How Race Dictates Space
Alexis Apparicio
Ohio University
Abstract

Colorblindness is a way to view race relations. It rests on the idea that the refusal to acknowledge race can better race relations. However, the refusal to acknowledge race and in consequence the results of racism we perpetuating the very system we are attempting to change. The system of race has created racialized spaces throughout the United States. Colorblindness solidifies the spaces that have been created and thus it is imperative to understand how colorblindness helps define space.

Keywords: Spatial Imaginary, Race, Space, Colorblindness, Racism
Introduction

One of my favorite web series is *Unwritten Rules* by inkspot entertainment. This series based off the novel “40 Hours and an Unwritten Rule: The Diary of a Nigger, Negro, Colored, Black, African-American Woman” discussing the challenges that Black women face in the workplace. I discovered this web series during my first year at Ohio University and it became a comedic stress reliever from the all-white environment I found myself living in. As a young Black woman on a predominantly white institution’s (PWI) campus I found myself isolated and constricted. Prior to enrolling at Ohio University, I had always been in majority minority environments. My elementary schools were extremely diverse; my friend group included an immigrant from Mexico, a first-generation Muslim American, and a Caucasian girl whose parents were deaf. At a very young age I was exposed to all the different forms of diversity. I was one-half first generation immigrant, and one-half native myself.

In this environment, I was rarely ousted. My high school was very similar; a majority Black school located in Linden area of Columbus, Ohio. Statistically students of my background and in this district, were not supposed to excel academically and go on to prestigious schools. However, my alma mater Columbus Alternative High School defied the odds and produced ivy league scholars year after year. In these spaces, race did not dictate possibilities. It was more so embraced rather than used as a means of control and suppression. However, race at predominantly white institutions do tend to dictate space.

Many scholars have argued that this notion of racism and the use of racial categories to define space and privileges is outdated and irrelevant. However, from my own experiences I have been able to see how race does in fact dictate space. Many first-year students at Ohio
University are involved in Learning Communities. These groups are comprised of 10-15 students in the same major who during their first semester will take 5 of the same classes, one including a general seminar class to ensure that students have the skills, knowledge, and resources to successfully acclimate to college life. My learning community group was comprised of about 12 political science majors; myself, 2 black men, 3 white women, and the majority were white men. In a learning community students spend a lot of time together both in and outside the classroom. We were required to attend workshop, socials, study tables, and of course classes.

Towards the middle of the semester my learning community began to meet regularly for study sessions for our upcoming midterms. We were reviewing concepts for our introductory political science class as the midterm was just days away. Round table style several of my classmates asked my colleagues for their notes and insight on these concepts. However, I noticed that myself and my Black colleagues were never asked for our input. This continued for several study sessions.

This incident along with innumerous others during my freshman year became a huge stressor and affected me mentally and in consequence my academics. I often found myself becoming hypersensitive to the racial microaggressions occurring around me such as finding myself in a row all by myself in a full lecture hall or being cold called on when discussion Black issues. These incidents were depicted in a professional environment on Unwritten Rules. I found myself in a state of déjà vu watching Racey, the main character, navigate everyday life in a predominantly White office. This web series addressed the problems that many Black people face when entering a while space, which is understanding the unspoken behavioral code of shared spaces. Unwritten Rules was a way for me to laugh to keep from crying. I was struggling
to assimilate into the white environment I was occupying for 4 years. This thesis will attempt to share the unspoken code and unwritten rules of how race dictates space.

Research Question

Knowing that the White and Black Spatial Imaginaries exist my question is: **How does colorblindness help to define racialized space?** I plan to structure my argument around the policies that have explicitly and implicitly separated Blacks and Whites. In due course, I hope to explain that the enforcement of the Black Spatial Imaginary has been embedded in American culture and politics through legislation and practice dating back to slavery and is still prevalent today despite our belief in a colorblind America. My thesis will examine the origins of the White Spatial Imaginary through understanding perceptions of race in the past and today as antiquated stereotypes and misconceptions of the opposite race are the fundamental beliefs for racial separatism.

I will then analyze the actual policies put into place. Compiling local and federal legislation for the basis of separate spaces are essential to understanding the concept of the differing spatial imaginaries. Otherwise, the White and Black Spatial Imaginaries would just be a theory. I will begin with describing the origins of racially separated institutions, their desegregation, and their current state. I will evaluate personal experiences on campus through primary documents and some personal testimony. Then I will discuss the impact of racialized spaces.

Addressing how colorblindness helps to define racialized space is important because many scholars, policy makers, media personnel, etc. claim that we are in a post-racial era. Race is no longer an issue that needs to be addressed by government agencies or individuals because
our society has become colorblind. Colorblindness allows us to people for their character and there is no acknowledgement of race. This idea of colorblindness is prevalent on Ohio University’s campus. One example of this is that supporters of Donald Trump and his foreign policy which focuses on building a wall to deport illegal immigrants and separate them from Americans is not seen as inherently racial. Although we know that the people Mr. Trump would be deporting are not White, his supporters believe that this is a matter of national security and economics rather than the manifestation of White supremacy in 2016. This thesis will attempt to prove that the concept of colorblindness is invalid and beliefs such as building a wall is indeed reinforcing the White Spatial Imaginary which values hegemonic spaces.

Chapter one will define and outline the basic terms and arguments that are crucial to examining the issues of race and space. Chapter two will discuss these indicators of the White Spatial Imaginary and their impact on the racial geography on a national scale. In Chapter three will discuss how these spatial imaginaries are implemented on a microlevel at predominantly white institutions, specifically Ohio University. Chapter four will explain the lasting impacts of the United States racial geography. The conclusion will address irrefutable findings and potential solutions for creating new, or reformulating existing spaces.
Chapter 1: Defining Race, Space, and Colorblindness

Race

Karen Fields explains in chapter one of *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, that race and racism although unreal has very real consequences (Fields, 2014). She goes so far to compare race to witchcraft in that although witchcraft was never proven to be true the consequences of being accused of witchcraft were real and harmful. Fields thus explains that the creation of racecraft is very similar. Race classification can be very problematic because there is not universal system to determine what race a person belongs to. Jacobson explains how scientists tried to explain differences amongst people due to race such as certain qualities and behaviors were a characteristic specific to their race (1999). Although many scientists reached similar conclusions in which race was superior their classifications were extremely different.

For example, Franz Boas concluded that there were “divisions” of mankind; Negroid, Australoid, Caucasian, and Mongoloid (Jacobson, 1999, 101). However, there are minor divisions of ethnicities within those 4 categories (Jacobson, 1999, 101). Yet in 1943 the Cranbrook Institute of Science divided race as; African Negro (Black Race), American Indian (Yellow Race), West Asiatic (White Race), South Asiatic (Yellow Race), North European (White Race), and East Asiatic (Yellow Race) (Jacobson, 1999, 108). This attempt by Cranbrook is much more specific compared to Boas. In 2015, a study simplified race even more and gave participants two options to choose from; Black and Nonblack (Penner, 2015, 1020).

When given these choices, some may find it easier or more difficult to self-identify depending on the number of choices given. However, what is more problematic than the number of choices is the wording of the choices. In one example race is classified by color, one by a
scientific name, and one was both color and region of origin. Lastly, another problem with these systems is that it doesn’t not account for people to identify as mixed race. Thompson discusses this as an issue that needs to be addressed nationally in the census (2012).

For the purposes of this thesis Blacks will used to identify African Americans brought to the United States as enslaved person in the late 1500s. They were often brought to the Virgin Islands and then traded up to the main land. This group has been historically discriminated against for being a nonwhite race and have therefore faced the consequences of governmental and social actions. American Whiteness and the spatial imaginary attached does not rely on how long a group has been in the United States but rather how the government deems them capable of assimilating to American civic national. Under the Roosevelt administration, American civic nationalism was a core value. Roosevelt believed that “the nation could only succeed as a carefully ordered and disciplined entity” (Gerstle, 2002, p. 43). Therefore, uniting the nation with shared values and freedoms was of upmost importance. This could be achieved through social and educational practices (Aoki, 2006, p. 328).

However, this proved to be problematic for minorities. Blacks and certain immigrant groups were essentially locked out of this civic society. Due to their race they were deemed to be unfit for self-government. However, per Wright and Wand, nationhood can be classified as civic or ethnic (Wright, 2012, p. 470). This is shown during Roosevelt’s administration when immigrants allied themselves with the United States even though the government “stigmatized them as racially inferior” (Gerstle, 2002, p. 115). However, African Americans though they had been here since the 1500s did not receive a legitimate political voice in the U.S. until 1965 because Blacks were not considered “true members of the national family” (Quigley, 158).
This desire for inclusion drove Blacks to join in wartime efforts. W.E.B. DuBois stated “First your Country, then your rights” in the NAACP’s *The Crisis* magazine which helped drive Black enlistment (Katzenelson, 2005, p. 83). Furthermore, the U.S. made a push as well with the Double V campaign, “victory at home, victory abroad”, to which Blacks couldn’t turn down the promise of full citizenship. This dream grew tired as the decades passed with none of the promises of victory at home coming to fruition and Black leaders such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King began to advocate against Black involvement in “America’s War”.

**Colorblindness**

Bonilla-Silva explains that racism is defined differently amongst racial groups, “for most Whites racism is prejudice, for most people of color racism is systemic or institutionalized.” (p. 8, 2003) This point of difference will become crucial for future arguments about how race takes space. Charles Mills argues that the Racial Contract

> “creates a world in their [Whites] cultural image, political states differentially favoring their interests, an economy structured around the racial exploitation of others, and a moral psychology… skewed consciously or unconsciously toward privileging them, taking the status quo of differential racial entitlement as normatively legitimate, and not to be investigated further.” (Mills, p. 40, 1997)

Colorblindness is the idea that race is not a factor in decision making both at a micro and macro level in society. However, many critical race theorists have explained that colorblindness is in it of itself a form of racism. Colorblind racism developed as a new racial philosophy in the 1960s (Bonilla, 2003). Colorblindness allows for the differing opinions in what constitutes
 HOW RACE DICTATES SPACE

racism. Bonilla sums it up best by stating “colorblindness is slippery, apparently contradictory, and often subtle.” (Bonilla, p. 101, 2003)

Space

In the creation of American Whiteness very strict definitions of racial separation were applied. The legal implication of racial separation reached its peak once the Supreme Court of the United States reached its decision in the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896. Homer Plessy a man who was 1/8th black or an “octofoon” challenged the South’s Jim Crow Laws when he was thrown off a train in New Orleans for sitting in the “White’s Only” car (Shaw, 2014, 9). The decision by the Supreme Court upheld the Jim Crow system by establishing that although the constitution calls for equal protection under the law regardless of race it is perfectly legal to have separate facilities if the facilities are separate but equal.

This doctrine protected American Whiteness by creating very strictly enforced racialized spaces. Although the de jure segregation only applied to public entities such as schools, transportation, etc. The effects carried over into de facto segregation in which policies such as redlining neighborhoods ensured racially pure spaces. Sundown Towns were created in which the saying for blacks in these spaces was “Don’t let the sun set on you!” (Esquibel, 2011, 1). Blacks although allowed to work in certain spaces were not allowed to live there. They were even threatened by whites living in Sundown Towns that if caught in the wrong area after dark they would become victims to violence.

The United States lived by this doctrine until the 1950s when 13 people came together to challenge the Court again. Brown v. Board of 1954 struck down separate but equal when the court stated that “separate is inherently unequal” (Lightfoot, 2006). Today’s political
climate is reminiscent of that the post Reconstruction Era. Discourse focused on the separation of people is one that we haven’t heard openly discussed since the late 1960s before segregation ended. However, the idea of separated spaces did not completely disappear from American politics. George Lipsitz introduces us to how America has been separated by race even after Jim Crow fell through his discussion of the White Spatial Imaginary and the Black Spatial Imaginary (Lipsitz, 2011).

These races interact in discursive spaces, which are public spaces that allow for a temporary intersection of the races in which Blacks use to protest the White Spatial Imaginary of homogenized spaces. Lipsitz uses Louis Armstrong attending a parade in which blacks and whites are present as an example of a discursive space. However, this can occur anywhere, a sidewalk, classroom, residence hall, etc. One of the best examples of this are Black students attending predominantly white institutions (PWI).

The Black Spatial Imaginary creates specific spaces for Black expressive culture which include places such as churches and barbershops. These spaces are not policed by Whites and therefore Blacks can create and practice their own culture without being subjected to scrutiny of hegemony which is White culture. This lack of policing by Whites is safe, which is of upmost importance to the Black Spatial Imaginary. In the Armstrong example, at his age Armstrong could not freely travel throughout the city but the band allowed him to see the city. Vagrancy laws were put into place to restrict the movement Blacks outside of their spaces.

Modern day examples of this are Broadway Cruising in Louisville, Kentucky or Urban Beach Weekend in Florida. These events were manifestations of Black expressive culture that allowed Blacks to enjoy free movement not granted to them any other time of the year. However, these events have been restricted. Urban Beach Weekend in Florida has been deemed so
threatening that Urban Beach goers, Blacks, are only allowed to use one of the two bridges to enter and exit the city of South Beach. They are also being targeted with increased license plate scanning. In Louisville, Broadway Cruising has been deemed disruptive and dangerous and is now under constant police surveillance with police blockades. This is because spaces of Black expressive culture are always fleeting. These spaces are temporary and contained to specific days, times, and areas. Lipsitz outlines the manifestations of the White Spatial Imaginary by highlighting how Blacks are confined to the plantation, the prison, the sharecropper’ cabin, and the ghetto (Lipsitz, 201, p. 52).
Chapter 2: Space Taking Shape (National Policies)

In the creation of American Whiteness very strict definitions of racial separation were applied. The legal implication of racial separation reached its peak once the Supreme Court of the United States reached its decision in the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896. Homer Plessy a man who was 1/8th black or an “octofoon” challenged the South’s Jim Crow Laws when he was thrown off a train in New Orleans for sitting in the “White’s Only” car (Shaw, 2014, 9). The decision by the Supreme Court upheld the Jim Crow system by establishing that although the constitution calls for equal protection under the law regardless of race it is perfectly legal to have separate facilities if the facilities are separate but equal.

This doctrine protected American Whiteness by creating very strictly enforced racialized spaces. Although the de jure segregation only applied to public entities such as schools, transportation, etc. The effects carried over into de facto segregation in which policies such as redlining neighborhoods ensured racially pure spaces. Sundown Towns were created in which the saying for blacks in these spaces was “Don’t let the sun set on you!” (Esquibel, 2011, 1). Blacks although allowed to work in certain spaces were not allowed to live there. They were even threatened by whites living in Sundown Towns that if caught in the wrong area after dark they would become victims to violence. The United States lived by this doctrine until the 1950s when 13 people came together to challenge the Court again. Brown v. Board of 1954 struck down separate but equal when the court stated that “separate is inherently unequal” (Lightfoot, 2006). However, segregation had become essential to one’s lifestyle for American Whites.

It has taken generations to strike down de jure segregation practices. Yet and still there are still policies in place creating similar racialized spaces, specifically in regards to mass
incarceration of black men. Mass incarceration is a practice of de jure segregation as it is the regulation of Black bodies through laws and policies targeting Blacks.

In the 1970s President Nixon’s War on Drugs was argued to be a direct backlash of the Civil Rights Movement. Criminality replaces the discourse of race as a form of dog whistle politics. Accordingly, Nixon campaigned for law and order, subsequently President Nixon doubled the federal budget for law enforcement and declared the War on Drugs as public enemy #1. This approach is critiqued for being handled as a criminal issue rather than a health issue both by intellectuals in the documentary “13th” well as in the Black Silent Majority by Michael J. Fortner. The War on Drugs was amplified by President Reagan in the 1980s as he makes it a literal war in neighborhoods of color by equipping local police forces with military grade weapons for drug raids. Consequently, funding was cut for institutions such as education and welfare, while millions were spent on the construction of new prisons.

By 1985, the War on Drugs reinforced the image of Black criminality through overrepresentation in the media through shows like COPS. A new term comes about to describe Black criminals, “super-predators”, and support for stricter punishments is supported by White and Black communities. Some of the bills that resulted from this include: 3 Strikes, on your third felony you will automatically receive life in prison; Mandatory Minimums, which take discretion away from judges and prescribes a sentencing; and Truth in Sentencing, which requires felons to serve 85% of their sentence. One of the most impactful pieces of legislation is the 1994 Federal Crime pushed by President Bill Clinton which was a $30,000,000 expansion of the prison system, the introduction of 100,000 new officers, and new incentives for arrests and convictions.

Mass incarceration exists because of its profitability. This can be explained by the connection of Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) to numerous crime bills and private
corporations that benefit from a high prison population. Companies such as JC Penney’s and Victoria Secret have used prison labor in previous years to produce their products. The experts also begin to unveil other systemic issues with the criminal justice system such as the shocking statistic that 97% of people in jail took a plea bargain due to the threat of being punished more harshly for going to trial. Experts also predict the upcoming issues of parole that will impact our communities.

Mass incarceration reeks of the White Spatial Imaginary which desires to regulate Black bodies to prison or the plantation but in today’s prison system it is hard to decipher the two. Michelle Alexander notes in numerous speaking engagements that there are more Black men imprisoned or on probation than there were enslaved in 1850. Therefore, to understand how mass incarceration could reach today’s peak we must explore the factors that contributed to its development.

Lipsitz identifies the plantation and sharecropper’s cabin as visible representations of the enforcement of the White Spatial Imaginary. In 1518 the first African Americans arrived in America as servants, soldiers, and slaves of the Spanish. The first slaves of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade arrived in 1619 in Port Comfort, Virginia. Prior to the 17th century, the Europeans who moved to America used indentured servitude as one of the main means of providing labor. The system seemed to be highly effective when first introduced because it provided incentives to the master and the servant, as well as increasing the population of the colonies. It was first introduced as means to keep up with the cultivation of tobacco, which was the only thing
keeping the Jamestown settlement afloat. However, the turnover rate of indentured servants was high and the plantations needed a constant supply of workers in order to keep up with their crops.

Eventually, the plantation owners started looking at the Caribbean and their model of slavery. They began to see that ultimately; enslaved labor was more economically sound than labor with compensation. The shift from indentured servitude to slavery was a gradual one. Punishments for indentured servants started becoming more severe. For example, if an indentured servant were to run away before his contract was finished, he could be sentenced to service for life, therefore making him a slave.

Ultimately, once plantation owners realized that they could have a continuous supply of labor without paying a cent out of pocket, they decided to take advantage of it because they knew using enslaved labor could help them reach great financial success. These enslaved Africans were victims of chattel slavery in which they were no longer considered to be human and were treated as cattle. These persons could be sold, inherited, legally confiscated, traded, and even won through gambling. African slaves were subjected to seasoning which was a disciplinary process intended to modify the behavior and attitude of slaves as well as make them effective laborers. The purpose of seasoning was to emotionally and psychologically “break in” new slaves.

Laws were implemented to legalize and protect the institution of this racial caste system. In 1662 in Virginia, enslaved status is clearly differentiated based on race when colonial law decrees that enslavement is for life. In 1662 Virginia reverses the presumption of English law that states that a child takes on the status of the father and enacts law that makes the status of children depended on the status of the mother, again solidifying enslaved status. In 1667 VA declares that baptism can no longer free a slave from bondage thereby abandoning Christian
traditions. In 1670 the Massachusetts legislature passes law that enables citizen to sell enslaved children which resulted in the separation of families. Any form of resistance to the system of slavery often resulted in physical punishments such as whippings, dismembering of limbs, branding and even death. These are just a handful of examples of how race regulated Blacks to the plantation.

After the emancipation of enslaved persons Blacks faced a new set of challenges; Black Codes and Jim Crow. Black Codes were legal acts and state constitutional amendments enacted by ex-confederates to restrict the liberties of freed slaves. In general, Black codes restricted where Blacks could live, regulated their work habits even arresting and imprisoning them if they quit their jobs, prohibited Blacks from protesting against Whites, limited Black mobility and overall freedoms, and prohibited interracial marriages. Hale argues “the culture of segregation made race dependent on space” (Hale, 1999, p. 228).

These codes were enforced by the American institution of lynching, which can be defined as an act of terror to spread fearing amongst blacks to maintain White supremacy in the economic, social and political spheres. Generally, lunching consisted of public mutilation, dismemberment, torture, burning, hanging, and murder by mob. Lynching became a social gathering in the South. Whites would travel from across the country to view and participate in lynchings. Many sent postcards of the victim to their folks back home or even took body parts as souvenirs. The idea of lynching protected “pure and homogenous spaces” by removing and marginalizing “impure populations” (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 29) Furthermore, lynchings “denied that any space was black space, even the very bodies of African Americans were subject to invasion by white” (Hale, 1999, p. 229).
Even with the culture of racial violence, Blacks were able to succeed and thrive in this environment. Affluent African-Americans like Madam CJ Walker and Booker T. Washington as well as scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois worked diligently for the upward mobility of Blacks. However, this forward progression upset Whites and thus the culture of segmentation was created “in large part to counter black success, to make a myth of absolute racial difference, to stop rising” (Hale, 1998, p. 21).

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 was an attempt to reintegrate veterans into society. Through this act over $95 billion of federal spending went towards veterans (Katzenelson, 2005, p. 113). This act was created by President Roosevelt to prevent any economic damages that could occur due to mass number of veterans returning home from war. When the bill was introduced it excited many Blacks for it would provide for upward mobility through education and wealth accumulation. The bill did provide for some improvements of blacks. For example, enrollment in southern historically black colleges and universities grew by 44,000 from 1940-1947. Over 1.3 million Black veterans participated in at least one aspect of the G.I. bill which was greater than white veterans (Humes, 2006).

Although the bill helped to elevate veterans into the middle class it was exclusively for Whites (Katzenelson, 2005, p. 114). Katzenelson states that the “veteran status that black soldiers has earned was placed at the discretion of parochial intolerance”, meaning on the surface the bill was equal, yet in practice Jim Crow was in the fine print of the bill. Blacks were not able to benefit from the act’s educational and job placement portions. This was in part due to the lack of
Black councilors (Onkst, 1998). Most Blacks beneficiaries were pushed into vocational work rather than attending a four-year college or university (Humes, 2006). In October of 1946 some 6,500 former soldiers had been placed in nonfarm jobs; 86% of skilled and semiskilled jobs were filled by whites, while 92% of blacks filled unskilled jobs. In a congressional investigation into local Veterans’ Affairs Offices it was found that programs were abusive and preyed upon black veterans in need (Humes, 2006). The bill increased educational attainment, through stipends, for black men born outside of the Southern United States by 0.4 years of college, however black veterans in the South made very few gains. Blacks choosing to attend university in the South could only choose from 100 public and private institutions. Of those 100 institutions, many of these colleges were junior colleges and the highest degree attainable was not even a B.A. Even the historically black colleges and universities in the South were ill-equipped to accommodate the influx of veterans (Picker). In fact, the G.I. Bill widened rather than closed the economic and educational disparities between blacks and whites (Kotz, 2005).

Through the denial loans to buy houses or start business that were protected by the G.I. Bill because the loans were not cash but rather demanded guaranteed collateral which many Blacks did not have (Onkst, 1998, p. 522). In New York and New Jersey less than 100 of the 67,000 mortgages backed by the G.I. Bill supported home purchases by nonwhites (Kotz 2005). Residential ownership was deemed an economic security during this time for whites (Katznelson, 2005, p. 116).
The issue of housing was exacerbated by redlining and restrictive covenants which ensure racially homogenized spaces. In the 1917 Buchanan v. Warley case the United States Supreme Court struck down a Louisville city ordinance which legalized the practice of redlining. Buchanan, a white person, sold a house to Warley, a black person in Louisville. Louisville ordinance prohibited Warley from living in the property due to the block having a majority of white residents (8 out of 10 houses were occupied by whites). Buchanan sued Warley to complete the sale stating that the ordinance violated the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The first section of the ordinance “to Prevent Conflict and Ill Feeling Between the White and Colored Races in the City of Louisville 1914” reads:

“Section 1- it is made unlawful for any colored person to move into and occupy as a residence, place of abode, or to establish and maintain as a place of public assembly, any house upon any block upon which a greater number of houses are occupied as residences, places of abode, or places of public assembly by white people than are occupied as residences, places of abode, or places of public assembly by colored people.”

Yet and still redlining existed well into the late 1960s and we still see the effects today. In a CBS Special Report entitled Black Power White Backlash. In the opening scenes of this report we are exposed to the height of colorblindness in which Christy Berkos, Cicero Town Attorney, states that “The negro is not the problem, the problem is what negro connotates, what it stands for. The pigment of skin isn’t the problem, the problem is that the negro is this country today stands for; venereal disease, prostitution, the numbers racket, and crime” (CBS, 1966). This is a
prime example of a colorblind response. Cicero was referred to as the Selma of the North by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. due to the need for confrontation in the town (CBS, 1966). In 1951 when a Black family moved into an apartment in Cicero other residents formed a mob and began throwing the family’s furniture out of the window and then burned the items in a bonfire outside of the building. The National Guard was called in to restore order and up until 1966 no Black family attempted to move to Cicero since the episode. Cicero is a textbook example of what happened when Blacks attempted move into restricted spaces.

In the 1970s, when studies showed that the worst housing problem afflicting low-income people was no longer substandard housing, but the high percentage of income spent on housing. Thus, Congress passed the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 which amended the Housing Act of 1937. The new act established a program of community development block grants, to amend and extend laws relating to housing and urban development, and for other purposes. Through time the Housing Act became known as Section 8. Section 8 authorized the payment of rental housing assistance to private landlords on behalf of approximately 3.1 million low-income households in the United States. The largest part of the section is the Housing Choice Voucher program which pays a large portion of the rents and utilities of about 2.1 million households. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development manages the Section 8 programs. This act created another racialized space, the ghetto. In All Our Kin, anthropologist Carol Stack examines Section 8 housing using the pseudonym “The Flats”. The subtitle of the book is “strategies for survival in a Black community”, thus foreshadowing the isolating and impoverished conditions Blacks have been regulated to.
Chapter 3: Personal Space

When we begin to think about how colorblindness takes place in our personal lives one of the easiest ways to display colorblind racism is our network. Most people’s friends are of the same race, and it is more common for Blacks to have White friends than for Whites to have Black friends. In Bonilla-Silva’s interviews he has found that whites typically inflate their reports on friendship with Blacks (Bonilla-Silva, p. 155, 2003). Some may blame it on racial make-up of neighborhoods, and thus educational institutions however it has been proven that in even in racially diverse communities Whites social network is still overwhelming White. Furthermore, Whites who have had friendships with Blacks tend to lose the relationship “after the reason for the formal interaction ends”, such as a job, class, club, etc. (Bonilla, p. 159, 2003) This phenomenon is known as hypersegregation.

However, this idea of being a product of our environment in regards to have racially monolithic friend groups may have a valid point. For example, at Ohio University Black students make up less than 5% of the student population, for faculty and staff the number is even lower. Therefore, a student is more likely to have an international student in their network than a Black domestic student. The question is how did we get here? Well as previously mentioned the fallout of the G.I. Bill’s discrimination in benefit distribution plays a large part in our geographical make up. The dispersal of resources has limited where Blacks can occupy space and in a cyclical manner, when Blacks occupy White spaces there is hypersegregation amongst the groups. The zoning restrictions of where Blacks could live and go to school ultimately affected the quality of education that Black children would receive as a result of the divesting in Black occupied neighborhoods in the form of White Flight and the creation of private and suburban schools. For example, in 1980 approximately 25,000 minority students entered high school in Chicago. In
four years, only 9,500 graduate and of those graduates only 2,000 were able to read at grade level (Steel, 1992). Also, restrictions

At Ohio University, we see this hypersegregation take place through the formation of student organizations and the right to specific spaces on campus. The following descriptions have been pulled from the University’s OrgSync portal which is an online student involvement database. Some Black student organizations include the Black Student Programming Board (BSCPB), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Black Student Union (BSU). These organizations purpose range from “exposing others to the culture, thoughts, and perspectives of African American and multicultural students throughout the Ohio University community”, to “to spread awareness and fight against racial injustice to take action and create social change at Ohio University”, to “to build a cohesive bond among the African American student community at Ohio University.” These organizations have similar goals for what they want to accomplish, however what they all have in common is the fact that all three of these organizations meet in the University’s Multicultural Center.

The Multicultural Center “serves as a place where cultural teaching and learning are the focus of all programs and activities. Its focus is intercultural, and provides a place where members of the university community, representing a variety of backgrounds, participate in programs and activities. All programming for the Center is designed to increase human understanding through the study and expression of culture” (BSCP, 2017). The Multicultural Center is home to Black Alumni Reunion Weekend and Homecoming events, guest lectures, and a space in which Black students feel comfortable enough to gather both every day and in times of crisis. Although the Multicultural Center is purposed to serve all students, Black students have had to claim this space as their own, or make it a “Taken Place” (Lipsitz, 2011, p. 52)
Chapter 4: The Impact

A Black college student having to balance both the rigor of academia as well as racism and colorblindness can take a toll on one’s mental health. As mentioned in the introduction I too have struggled with this balancing act. Fortunately, I found coping mechanisms to allow me to make it to graduation. However, for many Black students this is not the case. Black students face higher dropout rates in college due to negative emotional and physical stress responses, and depression as a result of extended exposure to microaggressions (Stambaugh, 2015, p. 193). 70% of all Black students who enroll at four-year institutions drop out at some point, while only 45% of their White counterparts drop out (Steele, 1992). This is evident on Ohio University’s campus as Black males are the least retained group at the university. Thus, the African American Male Initiative (AAMI) was created to respond and combat this phenomenon. AAMI is an extension of the Office of Multicultural Student Access and Retention whose sole purpose to retain multicultural students at Ohio University. The office attempts to do so by providing students with peer mentors who conduct bi-weekly one-on-one meetings with multicultural first-year students, as well as providing first-year students with resources such as scholarships, free tutoring, and targeted workshops to ensure their success.

The toll on a student’s mental health can be gauged through some national and local surveys. The JED Foundation conducted a national survey of 1,500 first-year students across multiple colleges and universities. This survey found that 50% of White students felt more academically prepared than their peers compared to only 36% of Black students (Green, 2016). Over 75% of Black college students reported that they tend to keep their feelings about the difficulty of college to themselves (Green, 2016). In a local campus climate survey conducted by the Ohio University NAACP Chapter, participants were asked a series of questions ranging from
their racial background, whether they believe racism is an issue at Ohio University, to if they witnessed or been victim or racist incidents. 82% of respondents stated that they believe racism is still an issue on Ohio University’s campus. Of the black respondents 98% of those students agreed with this statement. When asked if they had witnessed/experienced racism at Ohio University 48% of all respondents said “yes”, 68% of black respondents said “yes”. Finally, when asked who committed these acts 95% of respondents said these racist acts were committed by fellow students.

These feelings in conjunction with increased publicity on microaggressions on campuses across the nation, and frequent occurrence of police brutality against Blacks of all ages sparked numerous movements on predominantly white campuses. Students on campuses such as Princeton, University of Missouri, University of Michigan, and innumerous others protested and confronted university administration about their role in fostering an environment in which racism was tolerated. At Princeton students demanded that the university remove Woodrow Wilson’s name from campus buildings,

“I don’t think that you as a white person understand what it’s like to walk past a building or to be studying in a school or to have it on your diploma from a school that was built on the backs of and by your people. I don’t want to see that. I do not want to sit in Wilcox hall and enjoy my meal and look at Woodrow Wilson, who would not have wanted me here” (Green, 2016).

The creation and consistent perpetuation of these racialized spaces through the reproduction colorblind racism has created and extremely polarizing environment. Colorblind racism has created an issue for universities and companies alike given that the population is becoming majority-minority.
Conclusion

Author Roxane Gay addresses this as the “Racism we all carry” in her collection of essays titles *Bad Feminist*. Gay explains how there are unspoken rules of racism (Gay, 2014, p. 292). In which although we have racist thoughts we do not always act upon them. However, when we do we are revealing our secret racist selves (Gay, 2014, p. 293). Throughout this thesis we have debunked the myth of colorblindness as being a progressive form of addressing race relations. However, the fallout of colorblindness is very real particularly regarding the spaces we occupy. What needs to be addressed now is how do we resolve these racialized spaces and the issues that they have created?

An obvious solution is to get rid of colorblindness and racism altogether. However, as we know racism is ingrained in American society. Our country was built on the backs of those subjected to the gruesome treatment of racial oppression and dehumanization. It is difficult find a solution that will rid us of generations of societal norms, beliefs, and our human instinct to categorize things and people. However, what we can do is bring visibility to the issue of racism, and other isms, through cultural competency classes. The idea behind cultural competency classes is to rid students of their blinders when it comes to social issues. Many students of majority groups are able to ignore minority issues because it simply doesn’t affect them and thus they do not know, or have to know about it. Implementing a course that requires students to confront these issues can help combat the giant we know as privilege.

There is a need for cultural competency in all fields ranging from medicine in which doctors need to assess cost effective options for treat for patients with financial difficulties, to sports management in which a high percentage of professional athletes in the NFL and NBA are
minorities and understanding how that can affect their career. A more informed student population may not change things immediately or drastically. But it will spark a change because students will have more knowledge about the people they will be interacting with for the next four years and the rest of their lifetime. These courses are an investment into making our students better citizens. Cultural competency prevents “cultural gridlock” in which organizations with diverse members are unable to function due to gaps in cultural understanding (Brownlee).

A different solution would be to make completely separate spaces. This idea comes from Black thinkers such as Marcus Garvey and other Pan-Africanist who believed that racial equality would never be achieved in America. In order, for the Black population to reach their potential and be considered full citizens they would have to create their own civilization in which they would govern and be governed without racial oppression. Garvey believed that only way to achieve this was to leave the United States and move to a country that was majority Black. Garvey went so far as to incorporate the Black Star Line which would transport Black Americans to their new home.

Other Black intellectuals such as Malcolm X, during his time with the Nation of Islam, also share this sentiment. The Nation of Islam often referred to Whites as devils and that they were the ones to blame for the disadvantages of Blacks. Malcolm did not believe in support from Whites in order to solve the problems of Blacks. This is shown through Malcolm’s teaching of the global majority of Blacks as mentioned in the film Make It Plain. Malcolm conducted fundraising at his speaking engagements and referred to donations as “Freedom Dollars” that would be used to build Black businesses by the Nation. Per the film the Nation and its businesses was the largest Black owned business empire. Also, Malcolm did not romanticize integration due to other circumstances such as the attack on the Muslim temple no. 27 in Los Angeles which
resulted in the death of the temple secretary. The White police officer responsible were acquitted of charges while the Black Muslims involved were all charged and convicted. This incident mirrors events such as Rodney King and Michael Gardner. Malcolm was aware that there needed to be a change of attitudes rather than believing integration was the solution.

After leaving the Nation of Islam Malcolm changed his view on space and formulated an ideology that can be used to address today’s issues of race and space. Malcolm’s commitment to Black Nationalism and the Black nationalist consciousness is a step toward mental liberation. Malcolm argues that African Americans needed to change and be perfected in resistance to oppression (Terrill, 2010, p.151). This ideology is governed by the self-hatred, culturicide and menticide within the African American community per the policing of Black bodies. X advocates for a cultural transformation of the African American community through 3 lessons that must be learned. First, American society could not be redeemed on the basis of its present institutions. This is juxtaposed with the civil rights movement which aims to rehabilitate America’s current institutions through integration. Malcolm argues that this is not the liberation Africans in America should be seeking because it will not bring about true freedom. The second is Whites would not agree to share power with Africans committed to social justice. Thirdly, Africans had to accept their Africanity as a basis for political, economic, and moral actions. Essentially, African Americans needed to live in their African reality.

Malcolm also argues for cultural reconstruction. The first step in transformation African Americans needed to adapt ideas, attitudes, language, and history. Again, living in their reality as Africans in America. This meant that the negative connotation associated with the word African needed to change. African was often used as a derogatory term and Malcolm attributes this to cultural misorientation. Next was the Death of Negro, not the death of the negro but the death of
negro as a word or concept. This preordained that there would no longer be the new negro or the old negro order. Negro must be done away with altogether. We see this is the message to the grassroots speech in which Malcolm explains the Negro Revolution v. the Black Revolution. The negro revolution is no revolution at all, it is simply accommodation. While the Black revolution is proactive. Which leads to the idea that culture is proactive. X explains that Africans have an obligation to advance themselves from their oppressive state. Asante echos this notion by explaining that culture has no other practical end. It must be the regaining of freedom in order to be truly effective.

Malcolm X essentially advocates for the repurposing of space, very similar to what Lipsitz explains is the Black Spatial Imaginary. However, Malcolm suggests that space is more of a mental state than an actual physical space. Once we are able to change our attitudes on space, where we belong, how much we are allowed to take, etc., we are able to truly transform our spatial imaginaries. Much like Fields argues about race, space is not real but has had tangible effects.

In *Unwritten Rules* Racey is not able to change her mentality about space until there are more people in that look like her in office, i.e. a new Black CEO. This example can explain the need for affinity groups, such as the student organizations on Ohio University’s campus, to help combat the uncomfortableness of being a minority in dominating spaces. This again suggests that the issue of race and space is a mentality that has been made into reality. Perhaps if society can begin to think of racism as a choice we can begin to make a conscious choice to recreate the spaces we occupy.
References


