(RE)BUILDING CORNERSTONES 2.0: THE ROUTES OF A CHOCOLATE CITY… *(A Spatial Justice Studio)

Project Crenshaw, Perkins & Will, 2020
The History of Portland’s African American Community, Portland Bureau of Planning, 1993

UO Portland
Winter 2021, ARCH 485/585
Spring 2021, ARCH 486/586
MWF, 1:00-4:50pm | Remote (with in-person sessions or field trips as safety allows)

- Craig L. Wilkins, Belluschi Distinguished Visiting Professor; Faculty Fellow in Design for Spatial Justice
- Cleo Davis, Visiting Assistant Professor of Practice; Faculty Fellow in Design for Spatial Justice
- Kayin Talton Davis, Visiting Assistant Professor of Practice; Faculty Fellow in Design for Spatial Justice

NOTE:
There is an associated terminal prep research seminar in the fall
ARCH 507, Tues 2:15-3:45pm

BACKGROUND
Established in 2019 by Portland-based artists and activists Cleo Davis and Kayin Talton Davis, with Spatial justice fellow Karen Kubey, the (re)BUILDING CORNERSTONES (BC) studio is a critical component of UO SAE Portland’s long-term commitment to the interrogation of spatial justice in the built environment. Focusing on one specific community for several iterations over a period of time, the studio’s objective is to establish, deepen, and expand connections with local residents while working as partners to uncover, understand, analyze, and build proposals that creatively address decades-long, systemic obstacles to the benefits of space and place put upon Black/African American communities. The Davises identified the historic Black/African American inner North/NE Portland community of Albina as the initial site of
engagement. Specifically created to develop proposals combining architecture and historic preservation grounded in community histories and policy research, two sites were chosen to explore prototypes for residential anti-displacement strategies – the Mayo House and the Historical Black Williams Art Project plaza.

This iteration of the BC studio embraces their belief that activist-inspired investigations are opportunities to combine independent design and development research with ongoing community input. Taking advantage of Portland’s new residential infill legislation, we will position our work as part of a network of efforts and partners operating in Albina that include, among others, the Albina Vision Trust and the integrated architecture/urban design firm El Dorado which will at times provide insights and commentary on our work as well as technical support toward the comprehensive studio requirements.

BRIEF
In their book, Chocolate Cities: The Black Map of American Life, co-authors Marcus Anthony Hunter and Zandria F. Robinson define their concept of “Chocolate Cities” as

“a perceptual, political, and geographic tool and a shorthand to analyze, understand, and convey insights born from predominantly Black neighborhoods, communities, zones, towns, cities, districts, and wards; they capture the sites and sounds Black people make when they occupy place and form communities.”

In short, Chocolate Cities are continuous, interconnected sites of Black migration and cultural production catalyzed by systemic spatial injustice. Understood as “cities-within-cities”, exemplars include Harlem in NY, Black Bottom in Detroit and Nashville, Bronzeville in Chicago, Treme in New Orleans, Shaw in DC, Greenwood in Tulsa, Central District in Seattle, the Ville in St. Louis, the Hill District in Pittsburgh, and Orange Mound in Memphis to name but a few.

One can find Chocolate Cities scattered all across the expanse of the nation’s landscape. They remain recognizable – sometimes intact, sometimes in tatters – but at all times in mission and memory. As Black bodies in America are often tenuously tethered, the roots of these “cities-within-cities” are found in the routes Black bodies have traveled to arrive. A close examination of those roots reveals specific spatial languages, economic systems, rituals, traditions, legacies, expectations, aspirations, and methods and objects of cultural production that are unique to their locations but also share much with similar locations along the routes to and fro. Both can be used to remember, rebuild, and repopulate these Chocolate Cities, providing “new glasses” for those blinded by the lenses of “ghetto”, “slum”, “hood”, and “concrete jungle.”

INTENT
Our BC Studio will seek to properly situate Albina within that network of Black cultural routes. Focusing on community development and economic empowerment through placemaking, we’ll intentionally restructure the default power dynamics of most spatial explorations that situate the needs and desires of dominant cultures at its center. Understanding cities as intersections of power and place, our work will position the Chocolate City as the primary cultural actor on this stage.

PROJECT
Studio participants will be charged with producing unique, innovative, and comprehensive proposals that facilitate local empowerment in general, and local African American empowerment in particular. Working both in teams and individually, for three specific sites students will have the opportunity to choose between three project types:
● The expansion of the Mayo House as an arts hub, studio, archive, and intergenerational community space
● 2-3 new small-scale housing prototypes for various living arrangements and conditions
● A live/work daycare & early education center prototype

The final deliverable will be in the form of a project proposal that includes a comprehensive architectural design, budget, and community-based development strategy; one that is easily disseminated and accessible to the residents surrounding the chosen site.

FURTHER NOTE: Class sessions may be recorded and/or otherwise documented. Also, student work will become part of a larger, on-going project and published in part at the end of the studio as well as in its entirety at the completion of the long-term community project.