Elementary School (BTW) sits at the southeast corner of Douglass Park, right at the eastern edge of the Champaign town line. The school was built in 1951 to accommodate the increased numbers of children born in the post-war era
(“Champaign Public School History”).\(^{19}\) As has been discussed in previous chapters, there was no official Jim Crow segregation in Champaign-Urbana. However, BTW was one of several schools in Champaign and Urbana that were racially segregated. Prior to 1968, white students who lived in the vicinity of BTW (and its predecessor Lawhead Elementary) “[…] were sent to nearby Columbia School, which was all-white” (Wurth “Integration took a long time”). According to local journalist Julie Wurth, all of BTW’s students and staff were black from the school’s opening until 1968, when “[BTW] became a focus of Champaign's desegregation efforts and was turned into a magnet school for the arts, to entice white families to send their children to school in north Champaign. Black students were bused to schools across the district.”\(^{20}\) However, when bussing was implemented in 1968, the results locally aligned with those nationally, such

\(^{19}\) For example, in 1940 the population of Champaign County was 70,578, but by 1950 the county population was 106,100 (Forstall *Illinois Population*). This increase in the county population was indicative of the increase in black population in Champaign-Urbana at the tail end of the Great Migration, which saw a steady increase in the numbers of black residents in the North End through the 1960s. In fact, by the 1960s the North End neighborhood, wherein Douglass Park and BTW are centrally located, was 95% Black (Social Explorer and U.S. Census Bureau “1970 Census Tract, % Black”).

\(^{20}\) The approach of using the magnet school designation to balance the racial and class distributions in Champaign Public Schools has recently been reintroduced as a key component in the reorganization of BTW and other elementary schools in Champaign.
that the practice did little to reduce the racial disparity in educational access (Prendergast).

In the summer of 1996, several black parents of children in Champaign Unit 4 schools filed initiating complaints with the Office for Civil Rights in the US Department of Education.

The initial complaints addressed student assignment and educational services provided to approximately 550 mandatorily bused African-American Students. The amended OCR [Office of Civil Rights] complaints added four other issues: system wide discrimination in student assignment, within-school segregation practices and tracking, discipline, and staff hiring and assignment. (Johnson ex. rel. Johnson v. Board of Education of Champaign)

In a move that evidenced the Office of Civil Rights’ past experience of fielding racial discrimination cases in education, in September 1996 the OCR issued a “proactive compliance review of Unit 4 to investigate the over-representation of minorities in special education classes and the under-representation of minorities in upper level courses” (Johnson). As well, the initial complaints filed by the parents were included in the review. Unit 4 responded by holding a study period and taking community input on solutions. The result was a redistricting plan that, while having some influence on the racial and class composition of school populations, did little to reduce the disparities in the educational practices that lead to community members’ initial filing of complaints.

Less than a year later, in May of 1997, community members acting as the “plaintiffs notified Unit 4 that they were contemplating the commencement of class action litigation against the District challenging […] the student assignment methods
used in 1968-97 and the Redistricting Plan” (Johnson). To avoid the litigation, both parties reached an agreement via consent degree, “a final, binding judicial decree or judgment memorializing a voluntary agreement between parties to a suit in return for withdrawal of a criminal charge or an end to a civil litigation” (Wikipedia contributors “Consent decree”).

In an of itself the use of the consent decree, as compared to a full-fledged lawsuit, was of mutual benefit to both the school district and the complainants. Unit 4 wanted to avoid a class action racial discrimination lawsuit that might potentially draw clients from 1968 through 1997. Parents of those affected and others concerned with pressing the issue of educational equity wanted to reduce the cost and use of resources that might have been necessary to fight a long legal battle (e.g., The People Who Care v. Rockford Bd. of Educ. school discrimination case cited in the Johnson v. Unit #4 legal brief). Too, the consent decree made plain the presence of systemic issues with the school system, shifting the focus away from individual acts of discrimination and toward an awareness of racism as embedded. However, while the consent decree freed up resources and energy to help make corrections to the system, the decision also required black Americans and others disenfranchised by the school board practices to rely on the good faith response of the school board that was neither legally obligated to make changes to the system, nor laden with any responsibility for intentional discrimination against black students. Further, plaintiffs lost ability to utilize litigation as a response to continued systemic discrimination.

Despite the implementation in September 1997 of the Champaign Controlled Choice Plan Memorandum of Understanding that was intended to address continued
complaints regarding the assignment practices of black students throughout the district, there were glaring inequalities in the distribution of black students in advanced instruction classes and special education (Johnson). For example, Peterkin and Lucey found in their 1998 Educational Equity Audit that, “In elementary schools, African-American students represent 36% of students but only 3% of the Gifted and Talented Population,” and that “[black] students represent 31% of the overall student population but 47% of the Special Education population” (35, 45). Black students were also “suspended at twice the rate of their white counterparts” (51). Considered collectively, this data makes apparent the practice, if not the intent, by school administration to determine the location of black students’ bodies within the schools, even as school populations were more racially diverse. Put another way, access to classroom spaces and educational engagements for black students was, in most cases, mediated by race.

As well, there was the issue of busing and the lack of available seats for black students in the schools closest to their places of residence. School desegregation consultant and researcher Dr. Michael Alves found that there was an imbalance in the availability of seating for students in K-5 schools. For example, the number of students who lived in North Champaign exceeded the number of available seats in that part of the city, such that “if all the students who resided in the north wanted to attend schools in the north, 227 would not have been able to” (Alves cited in Johnson). Further, this imbalance was noted in the 1996-97 school year and maintained through the 2001-02 school year, despite the addition of another elementary school. The persistent lack of seating in North Champaign was used to justify busing “some 546 African-American
students in the 1996-97 school year,” a practice that eventually led to the filing of a lawsuit and second consent decree in 2002.

In light of the persistent disenfranchisement of black students, “Dr. Alves strongly recommended that the District consider the feasibility of adding at least two enrollment strands in the north side by expanding Booker T. Washington School facility” (Johnson). Alves offered other justifications for the restructuring of BTW. For example, while the school was located in the most densely populated neighborhood on the north side, only 17% of students (or students’ parents) living within 1.5 miles of the school selected BTW as their first choice when given the option to attend other schools in the district.

The conflict between Unit 4 and the black community persisted throughout the years of the consent decree, which included a revision of the agreement in 2006. The community’s dissatisfaction was confirmed by all the independently gathered data. For example Peterkin, in his October 2006 comments in Monitoring Report #4 to presiding District Court Judge McDade, cited several areas that Unit 4 had not done an adequate job of clarifying and targeting goals for racial diversity, to the extent that,

At the end of the day, the Monitoring Team states that it believes that the district was largely unresponsive to the courts July 31, 2006 order in that it did not specifically address targets, steps, and responsibility for accelerating the progress of African American students as agreed under the Second Revised Consent Decree. (Peterkin in Peterkin, Lucy and Trent Monitoring Report #4 142)
Prior to the presentation of the Monitoring Report and Judge McDade’s finding that Unit 4 was noncompliant with the consent degree, the School District proposed a $66 million building bond to address the shortage of classroom space in North Champaign (Cook, “Champaign school board’s decision upsets crowd”). While those who supported the bond initiative argued that the funds would go to fulfill the school district’s obligations to both honor a district-wide school improvement referendum and fulfill the terms of the consent decree, North End residents and their supporters characterized the proposal as a violation of the spirit of the agreement (Cook, “Site for new Champaign school draws fire”). The proposed location for the new school, at the northwestern edge of the city limits, would have technically fulfilled the requirements of the consent decree to increase the number of elementary school seats north of University Ave. However, the site was so far north that it would have only qualified as a proximity school for residents of the middle and upper-middle-class subdivisions that were under development in the area. Black students from the North End would still need to be bussed to the school.

When the proposed location of the new school was announced, community members started a campaign to garner “No” votes on the referendum through approaches that evidenced both a reversion to Civil Rights tropes and a more *a priori* orientation to address this specific issue. The MLK Community Committee, which led the opposition to the referendum, was a multiracial group comprised of civil and religious leaders (Rosales, “Champaign residents vote ‘No’ for School referendum”). The group was able to garner massive support for the “no” vote by characterizing the issue as one that would affect all children. Rather than appeal to the school board or
local government—who after some back and forth leading up to the vote were each in favor of the referendum as it was proposed—the group instead appealed to the voting public to defeat the initiative. The result was a nearly 2 to 1 defeat of the referendum (Cook, “Champaign schools referendum soundly defeated”).

After the solid defeat of the referendum, a new plan was developed with community input. Avels’ earlier recommendation to expand BTW was finally enacted. During the Winter Break of the 2009-10 school year BTW was closed and all school operations and personnel were moved to an alternate location in preparation for the building’s demolition and reconstruction (Elegant, “Parents Question Proposal”). The old BTW building was demolished in the summer of 2010 (Dolinar, “Demolition”), redesigned and rebuilt in a little more than a year, and reconceived as a magnet school with a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) focus (“Unit 4 Magnets”). The school reopened in August 2011 as one of three magnet elementary schools in the Champaign School District (“Unit 4 Magnets”). In a meeting with concerned parents and community members, (former) Unit 4 Schools Superintendent Arthur Culver clarified the district’s use of “magnet” label as an indication of the school’s focused curriculum, and not, as the term has been used in the past, to designate “a selection or application process” (Elegant, “Parents Question Proposal”). In keeping with Unit 4’s School of Choice placement practices, 80 percent of students would live within 1.5 miles of the school they attend. Culver added, “If there are seats left over, [the school] will offer them to students who live in other parts of the community” (qtd. in Elegant). Those left over seats were to be used to add more racial diversity to the schools. The eventual restructuring of BTW and the other magnet elementary schools addressed both
the need for more classes and seats for elementary students and the low selection rate of the school. As well, the change to a magnet STEM focus made the school an attractive choice for students and parents who lived in the neighborhood.

Ultimately, the efforts by the community to get the school they wanted in the neighborhood speaks to a shift in the political approaches of the local public. While the need for the consent decree came from the legacy of unequal access to educational opportunities for black students, the absence of specific segregation laws remediated advocates’ strategies to earning fair treatment. Rather than approach the issue through overturning laws, North End residents and advocates focused on the lived experiences of black students as they were influenced by the *de facto* practices of the Champaign School District. Further, that material space within the black community was a key aspect of the struggle only made pragmatic approaches all the more necessary. By countering the school board’s proposal for the Boulder Ridge site, community members made explicit the connection between conceptual and material space that was a constant present in the North End. Disparities still exist in educational outcomes for black and Hispanic students. However, through the efforts of the consent decree, the issue of race is not longer invisible in Champaign Schools. In any dealings related to students’ educational successes or failures, the school district must take into account the possibility that their decisions are racially inflected. As Dewey states, “Only when the facts are allowed free play for the suggestion of new point of view is any significant conversion of conviction as to meaning possible” (3).

BTW in practice evidences a “significant conversion of conviction” in terms of what a school in the North End could offer students and parents. As one of three
magnet schools in the district, BTW offers the best that Champaign Schools have to offer students and parents ("Unit 4 Magnets"). The STEM focus inside the building and the newness of the school’s architecture are all the more visible when viewed in terms of its material and conceptual location in the North End. As the Douglass Center, which sits just to the west of the school, in the past served as a central material and conceptual location in the North End, BTW serves as an indicator of present spatial and temporal moment. Keeping with this framing, the vacant lot to the east of BTW—the former site of Dunbar Court Homes—offers some insight into the future of material and conceptual space in the North End.

**Dunbar and Dorsey**

Dunbar Court Homes and Joann Dorsey Family Homes—respectively 26 and 67-unit complexes, were built in the North End in 1952 (Dodson, “60-year-old housing complexes to be torn down”). The two-federally funded low-income housing complexes addressed the neighborhood’s increased need for affordable housing at the same time BTW Elementary opened to address the shortage of educational resources in the black community. Considering that the Douglass Community Center moved into its first permanent building in 1945, this era was important for both structural change in the North End and conceptual change in terms of where black people in the neighborhood formed a sense of community. Where the original Washington Elementary School served as the site of community’s efforts to increase educational equity, and the Douglass Center addressed the need for community and public space, Dunbar and Dorsey bore witness to the reduction of home ownership in the neighborhood and the increased need for low-
income housing in the wake of Urban Renewal initiatives in the 1960s and 70s in the North End (Community Advocacy Depot, “A Critique of Project #1”).

The spaces have consistently been overused and under-maintained. Housing Authority manager Patti Smith notes that while Dorsey was gutted and renovated in 1990, “the walls in Dunbar Court hardly have an area that hasn't been damaged in some way by a plumbing or roofing leak” (Dodson, “60 year old”). The rundown material state of the structures made easy the decision to demolish the complexes in 2011 (the same year that BTW was demolished). The Housing Authority of Champaign County (HACC) was granted federal funding to demolish and replace Dunbar and Dorsey with mixed income housing units (Bauer, “Grant sought to cover replacement of two complexes”).

Initially, most residents were excited about the opportunity to have more modern living arrangements in other locations or upon returning to the redeveloped housing cites (Safronova, “Stories from the Housing Projects”). HACC prepared to issue Section 8 vouchers to help residents with relocation, and residents prepared to vacate the residences (Bauer, “Public housing complexes may get replacements”). However, residents were soon placed in a double bind, when it became evident that the value of the HACC-issued vouchers was not enough to finance most residents’ relocation, and the demolition dates for Dunbar and Dorsey were fast approaching (Dolinar, “Soon to be displaced residents protest”). During a July 2011 protest outside the HACC offices, then Dorsey resident, community activist, and current HACC chairperson Margaret Neil stated that most families living in Dunbar and Dorsey could not find housing priced within the range of the voucher value. After meeting with some residents, HACC executive director Ed
Bland agreed to not begin demolition on Dunbar or Dorsey until all residents had relocated (Wade, “Residents: housing authority should help more with move”).

At this point, the advocacy efforts by residents seemed to be successful. However, HACC revealed that the agency already had a wait list of 400 families prior to the demolition of the housing units (Holly, “Officials confirm reserved housing vouchers”). This reality begs the question, were residents of Dunbar and Dorsey expected to relocate with the help of the vouchers and then move back in after the new units were built, or was there an intentional move by HACC to remove black and low-income people from the North End? Did this move by Bland not smack of the urban renewal efforts of the past that resulted in a massive disenfranchisement of long-time North End residents? Further, what does the dispersion of poor people do in terms of addressing poverty?

The move by HACC could be interpreted as a positive. For example, Hamilton on the Park, the proposed development to be built on the former Dunbar site, has been designed as a modern, energy efficient, mixed income site (Benoit Group, “Dunbar Court Project Narrative”). While a portion of the 36 units in the development will be set aside for low income residents, other units will be reserved for residents who can pay market value. The underlying thinking here is that if poor people are not living next door to other poor people, then they must be living next to working class and middle class people. Varying levels of income in communities is one approach to addressing what some deem “a culture of poverty.” However, poor people, through Section 8 placement, might just be relocated en masse to residences beyond the visibility of the mainstream middle class. Further, this dispersal also limits the ability for poor people to use their
spatial proximity to one another as an advantage in democratic collective action. As David Fleming argues, “the grown spatial stratification of our physical landscape-the decentralization, fragmentation, and polarization of our local geography-is both cause and effect of our increasingly impoverished political relations with one another” (ix). The result is that as poor become invisible geographically, so too are they overlooked as a group that needs political consideration.

Yet another way to analyze this set of events is to view HACC as effectively dismantling a local public via a redistribution of the poor. I maintain that the effects of the reorganization of Dunbar/Hamilton and Dorsey Projects are ambivalent. On the one hand, the reconstruction means more amenable living arrangements for poor people. This is an undeniable benefit in terms of improving the life chances for black people in the most pragmatic sense. On the other hand, the community as it existed is no more, as residents from various class backgrounds will occupy the new development. Yes, poor people, people on Section 8, the elderly, first-time homeowners, and middle class residents will all live together. Potentially, this is fertile ground for the formation of a new kind of public, one that already necessitates an action-oriented identity in the process of community formation. However, there are potentially hidden results of this type of residential arrangement. For example, there is a reduced possibility of poor citizens to meet and organize in the spaces where they live. The result is a fracture in the relationship between shared space and shared experience. That is, while residents of various class statuses may share the same space, their day-to-day lives will vary as an effect of their class orientation. For example, poor residents will continue to be directly affected by such factors as HACC funding and distribution of Section 8 vouchers. Even
if middle class residents are indirectly affected (by virtue of their neighbors being
affected), will they engage in collective action to defend poor citizens' rights to
affordable housing? Need we be reminded that these class cleavages were in part the
result of black integration into the American mainstream accompanied by middle class
flight from mixed income black neighborhoods (e.g., Wilson, Massey and Denton)? I
agree with Fleming’s assessment that

[W]e need a third alternative [to either social separation or assimilation] a practice
that acknowledges, even celebrates, conflict but also attempts to resolve that
conflict through debate, deliberation, and adjudication […] we need a public
philosophy that says: difference is normal and good; because of it, we must talk to
one another; the result of this talking may not be to our liking, but we will come
back the next day and do it all over again. (16)

Fleming’s call for a third alternative, I think, converses well with the suggestions for
more pragmatic means of engagement encouraged by Glaude (and Dewey). When I
imagine a public wherein these types of engagements, this form of “public philosophy”
mediates everyday interactions, I see the North End as a space with the potential to
embody of this form of public. Time and space will tell. The changes in the
community’s racial, cultural, spatial and economic makeup present too many variable s to
predict a definite outcome. As a way to conclude, however, I will return to my framing
concepts of race, space, and rhetoric and offer some thoughts on how writing studies as a
field might contribute to these areas.
Race, Space, and Rhetoric: A Reprise

Here I return to the frames of race, space, and rhetoric I have used in this dissertation. I will offer some thoughts on how writing studies as a field can contribute to these areas, as I express my belief that more careful considerations for how we communicate with each other is essential to the process of bringing about more balanced social relations.

At the present moment, race remains a significant factor in U.S. social relations, even as it is more variously addressed in terms of its applications, forms, and functions. Regarding Americans of African decent, there is no denying economic success and increased social visibility for some. However, these apparent successes not only reinforce the myth of meritocracy, they also obscure the entrenched position of the black urban poor. As well, those who have been displaced from the middle class as a result of the last economic crisis have less access to clear-cut evidence of the role race plays in their disenfranchisement. For both groups, the dominant social perception is that they are responsible for their own socioeconomic positions. In both politically conservative and neoliberal terms, the poor and disenfranchised are largely responsible for the lots they have been cast.

Further, the lack of a shared political language (or resorting to political rhetorics borrowed from the Black Freedom Movement) makes suspect the task (and indeed the very value) of a black public. Depending on where blackfolks are, there is a variety of the available ways of being black and performing blackness. In this historical moment, wherein black people occupy the most and least powerful positions in this nation, the response to the question, “What is black?” becomes difficult to answer. Herein lies the
difficulty of using blackness, as a socially constructed identity, as a basis of political action. To return to a problem I introduced earlier, if identity is the basis of a given social movement, then what happens to attempts at social justice based on socially constructed identities? The short response here is, not much. No disenfranchised group holds enough collective power to alter its social position without the help of outside allies and resources. In exploring the longer answer, though, I see some potential for more pragmatic, ends-oriented approaches to political action as a way to both address the ways in which identities are constituted in the context of political activity and bring about social change and more balanced racial relations.

While this dissertation has focused on a specific set of experiences in a particular space and time, I think there is also some potential to consider the ways in which not only black Americans but also members of other socially constructed categories–based on class, gender, sexual orientation, disability, for example–might benefit from a shift to a posterior orientations. Rhetorically, the shift is from an orientation that states, “We are, therefore we want,” to one that states, “We want, therefore we are.” In Deweyan terms, the shift signals the move from a private consideration of individual identity, to a more public understanding of who “we” are and how we relate to each other: “Individuals still do the thinking, desiring and purposing, but what they think of is the consequences of their behavior upon that of others and that of others upon themselves” (Dewey 24). To rethink the relation of the individual to others in this way brings about the possibility for us to better recognize shared goals as the primary way in which we address the issue of social change (For example, how might the public’s response to the last housing crisis
have been different if a connection was made between people who lost their houses and displaced residents of low-income and Section 8 housing?).

What about the relationship between shared ends and location? Does the constitution of a goal-oriented public rely on that public’s occupying a given space? The former residents of Dorsey and Dunbar Homes, for example, need housing assistance. The decision by HACC to demolish and rebuild the developments will alter both the physical space and, I argue, the conceptual space. A positive result of the redevelopment efforts will be an improvement in the material conditions of those spaces. The quality of life for residents in those developments will be much improved. However, there is an issue with the reduced number of units that will be available for low-income tenants, compared to the number of market-rate units. Too, residents have been relocated to other areas. They will no longer share the same space in the North End, no longer share the ability to meet face-to-face in order to directly address the issues that affect their lived experiences. And yet, they will still be poor and face an even steeper challenge in forming resistance to their economic and social oppression.

How then, do we conceive a public? I think one way to approach the issue of conceiving a need-based public is by placing a pragmatic a posterior orientation into conversation with the “new philosophy” for which Fleming advocates. I agree with his simple yet profound suggestions that “we must talk to one another” (Fleming16). In and of itself, the process of talking with others in the spaces we inhabit, writing and reading about the past and present experiences of people who have shared the spaces where we live, is a means to bring about some understanding of a public based on our shared
understanding of who we are, what resources we have, and what we need to do in order to improve our lives.

And what is the role of writing studies? Research in the field that addresses talking, reading, and writing outside the classroom has already contributed to an understanding of how literate activity can bring people together to address issues affecting their lives. Works like Linda Flowers’ *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* and Elanore Long’s *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Local Publics* are but a few examples of works in the field that expand our understandings of the kinds of spaces and locations that can both support literacy practices and foster citizenship and participation in local communities. I also advocate for more local, small-scale studies as a way to better understand the shifts and trajectories in the ways people communicate across publics.

Language mediates our relations to each other. The more we understand how language functions in the context of social relations, the better we can understand how those contexts are formed and how those relations are constituted. In the most fundamental way, the work of bringing about more balanced social relations starts with talking to and with others about what *is* and imagining together what *can be.*
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