



# Beyond Affordability

Examining Segregation, Equity, and  
Design Justice

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# YOU DONT BELONG

Weyeneth in his book *The Architecture of Racial Segregation* examines how architectural and urban design practices have historically contributed to racial segregation. Architectural decisions, including the design of public housing projects and the placement of highways, often marginalized Black communities, enforce racial segregation. Milton S. F. Curry's work focuses on urban spaces shaped by racial dynamics. Through the role of policy, urban planning policies and practices have historically contributed to maintaining segregation through redlining, discriminatory zoning laws, and unequal investment in different neighborhoods. He highlights the history of Harlem, stating that it became "a 'black Paris' and the blackouts in 1977 really pinned this down" (Curry 49). Theoretical projects, including "NegroCity Housing + Harlem Target," contradict reparation, and instead show "a self-referential attempt to expose white liberal ideologies as a form of appeasement and assimilation" (Curry50).



WE WANT WHITE  
TENANTS IN OUR  
WHITE COMMUNITY



# WORKING AGAINST YOU

Today in Baton Rouge, the historical legacy of slavery and the subsequent Jim Crow laws are prevalent in community patterns and social structures. Practices like redlining prevented Black families from accessing mortgages, and these effects have lingered across generations, resulting in persistent disparities in wealth and housing. Baton Rouge's investment in infrastructure and services has often been uneven for Black neighborhoods, which receive less support for parks, schools, and public transport. Additionally, affordable housing has gained a negative stigma due to undesirable elements, negative stereotypes about the individuals and families who become residents, the belief relating this housing type to higher crime rates, and many more. These stereotypes perpetuate the cycle of segregation and hinder community integration. Thomas Waring explores the legacy of slavery and how it has influenced spatial and social dynamics in Baton Rouge. His research suggests that the laws established during the Jim Crow period continue to impact the city's geography. Today, residents are still feeling the effects of the long-standing segregationist policies through economic disparities, property values, investment levels, and public services. Affordable housing is normally isolated in enclaves, instead of integrated with diverse neighborhoods. Dr. Sarah Driskill and Dr. Sophie Trawalter's study on emotions toward the Antebellum structures and architecture, "found that the Black participants felt less belonging in the Antebellum structures" (Waring 10). Sarah Schindler defines architectural exclusion as the way physical design and built environments can be used intentionally or unintentionally to exclude certain groups of people based on, race, class, or other characteristics. Physical barriers and accessibility issues isolate and create a sense of othering, whether they are necessary, such as fences, walls, and gates. The placement of housing projects and highways historically marginalized minority communities. Schindler's paper highlights how physical design and architectural choices can perpetuate social exclusion and segregation.



# DO YOU **DESERVE** IT?

Spatial justice is most simply the fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges in society. "Spatial justice as such is not a substitute or alternative to social, economic, or other forms of justice but rather a way of looking at justice from a critical spatial perspective" (Soja2). This idea allows us to address or attack these issues in a more physical way, giving it a more meaningful resolution. 'Just' space enables people of diverse backgrounds to engage with and enter a community that might have in the past not been available.

Boundaries might give meaning and belonging to some but might in turn other another group or race through siloing their unique voice or belief. The 'right to the city', a slogan first proposed ny Henri Lefebvre in his 1968 book *Le Droit a la Ville*, has recently been reclaimed by social movements, thinkers, and progressive local authorities as a call to action for 'design justice.'

Equitable  
Distribution



RIGHT TO  
THE CITY

Political  
Inclusion

Spatial  
Inclusion

Social  
Inclusion

Justin William works to better understand the idea of 'spatial justice.' While looking at the policy document Detroit Future City (DFC), he highlights the controversy and argues that only by understanding spatial justice as an analytic lens can DFC be appreciated as a productive planning approach. We must challenge everyone to think more spatially in terms of economic development, environmental degradation, social polarization, and artistic creativity. Once we focus on how to view these components more spatially, we might begin to see changes at the source of the problem instead of topical or temporary fixes. "Spatial relationships produce social relationships, and hence justice relationships" (William5). Calling an injustice spatial merely states that it happens 'in space.' William references Lefebvre who believed that "physical space has no 'reality' without the energy that is deployed within it" (Lefebvre 1992, 13). Their view being that space is similar to a commodity. This brings attention to the way we focus on equality versus equity. The term equality is thrown around very naturally in society today, whereas the focus on equity has been less understood or introduced. Equality gives way to everyone being given the 'same' benefits or basic necessities. Equity is giving every individual or group access to the 'same' benefits or basic necessities, while also highlighting accessibility and usability for everyone. This considers working towards an inclusive design, as well as addressing the impacts of socio-economic disparities.



## DO YOU DESIGN JUSTICE?



"Building neighborhoods that **celebrate** our disenfranchised communities, protect and strengthen their culture, stories, and scared places" will help move us towards a better understanding of '**design justice.**'

- Meaghan O'Neill

# WHAT WILL IT COST YOU?

Marlee Pittman, first Director of Community Revitalization for East Baton Rouge Parish, discussed her work in the affordable housing market, managing federal subsidies for projects supported by the city council. She highlighted the key aspects of affordable housing. This housing type must remain affordable for 15-20 years depending on housing policy in the area. The sad truth is these projects is that developers make more money once they turnover or place the units at market price, turning away residents that might not be able to accept an increase. In a perfect world, a vacancy rate of around 7 percent should be available to aid with turnovers or repairs. Yet even with this additional percentage, there would always be a homeless population. In Baton Rouge, a study done before COVID revealed that about half of the population in this parish were at a house-cost-burden. This situation is where a household spends a significant portion of its income on housing costs, making it difficult to afford other essentials. From an economic standpoint, the understood metric of affordability is a third of your income should go towards your housing, whether that is for renting or a mortgage.

The appraisal gap can be a deciding factor for developers when choosing a project. Let's say they want to build a house, and it will cost them 250,000 to do so. Due to its location's appraisal gap, it will only sell for 150,000. The developer would be out 100,000, so this might not be an endeavor they wish to take on. She introduced the Three I's of a developer, inflation, interest, and insurance. In the affordable housing market, insurance is the current killer of those who are interested in developing or investing. VAD properties, which stands for vacant, abandoned, or dilapidated, are another issue that the Baton Rouge and many other cities face. VAD sites should be thought of as opportunity locations, yet in Baton Rouge most fall not in just low-income areas or those in FEMA floodways, but the intersection of the two that creates blight in the community. It is remarkable how those facts correlate on a map.



**Security System**

**Accessibility**

**In-Unit Laundry**

**Storage**

**Pet Friendly**

**Greenery**

**Fitness and  
Rec Areas**

**Power Backup**

**Maintenance**

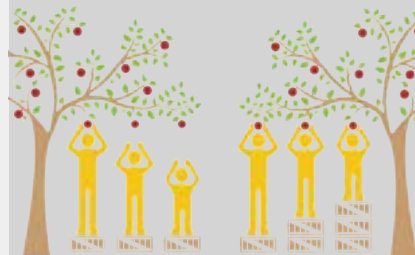
**After School  
Programs**

"You can mix incomes, but you cannot mix values." To attract people who can live anywhere to choose your community, you need to offer more than just housing—you need to provide a dignified living experience. When people are housed with dignity, they are more likely to invest in and protect their community. Wendy Daniels, a former employee of Mercy Housing, stated their philosophy is not just about the construction of buildings; it's about creating vibrant communities. Understanding the needs and values of the people you serve is crucial. Creativity and innovation are key. Making affordable housing more cost-effective sadly means not always choosing the more technologically advanced systems, from energy efficient or sustainable designs. We can see the benefits of how those techniques can save money in the long run, but with current policies surrounding federal subsidies and the lack of substantial funds, it can be difficult to convince developers to invest in these practices. Instead of allowing this to continue, the design world should be challenging the industry to push the boundaries and find new and innovative solutions to what we do and can call affordable housing. There should be a better balance between market-rate and affordable units. The common model where 10 percent are market rate and 90 percent are affordable can lead developers to minimize market rate units, as no subsidized money supports them. Wendy harped that a stigma around developers can be the lack of genuine interest in the community or from financial constraints tied to affordable housing. This can strongly change how they design or even choose affordable housing projects.

**WHAT DO YOU VALUE?**

# EQUITY WANTS TO SUPPORT YOU

The authors of the report Why Housing Matters for Upward Mobility highlight the significant role that housing plays in changing an individuals or families rise from poverty. They present five key housing goals, including housing quality, affordability, stability, assets and wealth, and a neighborhood context. Through much research, it was found that living in good-quality housing can be vital for residents physical and mental health, especially for children in academic and behavioral development. Affordable housing reduces financial stress, allowing families to save and begin to build wealth. "Housing cost burden may be associated with psychological distress" (Urban8). Stable housing allows its users to form stronger social connections to their community and can lead them to become more involved. Studies found "that homeowners with low rates of residential mobility volunteer, vote, and otherwise engage with their local community at higher rates" (DiPasquale and Glaeser 1998). Equitable policies aim to prevent the displacement of low-income residents due to gentrification or rising costs. Homeownership for many can provide a means of building wealth through equity but does not always. They mentioned the 2008 housing crisis and how black people "were disproportionately the victims of subprime loans, which were even extended to those who qualified for prime loans. This only further widened the homeownership gap. Today, Black homeownership is over 30 percentage points lower than white homeownership, a larger gap than when race-based discrimination against homebuyers was legal. Researchers have found that Black homebuyers buy less expensive first homes using more debt, meaning they have a longer and harder path to building home equity" (Urban14).



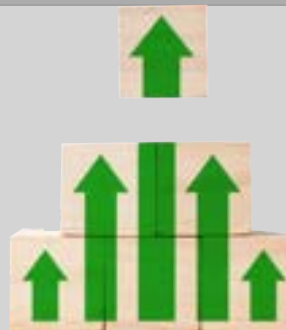
Affordability



Stability



Neighborhood



Quality

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