PAPER

Architectures of White Supremacy: Measuring Racism in College Campus Design

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In her study of law schools in the US, sociologist Wendy Leo Moore identifies such academic institutions as hegemonic white spaces. Drawing upon the racist history of the legal system and the legal profession in the US, she shows that law schools are complicit in upholding white supremacist ideologies. In her study, Moore also noted the role that the architecture of law schools played in reproducing racism. In her analysis, she cites classroom seating layouts, symbolism in interior design, and alienating circulation through the building. Scholars of race and space offer powerful theoretical frameworks for understanding space's role in perpetuating, inflicting, and creating racialized harms. But most do so by considering urban scales of space (e.g. the role of redlining or urban renewal). What is unique about Moore's study of white spaces is her attention to architectural scales of space. In an effort to deepen this thread of inquiry, in this paper, the authors investigate how members of a university community experience white and racist spaces of a predominantly white campus. The authors conducted twenty participant-led go-alongs where participants guide walks through the campus spaces they navigate. Participants reported ways architectural elements such as material, spatial hierarchy, threshold, and framed views perpetuate white supremacy. This research aims to document ways that members of campus communities experience white supremacist architecture. The findings of this project contribute to theorizing ways white supremacy is reproduced at architectural scales of space.

INTRODUCTION

Racial injustices such as segregation, exclusion, and surveillance shape the experience of many members of our communities. The spaces that we live, work, and play in are often complicit in perpetuating racial injustices.[1] Historic practices of neighborhood segregation through red lining continue to inflict dramatic social and environmental harms on black and brown populations.[2] Other forms of "white spaces" describe places where Black, Indigenous, and persons of color (BIPOC populations) experience exclusion, microaggressions, and emotional and physical harm.[3] On college campuses in the US, the history of formally segregated spaces lies dormant, but debates on racialized spaces resurface every time there are controversies around multicultural dormitories, explicit racist confrontations in academic halls, and art installations that seek to build awareness around racism on college campuses. In this project we seek to address the racialization of the spaces of academic institutions.

The purpose of this research is to study ways participants see connections between race, racism, and whiteness and campus architecture. Ultimately, we hope to contribute a theory of race and space that applies to architectural scales of space—in contrast to urban scales of space—such as classrooms and campus buildings.

Methodologically, this work adds to existing research on race and space in sociological, geographic, and architectural fields by adopting novel racial-spatial methods. We employ participant-led tours, also referred to in the literature as walk-alongs, go-alongs, or ethnographic walks. In these walking research methods (WRMs), we incorporate unstructured and semi-structured interviews with navigating spaces, photography, sketching, and mapping.[4] Our human subjects research contributes qualitative social science evidence to the otherwise interpretive, historical, and philosophical discourse on race and space in architectural research.[5]

WHITE SUPREMACIST ARCHITECTURE

> The norming of space is partially done in terms of the racing of space, the depiction of spaces as dominated by individuals (whether persons or subpersons) of a certain race.[6]

WHITE SUPREMACY

To understand white supremacist architecture, we begin with definitions of whiteness and white supremacy. Whiteness is "a structured advantage that channels unfair gains and unjust enrichments to whites while imposing unearned and unjust obstacles in the way of Blacks" or other minoritized races.[7] White supremacy, in turn, is linked to ideologies that consider whites superior to other races. Typically, white supremacy is grounded in habits and systems of exploitation, dominance, and violence—physical, emotional, economic, political, or otherwise. White supremacy—as a framework—brings attention to ways whites

accumulate undeserved benefits through the exploitation and extraction of opportunities from others who can be claimed as not white.[8] Whiteness and white supremacy operate structurally and institutionally. They shape our practices and social norms.[9] (The frameworks of whiteness and white supremacy are not primarily for making sense of individual acts of animus.[10])

White supremacy has significant impacts on society that go beyond "unfair gains." In White Rage, Carol Anderson provides a detailed and damning account of ways whites in the US reacted violently to attempts at Black liberation and Black success. Systematic torture, rape, and murder were only part of the arsenal of systemic judicial, law enforcement, and cultural maneuverings that undermined any hopes for success of Reconstruction, desegregation, civil rights, or even a Black presidency.[11] There has been no limit to the violence, deception, and evil that whites leveraged to maintain segregation in cities, neighborhoods, schools, businesses, and other civic, cultural, residential, and recreational spaces. With an imperative of maintaining supremacy at all costs, whites not only destroyed Black livelihoods but also the democratic and economic foundations of their own society.[12] The implications of white supremacy extend to all spaces in this country.

WHITE SPACE

We argue that white space is a quality of architectural space that can be interpreted as linked to whiteness and racism; as driving white social, political, and economic projects; or as expressive and perpetuating of white supremacy. In his research on the racialization of space, George Lipsitz uses a definition of whiteness as "an analytic category that refers to the structured advantages that accrue to whites because of past and present discrimination."[13]

Social theorists who examine race and space—though primarily at larger urban scales of space—see racial processes as intertwined with spatial processes. These happen through: ways our built environment is contested; everyday life in these spaces; mobility in and among these spaces; and relationships among groups of people that take place in specific spaces.[14] In their review of race and space research, Neely and Samura, rely on such frameworks to understand "how race and space interact in the architecture of the social world, in the lived experience of people, and in the structures and institutions that shape social life."[15] This understanding, in turn, makes visible "the fatal couplings of place and race in our society."[16] Geographers have led the way in demonstrating how "social relations take on their full force and meaning when they are enacted physically in actual places."[17] Indeed, "race is produced by space," or in other words, "it takes places for racism to take place."[18]

Defining white supremacy as we have above, allows us to think about white spaces—and white supremacist spaces. George Lipsitz describes the white spatial imaginary as one which:

> views space primarily as a locus for the generation of exchange value… the effects of segregated housing give white homeowners advantages and amenities unavailable to most minority home seekers: access to superior schools, protection from environmental hazards, proximity to sources of employment…[19]

A white supremacist space can be thought of as a space that perpetuates the myth of white superiority, achievement, dominance, ingenuity, cultural supremacy, political supremacy, and racial difference. With these defining features articulated this way, white supremacist space (WSS) helps us think about the use/instrumentality of architecture in perpetuating white supremacy.

White supremacist spaces exist at different scales. Most of our understandings of white supremacist space are based at urban/geographic scales of space. But the similar kinds of supremacy and segregation are articulated through architectural scales of space.[20]

> The plantation, the prison, the sharecropper's cabin, and the ghetto have been the most visible and obvious manifestations of white supremacist uses of space. Perhaps less visible and obvious, but no less racist, have been the spaces that reflect and shape the white spatial imaginary—the segregated neighborhood and the segregated school, the all-white workplace, the exclusive country club, or the prosperous properly gendered white suburban home massively subsidized with services, amenities, tax breaks, and transportation opportunities unavailable to inner-city residents.[21]

Our framing of white supremacist architecture brings attention to specific spatial practice and to a specific scale of space. The kitchenette, the classroom, the cafe and even the college campus, can be interpreted as WSS. They are, however, distinct from urban scales of the operation of white supremacy. For example, red lining is a collection of white supremacist spatial practices that have resulted in neighborhood segregation. White supremacist urban planning practices associated with mobility restrictions, housing segregation, and the dearth of green space, are examples of spatial dynamics that go hand-in-hand with disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards that non-white communities were violently subject to.

When we look at architectural scales of space, it's harder to understand the spatial operations of white supremacy. The social segregation that is well articulated at the urban scale looks different. Rather than seeing the segregation of large numbers of people at the block and neighborhood scale, we need to train ourselves to observe the discrimination that individuals experience. When architectural scales of space were explicitly racially coded, the task was easier: separate entrances, separate water fountains, and separate rooms could be more readily understood as white supremacist architecture. Without explicit signs and

signifiers, the white supremacy of architecture is less visible to everyone. Now the signifiers are implicit, hidden (surveillance), or misleading (woke-washing). Reading them is a skill/burden learned, generally by those who are exposed to the violent effects of white supremacist architecture.

Studying the college campus offers a way to connect urban scales of legibility of white supremacy to architectural scales. The unified institutional setting that is reflected in campus buildings, landscapes, and campuses as a whole provides an articulation of WSS that connects scales of designed spaces from the urban to the architectural. Existing research on campus diversity and racism notes ways campus communities (students, staff, and faculty) perceive racism and whiteness at a campus scale. The 1991 Berkeley Diversity Study report is one example.[22]

IMPACT

One of the ways that whiteness plays out is through a "public pedagogy" that reinforces and exacerbates public assumptions about who belongs in what kinds of spaces—and this kind of pedagogy is particularly legible in college campus design. Lipsitz analyzes such spaces as shopping malls and sports arenas and traces what he describes as "racial logics of hostile privatism and defensive localism."[23] Sites like these use public funds for private gain and reinforce racial segregation as part of what makes them desirable and marketable spaces. Similar kinds of pedagogy operate at the architectural scale, where material, circulation, thresholds, views are configured to support hostile privatism and to reinforce a perverse sense of benefit of racial segregation.

The presence of BIPOC people is often seen by whites as threatening to their understanding and conception of the whiteness (and thus valuation) of their spaces. The policing of black bodies by white residents can be understood to an extent in this way.

> domination itself… revolves around how 'groups marked as racially inferior' have been 'defined, confined, regulated, and eradicated… through the control of space' (2008, p. 28)[24]

An effect, can be that BIPOC members of college campus communities at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) feel out of place—or more aptly, that white members of PWIs consider BIPOC members of those communities as out of place.

> concentrated residential segregation enacted in concrete spatial form the core ideology of white supremacy—that Black people "belonged" somewhere else. In a deft paraphrase, Charles Mills represents the moral geography of whiteness as "saying" to Blacks that "you are what you are in part because you originate from a certain kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is inhabited by creatures like yourself."(Mills, pg. 42)[25]

Over the past decade, as racist policings in (and of) white spaces were circulated through social media, it may be that more people have been exposed to the racial logics of architecture. "Keyfob Kelly" blocked the entrance of a black man into his own apartment building in St. Louis. Claudia Rankine recounts how she was yelled at by the homeowner—to step away from the front door of a suburban home, where Rankine was scheduled to meet with that homeowner, who was a trauma therapist.[26] There are countless examples of similar policings of space taking place on college campuses as well.[27]

METHOD

To understand how white supremacy of campus is experienced and understood, in this project we build on individuals' reflections. An individual's reflection on white supremacy and space can be interpretive, analytical, or descriptive. Our goal is to identify ways in which aspects of the design of college campuses can be connected to white supremacist ideologies and practices. Thus, we consider personal reflections as a valid and vital form of knowledge for our project.

If, instead, we sought to measure white supremacist intentions guiding design, this epistemology would be insufficient. Because we are measuring ways white supremacy is perceived and experienced—in other words, since we are measuring impact—this epistemology is appropriate. As a matter of epistemology, we argue that in order to measure the impact of white supremacy in architecture on individuals, relying on their perceptions and interpretations is a critical first step.

In studying experiences and understandings of white supremacy in campus design, we use a walking research method (WRM) in order to privilege in situ experience.[28] Margarethe Kuthenbach uses "go-alongs" as an ethnographic tool to better understand participants' relationships with environmental perception, spatial practices, biographies, social architecture, and social realms.[29] In our go-alongs, we used quick sketching, photography, and note taking to capture participants' references to specific spatial and design elements that they connected to white supremacy. We have opted to use unstructured interviews instead of semi-structured interviews in order to encourage participants' stories to shape our conversations.[30]

We conducted go-alongs with 20 participants on the University of Colorado Boulder campus. All but one go-along was conducted between one interviewer and one participant. In one case, one interviewer met with two participants. We recruited participants through email advertisements distributed widely through campus academic and social email lists. Participants were offered a $30 gift card for participating. Fifty volunteers contacted the research team and of them, 25 followed up to schedule a time for a go-along. Participants included students, staff, and faculty. No identifying or demographic information was collected as part of this inductive phase of our project.[31] For the next phase of the research, we are considering a screening

survey that will collect information on age, race and ethnicity, gender, time spent on campus, role at university, and a question about personal experiences or ideas around race and space.

Go-alongs lasted approximately 60 minutes. A member of the research team met with the participant at a location of the participants' choosing on the college campus. After the consent protocol was reviewed and verbal consent was given, participants were engaged in in-depth and unstructured conversation on experiences of race and racism in the campus built-environment. The interviewer solicited reflections on race and space from the participant while walking or otherwise moving, sitting, or standing in various spaces. Participants were probed to indicate specific spatial elements (e.g. buildings, paths, circulation, thresholds) that figured in their experiences of the spaces. We prioritized unstructured conversations for soliciting reflective, interpretive, and potentially traumatic experiences of racial aggression and discrimination. On these participant-led go-alongs, researchers facilitated mapping, sketching, photography, and reflection in addition to taking notes. Following each walk, the researcher wrote ethnographic field reflections.[32]

The data that we collected includes hand-written notes from the go-along interviews, which were subsequently typed, maps of participant-led tour paths, and images and sketches of spaces and design elements identified by participants. Because our methodology builds on ethnographic approaches to observation and critical reflection in the form of field notes, these reflections were included as data.

This textual and visual data was organized and coded using qualitative content analysis methods. We coded our data manually, using comment and annotation features in GoogleDocs and PDF viewing applications. As our study expands, we will likely transition our analysis to ATLAS.ti. We used one round of inductive coding, which was an exploratory and open-ended pass of codes, which we reviewed and analyzed to identify a set of emergent themes that are used to structure the findings in this paper.[33]

The research team (the coauthors of this paper) include one associate professor and two undergraduate research assistants. Our disciplinary training includes architecture, sociology, gender and women's studies, and political science. We all identify as BIPOC or biracial. While our identities shape our individual experiences and sensitivities about race and space, we remind ourselves that there are a rich diversity of ways of thinking about, experiencing, and talking about how white supremacy, race, and racism are connected to the design of the built environment. We acknowledge that our own biases limit what we hear from participants, what we absorb, how we influence unstructured interviews, and how we code our data. We strive to be guided in our thinking about race and space by the literature in and around this topic, but we ask the reader to remember to interpret the following results while considering the biases that our positionality brings to this research.

FINDINGS

Participants shared a wide range of ideas about whiteness, white supremacy, and racism. They saw these expressed through, inherent in, and perpetuated by campus design. Those aspects of campus, in turn, included material, program, symbolism, circulation, visibility, surveillance, architectural styles, and discrepancies in resource investment in buildings. In our analysis, participants most frequently discussed:

- Ways campus architecture prioritized the mobility, visibility, and activities of white bodies
- Ways campus architecture expressed elitism
- Ways campus architecture conditioned invisibility and hypervisibility for global majority/non-white community members
- Ways campus architecture articulates belonging and exclusion

In this section, we summarize experiences and perceptions shared from our participants on these themes.

On the prioritization of white bodies. Participants described a host of ways campus architecture prioritized the mobility, visibility and activities of white bodies. Multiple participants described forms of surveillance on campus and ways these serve to limit freedom of mobility and presence on campus. While one participant spoke about surveillance cameras and campus police, others emphasized ways visibility of black and brown bodies—in stark contrast to the predominantly white demographic—are made hypervisible and thus subject to vulnerability. This was manifest architecturally as the lack of spaces of refuge or flexible spaces where BIPOC students could choose the degree of visibility. Study spaces with translucent vs. transparent enclosures were cited multiple times.

One participant—an international student in engineering—described a central field as follows:

> White students taking 'sunshine baths' on the grass and playing games like spikeball are typically American activities that gather white students. These things aren't part of my culture. This makes BIPOC students feel like outliers… like we're not welcome in these areas. We feel pressure to perform in these situations because we're the 'other' race in places like these.

BIPOC students reported feeling pressure to perform in these situations because they are the "other" race in the PWI context. One BIPOC participant described that they felt that white students are more comfortable gathering in large, open outdoor spaces on campus to enjoy time playing together.

On architectural expressions of elitism. Many participants described the manicured and curated aesthetic of campus architecture as emblematic of elitism. One participant described

the white spatial logics of order, hierarchy, and control. Standing on the Norlin Quad (a principal quadrangle of the campus), they described a European picturesque space that was devoid of any expression of the land and plants indigenous to this area. Norlin Library stands at the east of the Norlin Quadrangle as a symbol of power and knowledge. It towers over manicured, non-native landscapes, which are fastidiously maintained. The dominance of such lawns in campus landscape architecture raise questions about representation and inclusivity. To many respondents, these landscapes underscore colonization and domination:

> The ways racism plays out on this campus are probably the same as how racism plays out on many private campuses. There's nothing about this campus at all that says diversity, whatsoever. In the landscapes, for example, and the facade of Norlin, things like vegetation choice and even architectural precision are big parts of the white aesthetic. Some of these connections are more covert versus overt, but they are there.

While some participants described elitism in terms of a campus-wide aesthetic, most described this as a point of contrast between different buildings. Participants described buildings that portray high investment as indicative of areas of prioritization and valuation by the university. Large, expensive buildings, especially those designed for exclusive purposes, can be seen as expressions of elitism. For example, the business school and areas used to lure incoming students and their families exude a sense of whiteness. Participants described the campus tour experience as country club-like. By contrast, many participants noted that academic and residential areas for non-white and non-elite members of the campus community are not invested in. One participant described student housing as CU's ghetto. A participant noted that the correlation between elite architecture and white-majority disciplines, industries, and occupants reflects a sense of white supremacy.

Figure 1. Norlin Library, at the east edge of the Norlin Quadrangle Historical District.

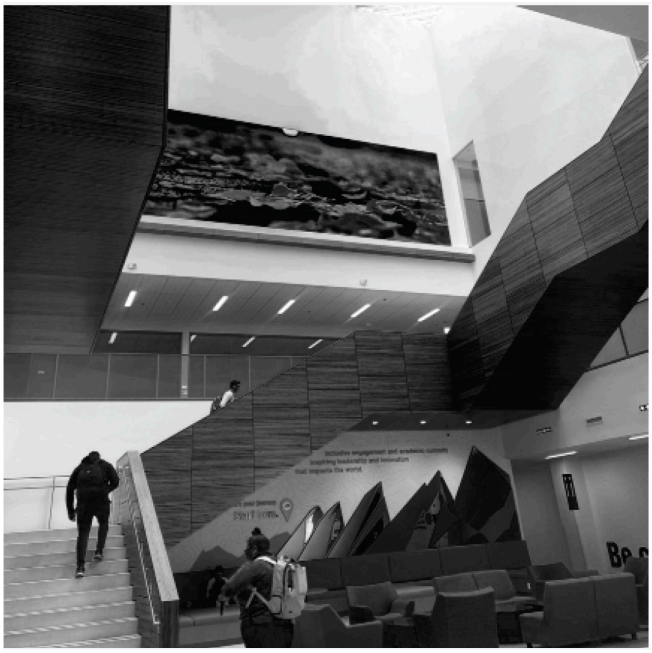

Figure 2. An interior view of the main entrance of the Center for Academic Success and Engagement (CASE).

Multiple participants remarked that a new campus building dedicated to student success and recruitment was alienating in its cleanliness, grand lobby (the point where campus visitors meet for tours), and absence of cultural symbolism that would resonate with nonwhite community members and nonwhite visitors to the campus. Sterility, newness, unrelatable, exclusive are words that participants used to describe this building.

On invisibility and hypervisibility. Multiple participants—mostly white university staff—talked about the lack of spaces of refuge for BIPOC students. In these conversations, they referenced movable furniture, movable partitions, transparent partitions, corners, and the diversity in floor plans that could allow for visual and acoustic separation. One participant described a multi-use learning space (capacity approximately 200) bordered on one side by a glass wall where passersby could observe what takes place in the room. The participant described ways that visibility could be burdensome for BIPOC students who are pressured to perform twice as hard and whose academic performance is tied to high stakes personally and for their families. Another participant—a white staff member—explained that BIPOC students and international students in particular, feel vulnerable in

highly visible spaces. She cited recent gun violence and attacks on racial minorities in the US as a concern. Another white staff person described a similar concern and added that publicly accessible buildings exacerbate this concern. We note that BIPOC community members themselves have not articulated these concerns thus far in our research, but multiple white participants raised these concerns.

Multiple participants shared insights about visibility of BIPOC bodies in the context of a new swimming pool located centrally on campus. This pool (Figure 3) is flanked by busy paths where passersby can see pool users from a high vantage point. One Black participant described the tyranny of the gaze in this setup, where white bodies can come to tan and recreate at this pool, but any non-white body would be rendered hypervisible. They described how the path, elevation difference, and mutual visibility of pool users and passersby reinforced white supremacy.

On belonging and exclusion. Participants described few spaces where they felt a sense of belonging and, by contrast, many spaces where attempts at inclusivity were contrived and resulted in a sense of alienation and exclusion. A student union building that included programming and office spaces for underrepresented minority affinity organizations was noted as welcoming. Participants described the diversity of programming (food service, social space, campus store, meeting and lecture rooms) that made the space engaging. One international student described the wide corridors and relatively low ceilings of the space as cozy and embracing. In contrast, multiple students described the atrium of a new, multifunctional building as being alienating.

Figure 3. A view looking down into the Outdoor Buff Pool and Patio at the CU Boulder Recreation Center.

Figure 4. The crest above the east entrance of Ketchum Hall.

In that space (Figure 2), one participant noted contrived efforts at making the space inclusive, including an impersonal lounge space and prominent text expressing the campus mission and values on the walls. Multiple participants criticized spaces that "forced a sense of community."

A crest displayed above a campus building (Figure 4) was cited as an example of ways architecture extends reverence to, and expresses alignment with specific religious ideologies that, for many members of the campus community, are traced to histories of whiteness, white supremacy, and colonization. The choice to prominently display symbolism rooted in Western European colonization histories signals a sense of familiarity for some while signaling a sense of exclusion to others:

> "White history is literally engraved onto this campus. This makes me think about how land acknowledgments can be performative: why do we have an auto-response in our emails, but then we display crests of colonization on our buildings?"

Exclusion was articulated through implicit color lines. To one participant, an underpass represents the threshold between campus and the primarily white sorority and fraternity spaces west of Broadway. The underpass, as a physical structure, may not inherently represent racial discrimination. However, contextualized as a threshold into a primarily white social space, infrastructure like this can often serve as an articulation of racial segregation. This physical division represents the feeling that minoritized members of the CU community can feel

when crossing into a space where they are underrepresented, ignored, and harassed.

Figure 5. The Broadway underpass at College Avenue, which connects the CU Boulder campus to the University Hill commercial area.

CONCLUSIONS

Participants identified material, symbolic, and programmatic elements of campus architecture as being connected to whiteness and white supremacy. Whereas we anticipated most participants would be unable to articulate connections between architectural scales of space and ideas of white supremacy, we found that their insights about material, visibility and views, circulation, massing, program, and symbolic elements were rich, and often reflected deeply held negative experiences. We were surprised by the number of participants who found it easy to connect white supremacy and racism to architectural elements. Similarly, we were unsettled by the number of participants who either could not, or would not, make such connections. Rather than the latter being primarily white participants, we found that campus staff members seemed most likely to deflect or reorient discussions about white supremacy and space.

We also anticipated that participants would respond to our prompts about whiteness and white supremacy by turning to more accessible experiences of spatial manifestations of difference along gender, class, ability, and their intersections. Few did so, however.

This research points to the articulation and experience of white supremacy in college campus architecture. Among the findings, we are particularly intrigued by discussions of articulations of white supremacy that are purely material, and not social interactions—in other words, the findings suggest that white supremacist architecture exists in and of itself, and does not require racist social interactions. This reinforces the premise that architectural scales of space have agency in expressing, perpetuating, and reproducing white supremacy.

Our hope is that this research might support future efforts to generate design considerations or guidelines that address the ways white supremacy is linked to design. We hope as well that this paper encourages architects and campus designers to avoid potentially ineffective or superficial approaches to inclusive design.

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