Infrastructure of the Marvelous:

Public Housing Led Social Transformation in Charlottesville

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Abstract

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Public housing, in the context of the United States, is a contested geography. It places those that call it home in direct relation to myths of poverty, policies of disinvestment, and systems that bureaucratize their lives. In doing so it erases the agency and meaning that public housing residents bring to not only their communities but also their cities. This commitment to erasure has made it easy to demolish the physical and social infrastructures of these communities because they are unseen, misunderstood, and undervalued. While communities around the US are being removed, Charlottesville, VA is unique in that public housing is being rebuilt and redeveloped. This is due to the ongoing advocacy and organizing of public housing residents. This research project explores the physical, social, and affective infrastructures that public housing residents have developed to make this a reality. It specifically witnesses how public housing residents build power, push the boundaries of policies, demand their rights, and care for their communities. Using a participatory action research methodology, the project worked with public housing residents for over 2 years by collecting oral histories to document a tradition of social transformation that led to this paradigm.

Keywords: Public Housing, Social Transformation, Infrastructure, Social Movements

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The effort to pursue a Ph.D. tends to be one of solitude and contemplation. It comes down to one person. You are the lone person that is putting words to paper. You are the one digging through archives to follow an interesting thread or learn a bit more about a minor fact. You become responsible for translating the wealth of knowledge that surrounds you. From the outset, that is not what I wanted this project to become. I wanted it to be a space of community, collective learning, and relationships building that have to extend beyond the timelines defined by the university. Simply put, I wanted the effort to strengthen connections that were full of admiration, but at the same time distant. I wanted to take what were minor moments of exchange and solidify them into something much more meaningful, digging down to find the meaning. That for me has been accomplished with the group of us that has come together to remember and listen together in ways that we are just beginning to understand.

I have to start by expressing my deepest gratitude to my family. To Robin, you made this possible. You are the foundation upon which this entire journey stands. You ground everything that I do, bringing it back to reality when I get lost in my own dreams or when I am full of self doubt. Greta and Colette, you inspire me to grow, to think differently, to always be pushing my own boundaries. Everyday you do things that inspire me and I hope that by doing this doctorate, it in some small way, inspires you. Mom and Dad, I thank you for creating my curiosity by opening me up to experiences, places, and people that have always pushed me to see and understand the world in different ways. To my sister, while I left for college and never really looked back, you always bring me back home and remind me of my roots.

I think back to the event that started this all. It started so simply as a question in response to the larger changes taking place in Charlottesville. What was the relationship between the arts and public housing? Maybe better asked - how could the arts support public housing in Charlottesville? I blame Holly for planting this seed, which is something she was so good at doing. I didn't expect to get the turn out that we did, but PHAR showed up. As it always does. After presentations and conversations were had, I remember walking with Joy out to her blue minivan, which I think she is still driving, and her saying, someday we need to tell the history of public housing organizing in Charlottesville. Another seed planted in the ground. It would take some time, but it eventually sprouted. As the idea grew, new faces and connections were built, Audrey, Brandon, Emily, Bill, and others. We traveled together and I watched the important work that PHAR was doing, inspired to see the way Joy held court at City Council meetings, and the ways residents expressed their power. All this made me see Charlottesville and understand myself in new ways.

The real work began when I first sat down with Audrey. I remember timidly coming to her apartment at S. 1st Street. She shared her vision for telling the history and knowledge of public housing residents. We began to imagine how we could support each other to make that a reality. When there is so much distrust, Audrey created a space of invitation. Together, we could help and learn from each other. That is something that happens every time we are together. Thank you for the opportunity to bear witness to the ongoing work and importance of PHAR.

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Chapter 1 - A Grounding for the Marvelous

Introduction

This research project is a partnership to witness and make present the infrastructures that public housing organizers, led by Black women, have used to enact social and political transformation in Charlottesville, Virginia. Contending with institutions that dehumanize and oppress at a variety of levels, public housing residents have continually fought for their liberation. There is an immense amount of academic literature focused on the history of public housing and tenant organizing. From the rent strikes in St. Louis to residents advocating for greater resources, a significant history is present in the way public housing residents advocate and take action in response to the mis-management of public housing (Friedman, 1966, Koebel, 1995; Baranski, 2007; Karp, 2014; Marcuse, 2017). Writing in the *Dignity of Resistance*, Feldman and Stall document the work of women to overcome the portrayals of poverty to access resources needed by their communities (Feldman and Stall, 2004). Focusing on Atlanta, Rodriguez shows how public housing residents continued to fight in the light of waning economic and political support for low income housing that led to ongoing waves of urban revitalization and displacement (Rodriguez, 2021). Several works explore the ongoing redevelopment and removal of Cabrini-Green in Chicago, showing how tenants have challenged policies, used the courts, and made discursive arguments in the hopes of sustaining their communities (Miller, 2008; Pfeiffer, 2006; Bennet, 2018). In each of these cases, what we see are ongoing battles that public housing residents are waging with local and federal agencies. While valiantly fought, many have not stemmed the national tide of public housing removal.

Underneath the specific organizing and physical histories of public housing, lies a much broader consideration of the relationship that public housing and affordable housing plays in society. In *Purging the Poorest*, Vale focuses on the cultural roots of public housing. Here public housing is not just a way of addressing the specific needs of the poor, but is deeply intertwined with specific moral values. Public Housing is then an expression of a relationship with poverty, as a cultural construct, that manifests how society as a whole relates to class, race, and ability (Vale, 2013). In parallel, Bloom, Umbach, and Vale consider the evolution of public housing from an idea rooted in utopian idealism to divergent critiques coming from both the political left and right. On one hand public housing has historic connections with racism and urban renewal. While on the other, we see a critique tied to ideologies that value free market economics. The authors go on to challenge the development of myths that have come to define a relationship to affordable housing (Bloom, Umbach, Vale, 2015). Similarly Darrickson and others explore the difficulties of overcoming these narratives in *Climbing Mount Laurel*. Following a 20 year history to build affordable housing, they point not only to the depth of which society holds onto these beliefs, imbued with underlying racial and class assumption, but the ultimate possibilities for the poor when advocates, politics, and the law substantiate their rights to access resources that strengthen and support their communities (Massey et al, 2013).

Public housing in Charlottesville has emerged in the literature in very specific contexts. Harris and Olmstead document the history, residents, and policies that came to define public housing at the scale of a small southern town (Harris, 1991). They show how public housing was a means to address a broader need for affordable housing for

the Black community that lived in the City. Saunders and Shackleford place public housing in relation to the political history of urban renewal, raising questions about the motivations of urban renewal (Saunders and Shackelford, 2004). While Rosenblith shows how anti-crime policy initiated in Charlottesville became part of a broader discursive argument that used criminalization and empowerment as a means to disinvest and deconstruct public housing (Rosenblith, 2020).

While each of these works create a general context in which to understand the difficulties and struggles that public housing residents contend with on a daily basis, they remain distant from the ways that public housing residents dream, design, and realize alternatives. In Charlottesville public housing residents have not only asserted their presence in a city beholden to systems of hierarchy and logics of race and class, but have created a paradigm, unlike others in the US, that has continued to make a place for low-income people to live in a rapidly gentrifying community. Over sixty years, they have rebuilt the social fabric that was destroyed by urban renewal, developed new institutions that strengthened their power, and cared for their communities. It is a history, at the moment, that lives as a daily practice in the bodies and minds of the organizers, a part of their ongoing commitment to the public housing community. This project is an effort to listen to that history, share it, and delve into the infrastructures that made it possible.

The Violence of Urban Renewal and The Response

In 1964, Black Charlottesville experienced the way intertwined institutional policies and practices, working between local and federal scales, to reshape their social, geographic, and economic livelihoods. This would erase the Vinegar Hill neighborhood

and set the stage for public housing to become a new site for Black organizing and advocacy.

Long an economic and social center, Vinegar Hill was the epicenter of Black life in Charlottesville. The neighborhood spanned the western boundary of the central business district, running from Main street down into the central business district, bounded by 4th street, and leading down Preston avenue up into Market Street to the north. It was where the Black community would come together to seek joy, buy shoes, get groceries, attend church, and go to school (Joy, 2021; Sonia, 2021; Alice, 2022). From there the Black community expanded out in Charlottesville through Starr Hill into the 10th and Page Neighborhood and then Grady Ave to the west, north along Preston avenue into the Rose Hill neighborhood and onto Kellytown, and South along Ridge Street, reaching out and beyond Moore's Creek. Vinegar Hill was a gathering space, the place where the community came together.

The implementation of urban renewal in the 1960's resulted in Vinegar Hill being cleared of the homes, churches, and businesses, a rupture of the social fabric of Black Charlottesville. To accomplish this, a narrative of 'blight,' one used in many other cities and core to the urban renewal movement, was used to not only create a clear demand for this removal, but also reinforce an understanding of the Black community that lived there (Gordon, 2004, Saunders and Shackelford, 2004). In order to receive funding from the federal government, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) required the City of Charlottesville to create public housing. In 1965, 126 public housing units were nestled into the edge of the historically Black 10th and Page Neighborhood, next to a main railroad artery, and situated below West Main street, out of sight along

the primary connection between the downtown business district and the University of Virginia.

This was all done with the promise of upgraded housing for the Black community and greater economic opportunity for the city. Those living in houses long in need of restoration and investment would get access to modern homes with central heating, electric stoves, and washing machines (Johnson, 2021). The space that was taken would be used for future commercial development, and transportation infrastructure would provide greater access into and through the city. This would benefit the more mobile, white affluent residents and business interests coming in from the expanding county and suburbs.

While these promises of opportunity were central to local government, institutions supportive of economic development, and broader federal policies, they also had other effects. Homes owned by Black families that were structurally sound fell into the same categories of ‘blight’ (Ayers and Warren, 2010). While there was remuneration based on assessments and a review of present land values, Black residents had limited access to comparable homes elsewhere in Charlottesville (Saunders and Shackelford, 2004). The equity that families had built would become useless, impacting the family wealth they held. Businesses, due to the change of location, would need to rebuild their client and audience bases to remain sustainable. The communities that had long sustained them would radically change, meaning that the regularity and accessibility of the business to the community and the community to the business would require a significant shift in their business models (Saunders and Shackelford, 2004). What had been a nexus of Black life in Charlottesville would no longer be present, fracturing the

community from the central position it had held since the end of the Civil War. Those living and working there would now relocate to other areas, uprooting the social cohesion and social capital that had been built and developed into a thriving community.

It was not until ten years later, defined by years of emptiness, that the promises of economic development came into being with the building of the King's grocery store, the development of the Omni Hotel, and the Commonwealth Building. In the meantime, half a million dollars of federal funds, not used for the urban renewal project, were repurposed for the continued extension of the downtown mall (Daily Progress, 1978). Political battles took place over future economic opportunities and who would have control of those decisions. With the lack of action, the City Council asked the Virginia General Assembly and was given the right to take control of the Charlottesville Housing and Redevelopment Association board, bringing the organization under direct control of political interests. All of which points to the value that the site had both at the present moment and in the future for building wealth for white economic interests in the city. A form of upward mobility that none of the Black residents would either have access or be a part of.

Witnessing the ongoing ways that white southern society worked to undermine and disenfranchise the Black communities (Dubois, 1935; King, 1967: Kelley, 1990, Davis, 2015; Rothstein, 2017), two critical points are the starting point for making present the ongoing work of Black public housing residents. One, even while communities of color were being fractured, they are continually working to strengthen the relationships that had been so important to them and build new communities of opportunity at new sites. In the context of Charlottesville, I would argue that urban

renewal, a moment of violence, has been seen as an end point in history, marking a traumatic moment in time that would forever fester in the city. As it does to this day. But, there was an immediate counter-response. It is this agency that is forgotten and overlooked. It is the vitality and vibrancy of how these communities respond to the events that took place which has reinforced their resiliency and positions them at the forefront of developing innovative alternatives. This practice of reorganization is a process that is continual, an ongoing experience since the arrival of Black enslaved people arrived in North America in 1619 (Hannah-Jones, 2021).

Secondly, and building on the previous point, is the desire for self determination. This is especially true in the way that the policies and practices that emerged from this moment in time entangled Black communities within structures of governmentality and necropolitics (Foucault, 2007; Mbembe, 2008). While for some the promise of new 'modern' housing undoubtedly became true, it is important to go deeper into the trade offs. A primary part of the narrative of 'blight' within the framework of urban renewal was tied to modernization (Johnson, 2021). This not only included connections to electricity, water, and sewer, all infrastructural services that Charlottesville had underdeveloped in neighborhoods of color (Yager, 2020), but also the perceptions of gardens and animal husbandry that were vital sustaining resources for families in Vinegar Hill (Saunders and Shackelford, 2004). Even with limited economic opportunities, families could provide the needed nourishment that they required. This became a part of the narrative that drove urban renewal. These culturally specific and historically significant practices were seen as backwards, harkening to an older time, and not a part of the vision of what it meant to live in an urban area. When in reality they were a means to provide the vital

resources that could sustain a family. Now this narrative has been inverted and overtaken with the identity of the urban pioneer, which asserts these values as a part of white upwardly mobile families reconnecting to the land through tending chickens and growing a vegetable garden (Smith, 2013). While it can be hard to argue about the authenticity of these actions, the way these narratives worked against Black families in Vinegar Hill and for present white families has to be recognized.

Whether with the move to public housing or the dispersal to other parts of the city, the social and economic rituals that had defined the area are now removed. One must now walk significantly further to get access to produce that they would have formerly grown themselves. Due to the way social benefits are perceived in the US and the bureaucratic demands of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, there is a continued encroachment of resident's public and private lives. There are continued requests for documentation of income to determine housing costs. Regular inspections are required to make sure that residents are following safety and security standards. Repairs to apartment mechanical systems are billed to residents. Changes in the legal language of the leases place further restrictions and financial demands on residents (Bell, 2021). The system that is in place to provide housing for low income residents of the city are forced to continually negotiate and respond with systems of bureaucracy that require vigilant review, defense, and resistance.

In the case of the Public Housing Association of Residents (PHAR), what we see is an ongoing history to assert the self-determination and agency of public housing residents. Like many other sites, this has manifested in ongoing demands to maintain and repair aging public housing sites to provide healthy and safe homes, but it also

includes efforts to push back against policies that come both from federal and local agencies that directly impact residents. This includes changes to rental deposits policy and how policing takes place in these neighborhoods. It includes a Residents Bill of Rights, which publicly centers the role of residents in decision making about public housing policy. While the creation of tenants associations as a tool for public housing advocacy and organizing is well documented, these have evolved in Charlottesville as a means to build power and center public housing residents in decision making and future redevelopment. There is the constant attendance and involvement at City Council and Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority meetings to make sure that resident voices are shared, heard, and included in the policy that affects their lives.

There are proactive efforts to respond to educational concerns at local schools, provide access to health resources, and even consideration of residents taking ownership of public housing. It also consists of programs and events to support residents. An internship program trains public housing residents to understand their power and build their consciousness/skill about public housing advocacy. Westhaven Day is a moment to celebrate community and bring a variety of partners and service providers into the community. Initiatives, such as the *Vision for Positive Redevelopment*, shape the future vision of public housing redevelopment, when other communities are seeing their sites bulldozed and communities again fractured for future redevelopment, recreating the exact same circumstances that took place during urban renewal. Unlike in cities across the country, efforts in Charlottesville are seeking to rebuild housing for residents and provide the wrap-around services needed to move them out of poverty.

Dissertation focus

This dissertation is centered on what makes the work of public housing residents, PHAR, and the Black Community possible. It not only wants to point at the fact that these efforts have happened and show a long history of Black, female led community organizing, but more deeply consider what makes them a reality. What are the infrastructures that underlie these actions? How are they creating the opportunity for Charlottesville to not only provide affordable housing, but be a city that is committed to valuing the experience and perspective that low income residents bring to the community. Even though the relationship between being low income and Black is much more complex, we cannot help but recognize that in Charlottesville they tend to align. The history of affordable housing is one that is deeply tied to who is and is not seen as a part of this community. This is not a simple one to one comparison. We cannot overlook the fact that the Black population continues to decrease from over 50% at the end of the Civil War to under 20% now. If there is something at the core of PHAR, it is staking a claim that low income residents have a right to be a part of Charlottesville just as much as anyone else.

Acknowledging the complexity of the history that both resulted in the destruction of Vinegar Hill and the variety of responses, specifically the work of PHAR, what took place was the wholesale removal of one community to make way for the possibility of future economic opportunity for the dominant white community. This included removing roads and replacing them with new roads that would drastically change the movement of people through the city. This would center the flow of cars through and into Charlottesville. It would also mean bringing in water, sewer, and electrical services into

the erased urban space. Infrastructure is used as a mechanism for removal and gentrification.

Part of the ‘blighted’ community narrative centered on the lack of these infrastructures, but it also brings to light the uneven development/disinvestment of Black neighborhoods in Charlottesville. These new systems would resolve long term flooding problems that had long plagued the community and bring access to resources that would spur future development. Beyond this it would impact housing which would require new homes to be built or simply push people to find housing elsewhere, which as Saudners noted, at this moment were limited for Black residents. The fact that the construction of public housing was a contingent aspect of urban renewal funding points to some kind of recognition of the importance of affordable, quality housing as a need. This example and the lack of infrastructural development, point at the ways that the state (local and federal) play in defining the realities of the city. Policy and infrastructure are intertwined. Policy provides a context within which infrastructure is realized.

Similarly, social infrastructures, the lifeblood of the community, would either disappear or need to be redeveloped. Churches would need to be rebuilt, moved, or combined. Business would move or close, shifting the everyday economic encounters that come to define a rhythm to the community. The restructuring of the streets and traffic would shift regularly trodden pathways. Community relationships that had been developed over 100 years would be fractured and seek to find replacements.

These changes would not only be physical and social, but also emotional, rippling throughout generations. This can be seen in the tears shed in successive documentaries about the impact of the removal of Vinegar Hill, the continued efforts to

memorialize these actions, and the need to remember what was done. Vinegar Hill is a deep reference point of loss. The experience of root shock, the reality of the impact of urban renewal as described by Mindy Fullilove, is a profound emotional upheaval that destroys the working model of the world that had existed in the individual's head (Fullilove, 2001). Even more so as the site lay vacant for over 10 years, it was a constant reminder of that loss.

And yet, those that were impacted would immediately start the process of rebuilding and strengthening. In the case of public housing, a tenants associations would support the social life of the residents that would move in (Maybelle, 2022). Regular events would celebrate the vibrancy of the community, programs would support educational opportunities, and as needs arose, community members would come together in response. Eventually seeing the need for building more collective power, PHAR would be created to hold both the City, the Housing Authority, and HUD accountable and empower resident voices in the decisions that impact their lives.

While this research project begins with the way that physical, social, and emotional infrastructures were removed, it doesn't end there. It sees this trauma as one of many moments where racial hierarchy perpetuated harm. In response, the Black community reconstructed these infrastructures, fighting for their self determination. Emerging from this legacy, PHAR has been a vital resource for addressing the racial, gender, and class conflicts that perpetually harm those living in public housing. The focus is then one that centers on the infrastructure that PHAR has built to not only have a voice, but significantly accomplish something that has rarely happened in other cities,

that is center residents in the public discourse around affordable housing and work toward the redevelopment of this vital infrastructure in Charlottesville.

Chapter 2 - Infrastructures and the Marvelous: A theoretical framing

In this theoretical chapter, I am walking the geography and reality of infrastructure, pulling at the threads of how it is understood and functions. In doing so, I seek to think about how infrastructure either creates or limits what is possible in the world. Moving from economic and physical to social and affective understandings, I argue for considering infrastructure less as a normative position and instead wish to think about how it supports opportunities for change. Using ideas that emerge from the Black Radical Tradition and Afro-Surrealism, I posit a counter theory - Infrastructures of the Marvelous - that works across definitions of infrastructure to consider how grassroots movements work individually and collectively to manifest social change.

This begins by thinking about how infrastructures function in our lives. Their presence or lack of presence. Their impact on how we move through and engage space. It then moves onto the way infrastructures are tied to economics. This explores the way a specific understanding of infrastructure facilitates a specific way of life tied to political and ideological frameworks. From there, I step into the literature on social infrastructures. Here, I am curious about the way social connections and social capital form an infrastructure that provides for community needs. Next, I move into the more recent academic literature on affective infrastructures. In this section, I am most curious about how infrastructure both perpetuates emotion, but also how emotion creates a form of infrastructure. Lastly, I consider how the Black Radical Tradition, with specific emphasis on the Afro-Surrealist and Afro Futurists movements, has realized physical, social, and affective infrastructures as a means to counter the dominant racial, colonial,

patriarchal logics. These are infrastructures of the marvelous, which public housing residents use to enact the change they wish to make in the world.

Functioning of Infrastructure

Infrastructure as a concept is one that is both ever present and not seen. Every present in the way that it supports everyday actions. They are the wires and towers that allow people to communicate over long distances, simplifying the opportunity to share news or wish someone well. They are the pipes that connect our homes to local water supplies and in doing so providing access to vital resources. In reverse, they are the pipes that take waste away, traveling below ground to later be processed. From a path cut through a woodland forest to the interstate highways, transportation infrastructure provides a way to move between spaces, allowing not only individuals to traverse long spaces, but also goods and services. Infrastructures are the skeleton, nervous system, and blood vessels of society, crossing both physical, technological, and social forms. A system of linkages and connections that provide the means for making action possible.

While providing the opportunity, they also constrain what is possible. Infrastructure concretize actions. Communities rely on them and then become rooted in what can be possible. Roads, while providing the means for walking and bicycling, have become synonymous with the automobile. Because of this relationship, they tend to dominate how we see and understand them. Instead of walking or biking to the grocery store, the habit of jumping into our cars becomes a normative routine.

When expanding our focus, one can start to see the intertwining of these systems. The relationship between roads and cars can be connected to the energy that allows cars to function. Oil is pumped out of the ground in the Middle East, transported

to refineries along the Gulf Coast, and is then distributed to gas stations. The demand for cars produces a manufacturing and supply infrastructure. Raw materials are gathered and refined to produce the metals, plastics, and glass. Car companies design and use these materials to create a car. A distribution system is created to move the cars to market and eventually sell them to a customer. After years of use, a car needs to be repaired, requiring someone to be knowledgeable about the car and access to the materials needed to make the repair. These are the supply and value chains that come to define how the world functions.

My purpose in following this thread is to recognize the way that infrastructures are interconnected and integrated. They do not stand alone, but build on themselves concretizing what is possible. To shift the complexity of these systems ripples throughout, affecting every step. Thus, as an infrastructure begins to concretize, it becomes more and more difficult to move beyond it. Internalized reforms are possible, but the standards hold fast and become the measure for which the world is realized.

If we take the time to pull apart the entomology of infrastructure, the intended transparency comes forward. “Infra” meaning ‘below’ reinforces the way in which these systems hide in plain sight. They are meant to move into the background, functioning without question. Readily accessible when needed, but not holding our attention. It is only in times of crisis that they become apparent. It is only when a snowstorm downs trees that fall on and eventually stress powerlines, leading to power outages which impact heating, that infrastructure becomes apparent. Or in the case of traumatic events like Hurricane Katrina, where weather causes catastrophic failures of multiple infrastructures (levees, transportation, food systems, etc), that a greater awareness of

the fragility of these infrastructure and their direct impact on communities is made manifest. Or in the case of the impact of drinking water in Flint, where a decision to change the access to water and the need to treat that water, caused problems with the infrastructure of lead pipes that provided water making it undrinkable, but ultimately untouchable. These moments make the importance of infrastructures all too present.

We must also recognize the extent to which we go to hide infrastructure. Cables and pipes are buried underground. Cellular towers are made to look like trees. Tall concrete barriers are constructed along highways to disperse the noise of car traffic into neighborhoods. Water pump stations are made to look like suburban homes so that they fit into the character of a neighborhood. Why is this done? Why go to all the trouble of hiding these systems? Is it a desire to appeal to our visual sensibilities? Decluttering our environment of the detritus that makes life possible? Is it a conception of what a space, a city, a neighborhood should look like? Or is it a desire to not take infrastructures seriously? Not recognizing its importance?

The reason I ask these questions and am querying the way in which infrastructures function is that there needs to be a deeper understanding of both what an infrastructure is and how it functions. We need to move beyond the more expected examples of transportation, water, or energy, and consider how social infrastructures function to not only support society but are in this cycle of construction and deconstruction in response to the needs of our communities. At the same time we need to recognize the stark reality of the varying scale of infrastructures that communities have access to. When there is a deficit, where do they find the resources to be resilient? What infrastructures are developed to realize a need? How do communities, especially

those that have long experienced disinvestment and disenfranchisement, build both formal and informal infrastructures to survive?

Economic definitions of Infrastructure

Definitions for infrastructure emerged in the middle of the 20th Century centering on the role that these systems play in support of a market based economy. Often referenced, Reimut Jochimsen's definition in *Theorie der Infrastruktur* emerges in the context of global market development in a Keynesian post World War II moment. Infrastructure is defined by the collection of material, institutional, and personal resources that are available for "economic agents" to address needs and wants (Jochimsen 1966). This definition broadly sees infrastructure as the combination of physical, governmental, and personal resources that are required for a functioning economy. At the same time it focuses on how those resources are used in response to the demands of the market. In this case infrastructure is a mechanism for the facilities and information defined by these resources to be activated for exchange.

Buhr, in 2003, revisited Jochimsen to reconsider this definition. He centered on the way in which material, institutional, and personal resources are defined in the present moment. Institutional infrastructures are the normative customs and rituals defined by a community as they are secured and supported by the state. Personal infrastructure is defined in the terms of human capital that supports a working population. This is the labor available to support economic growth. Material infrastructures is defined as the culmination of capital equipment and services in relation to the production of output. Here infrastructure is the culmination of equipment, services, and administration that supports public provisioning. An educational

infrastructure is recognized as the culmination of a school as a physical building, the courses provided by teachers to students, and the administration of these resources by a state entity. In focusing on the interactions between these three modes of infrastructure, Buhr develops a new definition centering on the economic opportunities that are created. “Infrastructure of an area is the sum of all relevant economic data such as rules, stocks and measures with the function of mobilizing the economic potentialities of economic agents” (Buhr, 2003). Infrastructure moves away from being simply a physical manifestation of a system and becomes a mechanism for economic growth, which state policy guarantees and protects.

Taking a descriptive position that asks what is infrastructure, other authors consider the function that infrastructures play in the economy. Prepared for the 2004 World Bank Conference on Development Economics, Prud’homme adds to the ongoing dialogue by considering the specific connections that infrastructure plays in support of economic development and more specifically growth. In seeking to define infrastructure, he attributes six characteristics to infrastructure. They are capital goods that provide specific services, meaning that while infrastructures have physical dimensions it is the resources that they provide that are important. Infrastructure has a lumpy nature, meaning that they are consistently responding to supply and demand dynamics. There is a permanence, again not only as physical form, but also in terms of how they are maintained and financed that extends their temporal and organizational life. Infrastructures are space specific. They are rooted in a response to specific needs that have geographical and social boundaries. Bridges are built to span specific areas and connect cities, but at the same time respond to geographies and the materials they are

built of. He notes the way in which infrastructure responds to failures in the market, which are then filled by governmental institutions. Finally, infrastructures serve both enterprises and households. Roads provide both the ability for producers to get their projects to market, having a direct financial output. While also providing the means to travel and visit family, which the author sees as having little to no economic value.

Understanding these functions, Prud'homme then centers his attention on the impact that infrastructure has on economic growth. Yet due to the heterogeneity and difficulty of direct assessment, he recognizes that answers remain vague. Instead he shifts his attention to simply how infrastructures contribute to economic development, circling back to the way that these systems support both enterprise and households. From the perspective of a home, infrastructure primarily supports welfare, which he notes has direct labor and productivity impacts. On the other hand, infrastructure in the entrepreneurial sector both opens up markets to the sale of goods and services. These lower the cost of accessing these markets in both time, transportation, and access to labor. His argument focuses on GDP as a foundational metric in which to assess their impact.

In 2012, Frischmann took a more expansive view in *Infrastructure: The Social Value of Shared Resources*. Beginning with the ongoing narrative around the lack of investment in infrastructure in the US, parallelling Prud'homme, he notes the discrepancies between a focus on "supply side" obstacles, raising the required capital to support infrastructure investments, and the "demand-side" issues, centering on the way communities place pressure on the need for investments. He argues that there is a lack

of concern with the social value of infrastructure. In doing so he more broadly defined infrastructure.

> "Infrastructures are a prerequisite for economic and social development. Infrastructures shape complex systems of human activity, including economic, cultural, and political systems. That is, infrastructures affect the behavior of individuals, firms, households, and other organizations by providing and shaping the available opportunities of these actors to participate in these systems and to interact with each other." (Frischmann, 2012)

Here it is important to emphasize the way that Frischmann centers infrastructure as a shaper of both behavior and opportunities for participation. Moving beyond the way that roads, telecommunications, and water systems provide resources, they also define the context in which they are engaged. These systems follow a distributive network that lies unseen and inexperienced until the flick of a switch or the turn of a valve gives us access. When we place a cup under a faucet to pour a glass of water, we are initiating a direct experience with a larger system that provides that resource. Yet, it is the simplicity of this interaction with an everyday object that is important. The instantaneous response defines a relationship to the resource. It is when we magnify this expectation across a wealth of demands or when the failure of those systems become apparent, when a behavior is directly impacted, that we are forced to change the behavior.

We can point to the ongoing water crisis in the City of Flint as an example. Not only has this required the community to seek alternative sources of water, relying on bottled water shipped in from elsewhere, an economic shift, but has also led to a change in political and health behaviors at varying scales. Frischmann sees infrastructure working at both micro and macro levels, influencing the in-system behaviors but also broader systems. "Infrastructure resources effectively structure in-system behavior at the micro-level by providing and shaping the available

opportunities of many actors. In some cases, infrastructure resources make possible what would otherwise be impossible, and in other words, infrastructure resources reduce the cost and/or increase the scope of participation for actions that are otherwise possible." Again there are similar concerns to those Prud'homme brought forward, but a deeper concern with the way in which these systems impact individuals.

Another primary argument of Frischman's consideration of the social value of infrastructure is its relationship with the commons. More specifically commons management, which captures a 'non-discriminatory sharing strategy' that makes infrastructure open access. He sees this form of resource management as holding specific values of openness, a lack of discrimination amongst users or uses, and eliminating the need to obtain a license to use the resource.

Infrastructure in this framing is a universal resource, readily accessible to those who wish to use it. Ultimately, this decenters the role that market based or governmental actors play in defining the boundaries of who has access to infrastructure. It also provides a way to think beyond solely economic functions and consider the social value that infrastructures produce, expanding the role that they play providing social and public good. Yet, he recognizes limits especially based in a free-rider dilemma as it reflects the ability to manage the commons.

Recognizing that this is a small survey of a more significant literature, it is important to note several themes that arise in this literature. For all the authors above, infrastructure is working within the framing of economics. Whether focusing on the way that physical, institutional, or commons facilitate exchange, we have to recognize that the foundational basis for this thinking is a free market, neo-classical economic system.

Infrastructures perpetuate the ease and opportunity of this economic system to access resources, develop new markets and build financial value. These are perpetuated by both political and legal systems that are focused on maintaining this economic system. As the focus is based on a descriptive mode of how infrastructures work within this framework, there is little to no broader criticism of the resulting impact.

In this case, I see infrastructure playing a double normative role. While easing the possibility and opportunity for action, infrastructures are the frame for what is possible and in doing so constrain the behaviors that emerge. They produce a reference point, which yes can be a platform for innovation, but at the same time is the defining way one perceives and acts. The predominance of automobile traffic on roads, situates how roads function. While historically, roads have played a much broader function, it is this frame of reference that perpetuates how we use and understand road infrastructure. When advocates for alternative uses place greater demand on how and who a road should serve, it produces a level of dissonance until cultural practices begin to reshape behaviors. At the same time it requires the desire to revise legal precedent through political action, de-cementing the dominant infrastructure, to see change occur.

Star and Ruhleder define similar concerns based on conventions of practice and the foundations the infrastructures emerge from. In their description of conventions of practice, infrastructures both shape and are shaped by the normative dynamics of society. They are situated in a bounded feedback loop that limits possibilities, but also reinforces what has been. Cycles of action are in motion but their frame is constrained. To this they note the way in which infrastructures inherit the strengths and limitations of their base. The contexts in which infrastructures emerge play a vital role in defining

what is possible and the breadth of their impact. When placing the normative feedback loops and the contextual limits/possibilities into a relationship, the dynamism of movement, connection, and simplicity of use of infrastructures becomes more rigid. The temporal and spatial contexts take on more meaning. They must not be taken for granted as simply what is, but must provide an opportunity to question what has been and what futures they perpetuate.

Starr is similarly concerned about the way that infrastructures define master narratives that then other possible alternatives. The physical and cultural codification and normalization that infrastructure perpetuates, positions alternatives as near impossibilities. This requires us to not only identify this other, but make them visible, questioning what is not seen or purposely removed. The tension of tacit and explicit forms of infrastructures must be dealt with to overcome paradoxes that infrastructures provide. Ultimately Starr questions the malleability and fixed nature of infrastructures. She questions the way that small problems provide big hurdles, magnifying the impact that infrastructures have. Requiring that we consider infrastructures as generators or barriers of the world we wish to create. Paradoxes of our own making.

Working in parallel to the functional normativity of infrastructure, is the normativity of broader economic systems, which holds fast to specific ideological stances in the economic literature. The dominance of commodity production and the exploitative nature of the relationships are taken for granted. Infrastructure serves as a primary mechanism for perpetuating these interactions that are based in extraction and domination. Shipping infrastructure of the colonial world provided not only access to extract natural resources, but also human resources in the form of chattel slavery that

was used to amass significant wealth for European powers. A more contemporary example, finance infrastructure not only allows money to flow quickly across a global network, but they also provide the means for dependency and perpetuation of under-development that locks in place relationships that situate the first and third worlds. Infrastructure in this case calcifies positions of domination which are reinforced through language and symbol.

Gibson-Graham, in their post-structural feminist critique of capitalism, questions the essentialist and overdetermined nature of these economic systems. Attacking the capitalocentric nature of economic practices and thinking, they challenge the way in which society performs a social world without questioning the underlying foundations, continually reinforcing its form and structure without even realizing it. This dominance is seen in “a variety of discursive commitments” that simplify and abstract the true complexity of economic and political systems, reducing gender to binaries, races to categories, and producing narratives that are rarely questioned.

We can see this in the understanding of infrastructure as a mechanism for economic growth in the literature. Infrastructure is meant to perpetuate and support free market economics, which requires state coordination, definition of a physical resource, and productive labor that supports growth. It overlooks the reproductive role that infrastructures play as a means for sustaining life both socially and physically. Home and community are side notes, relegated to welfare and public good, secondary to the primary objective of moving capital to market. The commons only becomes relevant when considering the provisioning of shared resources. Once again, we have to rehash the influence of the free-rider and entitlement that has long been the focus of economic

theorists. Institutional normativity in these cases are the foundation upon which all thinking and functionality is based.

Returning to Gibson-Graham, we have to question the way that traditional conceptions of infrastructure reside in an abstraction that allows their function to be overdetermined. They argue that capitalism's power is situated in its ability to exist in zones of being both everywhere and nowhere. It is so baked into everything that we do and see that it becomes unquestionable. Everything becomes a product to be bought and sold or a structure of supporting the amassing of wealth, the ultimate goal of everyone. Even though for the most, this is unachievable. Because of this, there is a resiliency that liberates it from the contradictions that are produced.

Infrastructure shares in this abstraction. It is there but not there, hiding in plain sight. Only becoming present at a moment of failure, harm, or extreme demand. Crisis produces a response, but not an overall critique of the system. Power outages rarely produce overall concern for how electrical infrastructure is constructed and defined. Instead, the focus is on the immediate needs that result from the outage. Short term needs always outweigh the long term impacts. We will continue to support coal-fired power plants until the effects of pollution have environmental, political, and cultural impacts that are directly tangible. Or powerlines trigger wildfires that destroy entire communities. Even then, it is easier to rebuild what has been than to restructure a system. This is a form of defuturing that, as Tony Fry has discussed, requires "the identification, judgment, selection and clearing of what this negation puts in place (Fry, 2010)." None of which normativity wants to or wishes to come to terms with. For all the

innovation that is out there, it is easier to reinforce what has been rather than imagine what could be possible.

A social understanding of infrastructure

Moving away from an economic functional conception, infrastructures are dynamic means of social interaction. As noted above, we can recognize their ability to not only support, but frame the opportunity for social processes. Ideological infrastructures provide a means upon which political organization develops and around which religious practices evolve (Roth, 2019). Language cements an infrastructure of cultural and geographical identity that emerges in response to lived lived experience (Lyons, 1981). While spatial and temporal infrastructures intertwine to further situate and contextualize these experiences, giving broader meaning to how the past, present and future interact with our understanding of our environment.

In her 1999 article, *The Ethnography of Infrastructure*, Susan Star intertwines methodological questions of infrastructure with a consideration of ethnography. Calling for a “study of boring things”, she considers the meanings and manifestations of infrastructures as they implicate themselves throughout information structures, organizations models, and virtual, interactive worlds that were developing at that time. She recognizes a general understanding of infrastructures as “systems of substrates” that are invisible and remain in the background. As mentioned above, they reside below the surface, functioning outside of our present attention. Though, in referencing Jewett and Kling (1991), Starr defines infrastructures as relational in nature. They perpetuate connections through different means, placing people, constructing places, and I would add, values and knowledge in relationship to each other. In this sense infrastructures

are not solely centered in their functional outputs, but a form of human organization that perpetuates action.

Based on this foundation, Star and Ruhleder define a series of properties that come to define infrastructures, those being embeddedness, transparency, reach and scope, membership, links with convention of practice, embodiment of standard, built on an installed base, visible upon breakdown, and modularity. Several of which are important to expanding an understanding of infrastructure as a social construction. Embeddedness points to the complexity of infrastructure. Instead of objects in and of themselves, we have to recognize how they are “sunk” into and “reside in relationship” to other structures. Infrastructures have both a rootedness in a primary function, but also support other functions. They conceptually stand alone, but are also interwoven to support a breadth of possibilities. The authors shift our conception of transparency, focusing not just on their presence, but also their use. While infrastructures might hide spatially, again moving into the background, they do so in ways that support and emphasize action. Due to this active positioning, there is no desire to reinvent embedded infrastructures as they continuously provide for a need that over time becomes an unquestioned habit. Simple, taken for granted actions are underscored by vast systems that make them possible. Infrastructures also have a reach and scope that is both temporal and spatial. Spatially they connect and disperse, providing access to resources, but also making it possible for them to move. While Temporally they function beyond the present, linking moments in time in fractional ways that build upon themselves.

Similarly, Larkin situates infrastructure in relation to forms of biopolitics and technopolitics. He states, “infrastructures are built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, ideas and allow for their exchange over space. They comprise the architecture for circulation, literally providing the undergriding of modern societies, and they generate the ambient environment of everyday life (Larkin, 2013). ” In doing so infrastructures are a form of social metabolism. They not only present forms of political rationality realized in technological projects, but “emerge out of and store within them desire and fantasy.” In doing so infrastructures are semiotic and aesthetic systems of political possibility.

With this foundation, Larkin considers the ontological, technopolitical, and the ambient meanings that have come to define infrastructure. Ontologically, he recognized that infrastructures are both things in and of themselves, but also relationships between things. In doing so they operate as systems, working at different levels simultaneously, generating multiple forms of address, which must recognize categorization as a political and epistemological act. It is in recognizing the complexity of infrastructure that we must see them as an amalgamation of technical, administrative and financial techniques. When we do this, we have to start to critique the “ethnographic” implications of these techniques. Simply describing an infrastructure like housing only abstracts embedded assumptions, requiring greater levels of socio-political analysis. When doing so, infrastructures are seen as metapragmatic objects, signs of themselves deployed in particular regimes to establish sets of effects. These systems then work at the sensorial level manifesting spatiotemporal experiences that are regulated by infrastructure.

Another way of understanding how infrastructures connect and support social practices is rooted in a more direct relationship that people have with urban environments. In this case, social infrastructure is not only a theoretical consideration, but a more tangible connection between the built environment, social networks, and social capital. In this more specific consideration, questions emerge as to how these types of social infrastructure support community well-being or when lacking perpetuate harm. Social infrastructures are the linkages and foundations that perpetuate and frame our social lives.

Studying the impact of a heat wave that caused the death of 739 people in Chicago in 1995, Eric Klinenberg explores not only the individual causes that resulted in these fatalities, but sought to understand the spatial impact at the neighborhood level. Based on statistical and qualitative data he came to recognize the importance that local conditions play in mitigating and overcoming the blanket of death that descended on the city that summer. While data on poverty can present a certain perspective on why certain neighborhoods had higher death rates than others, that information when seen spatially required a more complex reading of the data. What he found missing was an understanding of both the lack of and depth of the social infrastructure that underpins each neighborhood. Defined as a relationship between the physical places and organizations that shape the way people act, Klinenberg describes how social infrastructure provided a variety of ways for communities to respond to the crisis.

Social infrastructure is in this case a type of social glue that connects people together which is then framed and supported by the public spaces in which social activities play out. These are vibrant streets that have both a mix of activities and action,

but also allow for deep relationships to be developed amongst each other. They are the “hellos” and “how are you doing?” that play out on front porches and as people cross paths. They emerge at the last minute needing butter or eggs to finish off a recipe. The summer sharing of plants and produce from gardens. They are the threads of connection made possible through small encounters and shared needs that take place to realize a vibrant community.

These have been most iconically described by Jane Jacob’s in the *Death and Life of the Great American City*. There she describes her own urban neighborhood in New York as a mix of people, business, and relationships, resulting in the development of a community of people that are living a shared experience. It is on the sidewalks where much of these activities occur providing for both moments of contact and safety that define life on the street. Safety plays itself out through a network of voluntary controls and standards that are enforced by the people living and working there. These are the eyes on the street that are often mentioned as a means to document and understand only only what is taking place, but also as information to be shared throughout that network. Whereas, contact seeks a balance between people’s determination for privacy and the benefits that come from having people around. This allows people to both be connected and at the same time place boundaries around the relationships they have.

In many of the neighborhoods that were most impacted by the heat wave in Chicago, Klinenberg recognized that these forms of social infrastructure were not present. Instead ongoing modes of disinvestment and disenfranchisement had strained these neighborhoods of their vibrancy and stressed their resiliency. Any form of social

capital that had been held in common was now limited. Distrust in institutions and distrust in neighbors, reinforced by crumbling streets, discouraged relationships and impeded the mutuality that are the hallmarks of Jacobs description. Because of this the social cohesion of the neighborhood limited their ability to respond to the crisis that was at hand. Klinenberg sees these softer forms of infrastructure as vital to determining the fates of those that endured the heat wave. In the US, where infrastructure is tied more to economic viability than social well being, there is a need to invest in places and practices that encourage interaction across diversity, difference, and need. This requires a much deeper commitment to considering these opportunities and then designing how these spaces are developed and realized.

Referencing Klinenberg, Latham and Layton (2019) more specifically consider the ways in which cities function as sites of social interaction. “Cities are places where it is possible to make connections with other people, even become a part of a community.” Cities inherently serve as social infrastructures as the density and diversity of the city support the opportunities that bind and connect people, functioning as socio-technological systems. “Social infrastructure are the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions and groups that create affordances for social connection.” Emphasizing the term affordances, in a psychological sense, these are objects that allow for certain behaviors to take place. In a city, a street is primarily seen as affording a space for automobile traffic based on its design, placement, and scale. This is an obvious answer, but it also can provide for a multitude of other behaviors such as street parties, festivals, bike races, parades. Infrastructures may have primary functions, but they can, and maybe should be, allowed to support a much larger variety of interactions. Especially

when they serve as means for building relationships and cohesion, as noted above. While this example focuses on a specific element of a city, when we consider the entirety of urban space, the city can be seen as a social infrastructure in and of itself. The city is a conglomeration of social practices that combine economics, culture, and politics. It is this understanding of a city as a living form, as both an opportunity and space for opportunity, as a collective manifestation of social energies, where the importance of social infrastructure comes to bear (Lefebvre, 1968; Mitchell, 2003; Harvey, 2015). Yet, it is important to recognize that these practices are not solely urban. The heightened nature of interaction and the amount of interaction may make them more readable, they are means of social organization that takes various forms in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

Yet, it is the publicness of social infrastructure that Lathmon and Layton turn their attention. Not only are they non-discriminatory in an economic sense, but they are purposely meant to perpetuate modes of interaction, collaboration and engagement. In this role they see social infrastructure functioning publically in four ways - being in public, participating in a civic activity, engaging in a matter of concern, and in provisioning. These are multidimensional modes of interaction, which individuals engage in both singularly but also collectively. Social infrastructure is then a means to consider “public dimensions of urban life.” In doing so, we have to understand that urban life is not inherently equal. It is not only a privilege to have the ability to use a street in ways that deviates from the norm, but it is another leap to see oneself as included in those activities. This requires us to see these spaces as serving a host of functions that support a wide variety of actions and developing social infrastructures that

support who is included or excluded within the city. Unless this is understood and those in power are making decisions in response, our ability to develop inclusive, diverse cities is limited.

Social infrastructure is a reflection of not only the constructed environment but also of the people who live there. As Robert Park recognized, “if the city is the world which humans created, it is the world in which they are henceforth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of their task, in making the city they have remade themself (Park, 1967).” The publicness of social infrastructure is then not only a means of participation and interaction, it provides a much deeper question of who we are and who we want to become. If physical infrastructure is perceived as “congealed social interest” (Graham & Marvin 2001), then social infrastructure must be understood as putting those social interests into action. In doing so, we have to consider not only who these social interests include but the people they allow us to become.

In continuing to push a conception of infrastructure, not solely defined in physical, economic, institutional, or networked terms, where the social or political organization is the focus, it seems appropriate to consider the role that people serve as infrastructures. Over 20 years ago and with a follow up article in 2021, AbdouMaliq Simone considered how people served as a form of infrastructure within the urbanized contexts of the Global South. Very much indebted to a Lefebvrian concept of the city as a social construction, Simone explores the ways in which people draw on the traces of the past, negotiate governmentality, work across hierarchies of immigration, and reimagine space to continually contextualize and remake urban space. He focuses on

the tensions that are developed in making a city legible through either the codification of legal and political standards in comparison to the more dynamic, haphazard modes of social interaction. It was at the conjunction of the visible, concrete social structures elicited by bureaucracies, and the invisible, the possibilities created by highly mobile people seeking to make a life, that in an operating system of people as infrastructure emerges. While there is a desire to concretize and organize patterns of interaction, “People as infrastructure indicates residents’ needs to generate concrete acts and contexts of social collaboration inscribed with multiple identities rather than in overseeing and enforcing modulated transactions among discrete population groups (Simone, 2004, 2021).” People as infrastructure is an understanding of urbanization and community as a complexly layered interaction between a desire for uniformity and the flow of living. While there is a focus on understanding urban spaces from a technical point of view, it is within dynamic social systems that a city truly functions. This produces a “spaciousness” that “allows bodies to be more and less than what they are - dynamic infrastructures.” Ultimately Simone is advocating for an understanding of life as more “improvisational, ephemeral, evolving, and incomplete”. In doing so he is seeking to describe and provide a form of agency that in many ways is bounded physically and temporally, but nonetheless opens a way of recognizing the vibrancy of collective life.

Taking these as a whole, I think it is important to both reiterate and challenge several of the threads that emerge from the literature. I want to start by what I see as missing. While Klinenberg, Simone and others reference a need to critique the discrepancies that cause the failure of social infrastructures, these remain shallow. Simone notes the role that capitalism and globalization has in defining the urbanized

world that people as infrastructure struggle, even pointing to how these systems of domination and extraction perpetuate these struggles. Yet, his focus is much more centered on describing an urbanized present and not engaging how the past came to define that situation nor how the agency of people might define a different future. People are bound to an already established urban metabolism. Klinenberg focuses on the state and civil society, noting the massive investments that can be made following global policy agreements. This overlooks the autonomy, power and knowledge that are held in local communities to build their own responses. This needs an acceptance of and investment in social infrastructure. Following arguments of presence, social infrastructures are only seen and taken seriously in moments of crisis. Failures and disasters place attention on thread bare systems and that puts them under further stress.

The success of this literature is in how they make present the role that social infrastructures play in lived experience. They are creating a language and giving form to processes that are ephemeral in nature. Much of Jane Jacob's writing focuses on giving value and exploring the meaning of everyday activity, practices that reside in the background, habits that sit on the edge of consciousness. She gives credence to social action and underscores how it makes thriving urban spaces. It must be understood that much of the drive to do this work was in response to the power of development ideologies that were reshaping New York City and erasing what she was trying to describe. Lefebvre, defining a right to the city in 1967, is equalizing disproportionate power relationships. Following the human rights conversations that emerged after World War II and in the milieu of 1960's activism, he is asserting a positive right that connects

everyday action to the manifestation of space. This positions social infrastructure not just as an idea but an ability to be included in the law, which several countries have included in their constitutions. Even so, the right to the city encounters limits in how this right is translated through legal, political, and technical processes, moving from global to local (Friendly, 2014). Either by giving value as a right or in defining what a vibrant social space can be, these ideas give social infrastructure an agentic nature. Infrastructures do not solely define what can be possible, but are spaces of action that individuals have a role in manifesting.

Infrastructures of Affect - Feeling/Consciousness/Emotions

Thus far I have begun to complicate an understanding of infrastructure as having a singular function. As simply a hidden provider of provisions or a means to perpetuate economic activity. From Frischman's consideration of how infrastructures define behaviors to Klinenberg's consideration of how social infrastructures perpetuate social cohesion, there is a conception that these systems do more than what is presented, but are a vital way of perpetuating specific ways of knowing, understanding, and being in the world we live. Moving another step beyond the physical, a significant literature has developed around an understanding of how infrastructures both make us feel and at the same time how feelings produce infrastructures. When Klinenberg described the hurdles that disenfranchised and disinvested communities must overcome in responding to a crisis, they are not only physical and social, but deeply psychological. This is the distrust that grows as a community member watches their neighborhood gentrify and they can no longer recognize themselves in their own community. Or when

the fear of physical violence, perpetuated by the police or by a local gang, forces people to hide in their homes, removing the possibility of building the cohesion that leads to resilience. It is also the care that is expressed when helping a neighbor in need, the realization of collective identity that emerges during a street festival, and the courage that is needed when responding to moments of crisis.

Mindy Fullilove considered the emotional and psychological toll that the destruction a community encounters in *Root Shock*. Focusing on the urban renewal process that dissected communities of color with infrastructure, she defined displacement as the primary problem of the 21st century. While urban renewal was described as a mode of progress, its actual impact was to severe the social relationships of these communities. “In cutting the roots of so many people, we have destroyed language, culture, dietary traditions, and social bonds. We have lined the oceans with bones, and filled the garbage dumps with bricks (Fullilove, 2004).” Root shock was the response to this upheaval of carefully crafted communities not only at the social and physical level, but the “emotional ecosystems” that these communities created. She describes how this form of shock not only imbalanced the external, but also the internal lives of these neighborhoods. A process that took generations to build, was once again having to start anew.

This fracturing was both an individual and community experience. Individually, it requires one to reconstruct the mental maps that had been created during one’s experience of living in these communities. The habits and relationships of everyday life had been violently removed and now required reconstruction in entire new social and environmental surroundings. At the community level root shock ruptured bonds and

dispersed people, removing the compass of a community. This loss of interconnectedness perpetuated emotional ripples that manifest in all directions - a fractal of disturbances that become the foundations of future life. “We live in an emotional ecosystem that attaches us to the environment, not just as our individual selves, but as being caught in a single, universal net of consciousness anchored in small niches we call neighborhoods or hamlets or villages. Because of the interconnectedness of the net, if your place is destroyed today, I will feel it hereafter (Fullilove, 2004).” In order to heal, Fullilove defined specific tasks for both Black America and everyone else. These centered on creating stable communities, finding good jobs, and using schools as sites for emotional healing and repair. This ultimately required creating neighborhoods where people could live as whole people and have the physical, social, and emotional resources needed to be human.

The value of Fullilove’s research lies in the way that emotions intertwine with the built environment. They are not just a response to or manifest out of a connection to the environment, but are a primary way of providing meaning. Emotion and feeling are a form of cognitive infrastructure that root us in place to both support our identity but also develop deep attachments. In 1978, Proshanksy recognized the place as playing a vital role in identity formulation alongside sex, gender, race, etc. Both consciously and unconsciously identity is informed through a complex mix of ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and tendencies and skills that relate to the environment. He later described Place Identity as a sub-structure of a person’s self-identity, and consists of knowledge and feelings developed through everyday experiences of physical spaces. (Proshansky et al, 1983) We have to wonder what identity emerges from a continuous

contestation and defense of such spaces. Based in this foundational work, Low and Altman defined place attachment as an “integrating concept that involves patterns of attachments, actors, social relationships, temporal aspects, and places that vary in scale, specificity, and tangibility.” In these definitions, there is an understanding of the way in which emotion tied to place provides a platform upon which individuals locate and connect every day action.

While the connection between feeling and place is of significant importance, we must also understand the way that emotional infrastructures shift over time. In a short chapter of his 1997 book, *Marxism and Literature*, cultural theorist Raymond Williams clarified an ongoing interest in what he called structures of feeling. Interested in the relationship between culture and society, he was concerned with the tension between on one hand recognizing the social as a fixed past manifested as institutions, formations, and positions; and the personal which is formed in the active, present moment defined in the now. The social was an objective position that emerged from congealed activity that became more abstract as time passed. Whereas, the personal was rooted in the subjective lived experience based in “changes of presence” and residing outside rationalization. It was only through the interplay between these two positions that a social consciousness emerged, a “style,” that worked between and within temporal/material/social relationships. “It is a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulated and defined exchange.” Structures of feeling result from the changes in presence that come when meanings and values are actively lived and felt. “We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically

affective elements of consciousness and relationships; not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought; practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity." He is both seeking to define a set of relations and tensions (a structure), but also a social experience that is in process (a feeling). Structures of feeling are then social experiences in solution, dynamic and in flux.

Subsequent authors have expanded upon Raymond's definition of structures of feeling to define two specific types of infrastructures. In their edited book *Structure of Feeling*, Sharma and Tygstrup focus on affective infrastructures by placing Williams writing in relationship to the growth of affect studies that emerged in the 2010's. The authors are specifically concerned with research that is interested in the intersection of the body, the historical production of space, the social-cultural life-world, and 'thick' description of historical reality that Williams perpetuated. This created a greater awareness of "how experience is articulated in a close and complex interaction between humans and their environments, how it is bodily mediated, and how it plays out in a particular spatial framework, and how it is inextricably invested in and dependent on social relations between humans, and between humans and social institutions." They see this as being moved in two specific ways, as a matter of the soul and as a mechanic of affect. In the former, affectivity is the "attunement of our being " to the phenomena we encounter in everyday life. This is our receptivity to what is taking place around us, which frames the ways in which we take part in and respond to the situations and environments we find ourselves in. While the mechanic focuses more on the interpersonal interplay of affectivity. This is both the way we react to affective stimuli and the agency the body has in response to that encounter. This is how we respond when

someone extends a hand to say hello. Are we trusting or suspicious? Do you immediately mimic the gesture or respond with a different reflex? Very much in alignment with Simone's desire to see people as agentic beings in dynamic urban environments, affectivity is an underpinning of our power to be in response to the moments we live.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, in *Abolition Geographies*, has a much different purpose when defining infrastructures of feeling. In this case, Gilmore is seeking to find and develop a counter-ontology to the carceral geographies that have been realized in the military and prison industrial complexes that have come to define US society in the late 1950's through today, a structure of feeling tied to neoliberal capitalism. Infrastructures of feeling are a means to develop and perpetuate abolition geographies, while also negating overlapping and interlocking carceral geographies. Beginning with Williams, structures of feeling are defined as tradition, which Gilmore recognizes as having "substantive shape". These structures become a mediating factor between feeling and the material world, a recognition of the way in which emotion leads to action that then results in a material reality and vice versa. "Infrastructures of affect are the conscious-foundation, sturdy but not static, that underlies our capacity to recognize visceral immanent possibilities as we select and reselect liberatory line-ages." Gilmore sees in the Black Radical Tradition unbounded infrastructures of affect that realize abolition geographies by moving away from domination and exclusion.

Finally, a 2022 article by Bosworth questions the difference between affective infrastructures and infrastructures of affect. Bosworth sees the interest in affect and infrastructure as a "renewed attention to the mediation, layering, alienation and

organization of systems and subjects' ' either inline with or against the conditions of capitalist political economy. It is this alienation, this distancing of individuals from the underlying systems that make life possible, that a concern with affect emerges. He describes this an in-between zone of relation and feeling in connection to the world we are living. Affective infrastructure points to the way in which emotion is a spatio-temporal experience. Infrastructure is specially a producer of affect. When a crisis takes place that causes infrastructure to fail, it produces specific emotional responses. At the same time infrastructure is a specific technical response to a historic moment. One just has to think of the way iconic public investments of the early 20th century not only provide access to natural resources but also perpetuate a vision for society's control of nature, a modernist structure of feeling.

Alternatively, Bosworth defines infrastructures of affect as “a simultaneous material-affective conditioning of the circulation and channeling of political events.” Infrastructures of affect animate and sustain political organization and action. An obvious example is the way that a language or narrative of fear is used to rally political action. The rhetoric becomes a lived reality that is later manifested in policies and investments. Based on this analysis, Bosworth understands affective infrastructure as functioning two ways at once. They are a passive technical alienation that generates political action and specific socio-spatial setting, context, and conditions that generate affective forms. Affective infrastructure is then a technology of power.

The Marvelous

Much of what is described above lives in the past tense. It focuses on how infrastructures have functioned as world shapers not solely in a physical way but as

conduits for activities that solidify habits. The authors are primarily concerned with developing an understanding of the complexity of these systems and the breadth to which they prescribe our present reality. As I have tried to critique, they build on normative, descriptive positions. At best they point at or allude to the underlying ideologies and assumptions that form the foundations of infrastructural development.

While there is a concern with the way that infrastructures perpetuate alienation, it is balanced with a lack of concern for the way that definitions (ie. non-discriminatory) mask accessibility. It is only when we broaden our perspective of infrastructure that we have to ask where these systems are taking us? If there is a power to them, then how can it be used to shift and change what has been and what can be? Is constructing a consciousness around the role that people play in defining environments and demanding a right to that process enough? How then do everyday people take up the power to realize these alternatives?

There is a need to forefront the positionality of present day infrastructures, but also explore how grassroots movements develop and activate new forms of infrastructure that seek to realize new behaviors, new resources, new geographies, and new powers. How do they break from the normativity that precludes what is possible and move toward a more active position, as creators of the world we wish to inhabit. This picks up on the agentic ability of people to respond and shift infrastructures that are so core to Simone's argument for people being perceived as infrastructure. It also connects to a host of other authors concerned with the hybridity, the liminal, and the possible. Here we could connect to the Deleuzian shift from being to becoming, a

witnessing of divergent temporal logics in tension and the lack of fixed structures (Deleuze, 1987).

We could also situate this concern in Bhabga's definition of third spaces "which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation (Bhabha and Rutherford, 2006). " This is the emergent in-between space where culture and identity are continually being rethought and reformed. Finally, it could connect to the hidden transcripts that form Scott's concept of infrapolitics. There everyday forms of resistance test and probe the boundaries of the permissible and in doing so bring alternatives to life (Scott, 2005). Instead, I want to develop a definition of a critical, emergent form of grassroots movement infrastructure building in the concept of the marvelous.

The marvelous emerges from an Afro-Surrealist vision for developing another world that moves beyond the constraints of Western, European logics. The concept challenges the way modernist thinking centers a rationalist and scientific mode of being. Instead of solely focusing on a singular truth, surrealism lives more in a fragile present that balances the conscious and the unconscious, valuing the imagination and dream (Breton, 1924). From a European standpoint, surrealism is an internal struggle between the conscious and the unconscious, but for Afro-Surrealists that struggle produces internal paradoxes that are manifested in tangible/physical ways. The contradiction plays out in the mind, which is then reinforced in the environment through dominant political, economic, and culture forms. As a totalizing activity, Afro-surrealism reveals the unconscious and in doing so liberates people by illuminating the blind myths that have led them to this point (Cesaire, 1943; Richardson, 1997). Afro-surrealism works across

boundaries by telling and decorating, signifying and communicating, living in the real and the unreal, as a revelation of truth and function of its beauty (Baraka, 1988). Afro-surrealism is then a critical tool that provides a foundation for revolution.

As the “unknown shore”, the marvelous is defined in Afro-Surrealist writing as both a platform for the imagination and the ultimate goal in overcoming domination. Suzanne Cesaire defines marvelous in a 1941 manifesto. She calls for a new art that would awaken a consciousness to the blindness of hegemonic systems. It is in creativity that another world is made possible. In doing so, domains are revealed where life is lived spontaneous and natural. At the same time, the marvelous reinforces a relationship between humans and their environment. With the abstraction of nature that modernist thinking has produced, Cesaire seeks to harmonize the relationship between the human and the world around them. The marvelous emerges by giving people their humanity and valuing the deep connections that people have with all that surrounds them.

Menil similarly sees the importance of creativity in transcending the constraints of rationality. The marvelous emerges from our engagement with narrative as a means to transport us into an extraordinary world. He concentrates the marvelous in a desire to achieve a world that assures our contentment instead of a world limited by physical obstacles and social realities. In this context, the marvelous is an active form of being, residing in the moment of one's ability to extract themselves from the boundaries of everyday experience and find a different, more creative, mode of living.

Both Césaire and Menil express a hope for the marvelous. It is the opportunity and desire to enact and realize something different. Yet, there is a conundrum between

the ways the marvelous is manifested. Individually, it emerges in the moment, an expression of an unconscious reaction to the world. While collectively it has a power to transform, but that transformation can at the same time reinforce the hegemonic forces. In some ways the marvelous is a flicker, a spark, a brief opportunity to see the world anew. Though at the same time, it is an ongoing effort to challenge what is taken for granted, to peer behind the curtain. But, this is not an attempt to rationalize and dissect an underlying structure, but to live in it, allowing the experience to open a perspective onto the world and create new forms of knowing.

Contemporary authors pick up on similar threads and continue to contextualize the marvelous and surrealism as a transformative force. For Robin D. G. Kelly, in his book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Tradition*, surrealism is about making a new life. It is in our dreaming and inventing that alternate possibilities and realities can be achieved. “Above all, surrealism considers love and poetry and the imagination powerful social and revolutionary forces, not replacements for organized protests, for marches and sit-ins, for strikes and slowdowns, for matches and spray paint (Kelly, 2022).” Whereas Miller describes the marvelous as residing in a moment of one’s ability to extract themselves from the boundaries of everyday experience and find a different, more creative, mode of living. “The marvelous is the image of our absolute liberty (Miller, 2013). ”

The marvelous remains the objective of these efforts. Though, instead of wanting to locate or define it, it is important to maintain its potential. The domain or land of the marvelous is a space of possibility that can emerge anywhere. While Césaire wishes to prioritize the role of the artist in revealing the marvelous, this limits what it can

be. Might it be seen in a smile, a way of seeing the world, in the exhaustion of a lifetime challenging discrimination? The marvelous should be the device of anyone, a capacity to recognize the potential of change. The marvelous should be realized in the everyday, from the smallest act of kindness to the largest social movements, as an inherent drive to explore the future by living in the present. This is inherently an emergent action that moves across all fields of experience and is rooted in struggle.

This aligns with Cederic Robinson's conceptualization of the Black Radical Tradition. In response to the ways that racial capitalism has flattened Black identity, hidden an African past, and constructed a slave identity, a Black consciousness emerges that seeks to reconcile a Black social consciousness with the historical materialism in which Black communities live (Robinson, 1983). This tradition is not simply a result of reconciliation, but an African response to direct oppression and the way exploitation is woven into Western Civilization. The Black Radical Tradition "is a revolutionary consciousness which proceeded from the whole historical experience of Black people and not merely from the social formations of capitalist slavery or the relations of production of colonialism." As an internal process, this tradition is a means to preserve "ontological totalities" through the "renunciation of actual being for historical being." In doing so the Black Radical Tradition brings into question racial capitalism's ability to reform social life and create new identities bereft of historical and cultural foundations.

Building from these framings and histories, I define Infrastructures of the Marvelous as a form of grassroots movement infrastructure that functions across affective, social, physical, and economic forms of infrastructure. It does so with the

purpose of realizing a world outside of the boundaries of racial capitalistic logics. This functions both at the level of the individual and the community. It includes the raising of internal consciousness that supports the creation of new identities and actions. In doing so, the individual becomes a creative force for change. This agency is not bounded, but is a platform for seeking different ways of living and being. At same time, it substantiates the vital importance of our connections to each other and the environment. It is driven by a desire to seek humanity in each other and develop connections to places that are not defined solely by economic value, but in how it provides meaning for life. This brings to the forefront further questions. How are affective, social, and physical infrastructures used as a means to not only overcome modes of oppression but realize their internal and external liberation? How do lived experiences work in relationship to the political, social, and physical geographies that surround them? How are policies and institutions challenged to both realize a different world and build power? What are the organizational and strategic processes that are used to develop a consciousness of freedom? How do they create communities of care that work outside “formal” economic systems?

With an over 60 year history, the work of public housing residents and advocates in Charlottesville serves as the context through which I wish to explore and understand how grassroots movements create infrastructures of the marvelous. This history is replete with examples of the ways in which they have challenged institutions, asserted their presence, created power, and built relationships of care. All of which is dedicated to creating a world that lives beyond the one defined by federal policy, narratives of poverty, or the racial hierarchies that are present in Charlottesville. They imbue a

creativity and imagination that lives beyond the present reality, which they struggle for everyday. What follows is dedicated to witnessing and sharing that history.

Chapter 3 - Methods as infrastructure for liberatory research practices

Introduction

While the goal of the research is to witness the infrastructures of social transformation led by public housing residents in Charlottesville, it is only fitting that the methodology engender similar practices. A methodology of the marvelous would manifest itself in ways that seek solidarity throughout the research, horizontalizing the hierarchies that are traditionally perpetuated between researcher and participants. In parallel, the goals of the research would align with the broader goals of the organizing work. Taking PHAR's mission as a starting point, this would center public housing residents in the process. Not just as participants of interviews, but in developing the scope, organizing the questions, leading the efforts to gather information, and then analyzing that information. The research is then a rich collaborative process between public housing residents and myself. In doing so, it becomes not only a process through which we understand the history and practices of public housing organizing, but an opportunity to thoroughly explore and critique the possibilities of collaborative community based research.

What follows is an exploration of this project as a model for rethinking the infrastructure of research done by, for, and with marginalized committees. I delve into the methodological ecosystem that has been created within this project, sharing opportunities and critiquing limits. This begins by exploring the methodological frameworks that inspired and grounded the research process, participatory action research. This mode of research engages theorists and researchers exploring the limitations of traditional positivist research and opens alternatives that seek liberation.

In light of these ideas, the section ends by considering the commitments that I as a researcher and public housing resident as collaborators must make to realize participatory action research in this context.

Since oral histories are at the core of this research, the rest of the chapter is an accounting of what allowed the research to take place, an explanation of the design, the ways in which the research group contented with the reality of doing the research, and several reflections on the research process. I begin by describing the emergence and then importance of relationships in the research and then shift to the research design as initially conceived before walking step by step through how the research took place. This then leads to the impact that a wealth of historical documents played on the project and its future. Finally, end with several reflections on the process with specific focus on temporalities, labor, doing PAR, and linking the methods back to ideas of infrastructure.

Frameworks, Stories, and Commitments for Liberatory Research

Participation and Action

From the outset, valuing the vibrancy of these relationships and honoring the immense knowledge held throughout the city, the research demanded pursuing a methodological process that moved beyond the extractive practices that can be typical of academic research. This was not about developing knowledge solely in service of the researcher, or even the needs of the university, but using the dissertation as a way of investing in the community by placing the resources of time, funding, and labor at their disposal. When I heard Joy and Audrey express their interest in telling the history of public housing residents, it always came with a caveat that included an uncertainty of

where to start and the fact that the fight for affordable housing in Charlottesville is an ongoing everyday practice. By undertaking community centered research, we would collectively create a space in which to explore the timelines, space, and bodies that have produced this knowledge, but also explore ways for it to be transferred amongst the community. By doing so, we could magnify and celebrate the lived experience of those who shared it. The process would be an act of community building and love that would have value beyond the dissertation, responding directly to community needs, building their capacity to do research, and control how their knowledge is used and shared.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies provided the framework from which I started the research process in partnership with PHAR. PAR methodologies evolve from a particular historical context and encourage researchers to root the research in and support broader commitments to equity and community power. While PAR doesn't delineate specific research processes, it does argue that research should situate research at the disposal of communities in order to produce modes of countervailing power that connects knowledge and action. (Freire, 2018; Fals-Borda, 1991). Writing the 1991 book *Action and Knowledge*, Orlando Fals-Borda defined PAR as an experiential methodology being "a process of personal and collective behavior occurring within a satisfying and productive cycle of life and labor (Fals-Borda, 1991)." Research should be reflexive in nature with information being continually exchanged and discussed between those involved. It also always works toward some tangible end that emphasizes community driven change both mentally and physically. This creates a different relationship between the researcher, community researchers, and research

participants as they work together to equalize power dynamics resulting in collectively defining the scope, questions, and reflecting on experiences.

Kemmis and McTaggart further expand on this by noting five things that only participatory forms of action research can accomplish. This includes working from within the traditions of practice, building shared language, being responsive to the moment, developing forms of action and interactions, and creating a community of practice that moves beyond the specific temporality of traditional research (Kemmis, 2014). Instead of extracting knowledge and individualizing those involved, PAR is a platform for constructing deep relationships of inquiry that recognize the wealth of knowledge that is held by those involved. When lines of trust and shared interest are established, the research is unbounded by time and becomes a living mode of engaging with the world and being together.

The relationship between theory and action is a fundamental concept within PAR. Instead of a linear process, PAR advocates for a continual exchange between modes of knowing and being as an ongoing praxis which spirals outward from the beginning of the research. In 1946, Kurt Lewin described action research as creating cycles of knowledge that build from initial questions. This has a continuous relationship of plan, act, observe, and reflect which drove the research endeavor forward. Researchers and participants would engage together in defining a plan, enacting a specific program or process, study it as it took place and then reflect on what they saw. As a form of praxis, this intertwines and layers knowledge development across various ways of knowing the world which brings more complexity and intricacy into the research. But it also has an

outward direction, shifting and changing in relationship to the ideas and needs of those working together.

Similarly, Fals-Borda emphasizes how forms of praxis create new times and spaces for research. Different temporalities and geographies are constructed that move both vertically and horizontally. In negotiating these intersecting dynamics, research takes on a more political form, valuing and presenting the subjectivities that are inherent in research. PAR allows for different approaches to emerge from the bottom up and outside in through an interactive process that is deeply attuned to power relations and works toward reciprocity(Fals-Borda, 1991).

It also inverts the hierarchy of theory over practice. Instead of starting with an overarching theoretical position which is then trying to be proven, the research instead is a generator of theory. PAR centers the research in the lived experiences and the emergent conversations that come out of listening and re-listening to what is being told. From that position specific concepts and themes emerged, which are explored through further reading and conversation. Theory never specifically defines the pathway, but instead resides in the background and serves as a reference point in which to situate the meanings that are being found.

PAR advocates for making present the positionality of those involved in the collective process of research, in so humanizing researchers, partners, and participants. Where traditional research focuses on distancing the researcher and participants in a subject/object relationship, based in a desire to seek objectivity, PAR values the subjectivities of all those involved in the research. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Friere challenges the distanced nature of research and learning (Freire, 2018). He

recognizes the innate reality of those that are involved in the research, which develop as the cycles of plan, act, observe, and reflect are enacted. This sees all those involved as whole humans, bringing diverse, unique, and valued experiences to the research process.

This is most clearly defined in the ways that PAR works to build consciousness and authenticity. Overcoming the dehumanization trends of modernist, Euro-centric logic, PAR places emphasis on the development of critical consciousness, what Freire calls conscientization. This is realized as the oppressed seek to liberate both mind and body in order to achieve freedom. “In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform (Freire, 2018).” Challenging the subject/object dominance, transformation is then the ultimate goal of research, which is in itself a historical and political task.

The work of public housing residents can be seen in the context of this form of transformation that seeks liberation. While broader societal pressures limit the opportunities of public housing residents, PHAR challenges the boundaries of those limits or opens up opportunities for residents to transform their world. This research endeavor is then a piece of that historical struggle to not only make change, but situate those struggles in relationship to other historical narratives. In parallel, the project also seeks to build authentic commitments between those involved through direct participation. Yet, it must be understood that participation works at different scales and with different modes of power (Arnstein 1969, Gaventa 1982, Fung 2009). PAR seeks to situate participation in the rooted cultural traditions and real histories (based in feeling

and communal practices) to overcome asymmetrical power relations (Fals-Borda, 1991). This type of authenticity is democratic and collective in nature, continuing to disrupt the distinction between researcher and the researched, resulting in the development of public knowledge.

Studying the history of PAR as it was developed in South America, Joanne Rappaport questions these forms of participation and collaboration, defining them as a chain of conversations. Focusing on Fals-Borda's work, she wonders if PAR is simply a way of presenting knowledge that is "already there." If so then is it truly research? Rappaport sees collaboration as vital in the analysis of the research, providing the opportunity for thick description to develop as ongoing review created the opportunity for new questions to emerge. Collaboration is a "counterpoint between information collection and interpretation" which becomes a "continuous state of creation". Participation and collaboration builds complexity and in doing so becomes a platform for new meaning.

As a part of his ongoing research into the impact of the carceral systems, Ruben Jonathan Miller notes the gifts that these relationships provide when a level of proximity is made possible. Understanding that our bodies are the primary way that we experience the world, he sees research as a way of being together. This has reciprocal impacts. "If I invest the time to pay attention to the specificities of my pain as I walk aside and attend to the experience of others, I may be able to connect with them in more than a surface way (Miller, 2021)." Research that seeks to humanize the research also humanizes the researcher. As Miller notes, this goes beyond empathy. It allows us

to be in relationship to each other in new ways that build trust, which in turn requires greater responsibility to those relationships.

Building out of her community based research in India, Richa Nagar defines these relationships as opportunities for radical vulnerability in her book *Muddying the Waters*. In relationships of collective appreciation, alliances of possibility form which can engage and critique specific geographical, historical, and political settings. It is in the ability to openly critique that “a politics of location, authenticity, trust, and relevance develop (Nagar, 2014).” Radical vulnerability not only deconstructs the hierarchies of subject/object relationships, but believes that by being more vulnerable, research is more enriched by more deeply being involved in the sites of struggle that can be distant.

Lastly, PAR fosters a commitment to emergence, which exemplifies values of democracy and the knowledge that each participant brings to the research. This focuses on being responsive to the skills and needs of the community as the project develops. These efforts are emergent in the moment, in the relationships, in the context to which we were living. Adrienne Maree Brown in *Emergent Strategies* frames this process as both an adaptive and intentional approach. “Emergence notices the way small actions and connections create complex systems, patterns that become ecosystems and societies . . . Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for (Brown, 2017).” Research using an emergent process does not necessarily follow a historically defined trajectory or specific pathway, but opens a space for people to come together around a specific concern that is still in formation. Then as the research evolves, resources and theories are added to it which continue to inform and refine the knowledge that is being

magnified and created. This transitions through a process of engaging “what is” to “what can be.” As Latour and Puig de la Bellacasa have explored, the research moves beyond matters of fact, seeking a totalizing theoretical position, and instead lies somewhere between matters of concern, a pluriversal response to needs, and a matter of care, which places a stronger emphasis on an ethics of our process (de la Bellacasa, 2017; Latour, 2004). Emergence is an iterative process that then makes use of all information (Brown, 2017).This requires those engaged in the research to be aware of the many possible ways the data can present itself, flexibly responding to the moment, and induce feedback loops that continue to reflect and refine the research.

Oral History as Collective Meaning Making

Underneath these broader ethical objectives, this research has a commitment to centering the perspectives of the marginalized and powerless in an effort to recover their histories. As was expressed in early conversations with PHAR, the goal was to document the knowledge and experience of those that have lived in public housing; and explore the ways in which those involved have not only advocated for affordable housing in Charlottesville, but the presence and well-being of low income residents in the city. Oral histories, as a qualitative mode of research, provided a means to make these voices heard, doing so in ways that had cultural relevance in the Black community and as a means to engage the tellers of these histories in accessible ways. This focuses on deeply listening to the lived experiences of those who sat down for interviews, which requires preparation and trust from both sides. To do so requires developing spaces of comfort that meet people where they are at, acknowledging the power and value of the stories that are to be told, and allowing the teller to lead the

conversation. From the position of the listener, it is about understanding the experience of the teller and preparing questions that align with that experience.

It is also vital to understand that oral history is never an exchange that occurs in one direction, but instead is a conversation. Entering into an oral history interview with true intention of having a conversation enables the oral history to serve as a process of making history in dialogue with each other (Pollock, 2005). While centering the knowledge of the teller, it also layers in knowledge that came through the listener's collective reading, archival research, and the rooted knowledge of other public housing residents. The oral histories create a geography of meaning that places these experiences in relationship to each other. In doing so the oral histories become a transformational process that links past, present, and future. Oral histories also transform the body when experiences move from memory into active moments of remembering (Pollock, 2005).

This also allows for a broader authorship, decentering singular dominant voices whether they be academic, institutional, or community. Instead of telling THE story, there are multiple voices coming into harmony with each other. Co-authorship evolves through the various experiences and struggles that come forward in the telling, listening, and translating of the knowledge that is presented. The story of place and people becomes pluralistic in nature and open to a breadth of ways for understanding how experiences can diverge, align, or work in parallel to each other. In doing so, we can begin to map the terrain of these experiences. By valuing these differences, storytelling creates new ecosystems of meaning.

In noting the wealth of voices that come to bear in oral histories, power must be an important concern. Here, I return to Nagar's collaborations with women's groups in India, where she notes how power manifests itself in co-authored forms of storytelling. "The telling of stories must continuously resist a desire to reveal the essential or authentic experience of the subject; instead, every act of storytelling must confront ways in which power circulates and constructs the relationalities within and across various social groups (Nagar, 2014)." Storytelling is less about who holds power but about the ways that stories manifest power to build shared understanding and in doing so strengthen social connections across these experiences.

Oral histories are a form of recovering the past and making it relevant to the present. Critical recovery has long been a direct piece of PAR methodology, with forms of storytelling and oral histories providing a means to support these forms of exchange. For several authors this is a mode of engaging with the temporality of struggle and developing a consciousness about what has come before (Bonilla, 2020). Critical recovery in this case is an intergenerational exchange that connects past and present. This allows those living today to find shared experiences with older members of the community and recognize a continuum of struggle. Though it also is a mechanism for harnessing historical interpretation for the formulation of organizing strategies (Rappaport, 2020). The recovery of memory and knowledge through oral histories provides a platform for the future that builds from commonality and centers belonging. In the case of this project, a primary interest was about filling a historical void that has emerged as the broader community (Black and white) continues to come to terms with the trauma of urban renewal. While the events that resulted in the destruction of the

Vinegar Hill neighborhood were a continued reference point, this research endeavor was about the ways that the Black community continued to hold onto the relationships that the neighborhood provided and challenge systemic efforts to undermine their well-being.

Commitment to these standards

The frameworks of PAR, emergence, and the importance of storytelling were a commitment not only to the relationships that I had built with PHAR, Joy, Audrey, and others, but also to myself and a way of doing research in the truest sense of liberation. At the core of this was a question of what it meant to do research with a community of Black, lower-income public housing residents. It was first important to recognize the history of how research had been done to and on the community. The University of Virginia, as most universities, has a history of studying the community from a distance and extracting knowledge for the benefit of faculty, students, and the institution. Members of the university propose the research, get the grants and funding to do the research, do the research, come up with conclusions, publish those results, and at best report back on what was found. The university is always centered in these efforts. As a representative of that institution, I was deeply aware that this is the norm. Knowing that others share this concern, I wanted to explore ways that would reverse that relationship, even to the point of considering ways that we could remove the university from this dynamic. Could this project be a basis for building the capacity of the community to do its own research? This question is about working to invert the power that institutions of higher education hold as developers, conveners and organizers of knowledge. Inspired by the history of the Detroit Geographers Expedition and Institute, the Public Science

Project, or the early PAR work that Orlando Fals-Borda did in rural Columbia, there were other models for pursuing research that shared these values and were working to answer similar questions. Having studied and read about these methods, this project was an effort to put them into practice. What does it mean to truly do critical recovery? How do oral histories provide shared modes of remembering? How does one practice radical vulnerability? My initial commitment was then to making sure that the research project always queried this relationship and sought to collectively explore these modes of doing research.

Understanding the inherent positionality, this research was an opportunity to decenter these dominant roles, allowing all of us doing the research to recognize the power and experience that each of us had and how that power could be used to support our work together. This meant a few different things. First, the research would have its own timeline. The temporality of the research would remain collective. In doing so, the research worked at the speed of the group, extending across past, present, and the future in unexpected ways. While pressures were regular, the collaboration needed space to develop and evolve. It was important to see oral history as a node in a much longer trajectory of struggle. Secondly, it meant creating shared practices of leadership and a community of care. This meant distributing scheduling the meetings, being in communication regularly, making sure people were fed, driving people to meetings, and taking on the technical responsibility of making the oral histories possible. This allowed everyone to be an active part of the research. Thirdly, the project committed providing funding for the oral history team, interviewees, and PHAR. It was important to bring resources to the table so that people's labor was recognized and had value. While this

never could have provided for the real value of these efforts, more a symbolic gesture, it was meant to respect the resources that those involved were providing. Lastly, there was a commitment to ownership of all the information that was produced by the research project. In early conversations with Joy Johnson, she made it clear that the knowledge stayed in the community and was owned by the community. They would have control at all times about how their knowledge would be used and shared. Data would be under control of PHAR and housed in their systems.

It is also important to note the commitment that Joy, Audrey, Sonia, Frances, PHAR, and the interviewees have made to the research. Having seen their tireless efforts working for their community in a multitude of different ways, their commitment is clearly focused on residents of public housing and Black Charlottesville as a whole. Their desire was always to find ways to listen, document, and share the experiences of public housing residents, making them present and building resident power. They expressed this by attending our weekly meetings, reflecting and revising the work we were doing, reaching out to people that they have known during their time in Charlottesville, and sitting down with possible interviewees in an effort to prepare for a more official interview. These actions and their presence, even after the more formal oral history process ended, perpetuated an ongoing commitment to the work that was being done together.

Ultimately, these frameworks and commitments are foundational positions upon which to pursue the research. They created spaces of reciprocity and set collective boundaries around the research. Commitments to each other, to PHAR, to residents were in the forefront of our minds and our conversations. There was a continuous

refrain of “How does this work benefit public housing residents?” that is reinforced by PHAR’s mission and verbally supported by Audrey, Joy, and others. This was a starting point for every action and set the tone around how we would support each other. When combining the relationships that predated the research, these commitment, and these frameworks, a platform for trust was established that could develop as we moved forward. Joy has said many times, “Trust is hard to get and easy to lose.” Knowing the ever present nature of distrust, especially between housing residents and institutions of power, it was vital to establish our trust with each other as we began the research. It was both in the regularity of our time together, setting clear collective short and long term goals, and doing little things to support one another that allowed this trust to grow.

The reality of a community led process

Where the frameworks and commitments created a starting point for the research, what comes next is a more linear accounting of how the actual research took place. Here the primary challenge was about finding ways to hold onto the values that were so important at the beginning. It was one thing to speak about how the research would focus on liberation, but it is another to actually realize it as an everyday practice. The reality of our daily lives required flexibility and a level of responsiveness to these demands. It also requires that we go back to the beginning to understand the relationships that are required to do such work and how they served to set the foundation for the research. It also requires delving into the reality of how this research process actually took place and how we worked to ally the standards and expectations that had been created internally, institutionally, and theoretically with the reality of both realizing an authentic relationship with PHAR, Joy, Audrey, and the oral history team.

Relationships as foundation

My relationship with public housing in Charlottesville began in March 2013. On this particular day I was meeting with Holly Edwards, a former city council member, community organizer, and nurse at the Westhaven Clinic. After meeting early that year, she invited me to visit the clinic, saying that if I wanted to understand Charlottesville, it was important that we meet at Westhaven. Not yet knowing the broader history of the city, this meeting provided an opportunity to understand the broader social and political dynamics of Charlottesville. It was at this same time that I would meet Joy Johnson. She had been working at the clinic to support the administrative aspects of providing health care to her community.

This moment proved fateful as it would begin an education about the deeper history of Charlottesville. This was the beginning of my inclusion into the lives of this community and theirs into mine. It would come to frame my understanding of how Charlottesville functions as a city. This is where this research project started. It was over individual, small conversations that I came to understand the importance of a community like Westhaven in Charlottesville. It was in sitting together and living in the humanity of each other, that would make the future research possible. It was just about being present. Not necessarily saying anything. More deeply listening, being in space, and strengthening solidarity.

After this meeting, there were a host of moments of shared support and magnification. Early morning events that would give youth in public housing a juice and a donut as they got on the bus for school. The kids would quickly get their treat and be reminded to say thank you. While mothers still in their pajamas, would come out to talk

and be in community. Joy was a continuous presence at city council meetings, advocating for the rights of public housing residents and the overall goal of maintaining affordable housing in the city. There were times that I helped to coordinate partnerships and events that would pair public housing residents with artists to show the vibrancy and creativity of these neighborhoods. Even closer to my own home, Joy would be driving past on her way to Madison Street, pull over, and we would still be talking an hour later. This even included Westhaven Community Day as an annual celebration of public housing and the people that lived there.

One of the most personally impactful moments in my burgeoning relationship with Holly, Joy and residents occurred when we organized an event to bring public and affordable housing leaders more directly into the public consciousness of the city. The event focused on the creativity of public housing and how the arts could be used to tell their history and build community. We were not sure who would come, but the space was packed and it provided a way of thinking more about ways to be in support as conversations about redevelopment were beginning to ramp up. After the event, walking with Joy to her blue mini van, she mentioned that she always wanted to find a way for PHAR and public housing residents to tell their story, their history. A year later, she would repeat this interest at another meeting. It would become a constant refrain. This led to a conversation with Audrey Oliver, another long time public housing resident/activist in Charlottesville. She too had a deep interest in doing an oral history project with public housing residents, but needed some support in moving it forward.

When I began to explore my dissertation research topic, focusing on Black led social transformation, it was these relationships that I had in mind. At first, I looked

elsewhere for inspiration. But the more I looked elsewhere, the more I realized the uniqueness of the work taking place in Charlottesville. Why did we see public housing being torn down in Richmond and being rebuilt here? Where other research projects would have to create relationships in order to answer these questions, in this case these relationships were already present. It was from this foundation of connection that the research endeavor could move from a more surface recounting of history to a more substantial, witnessing of the meaning that came out of over 40 years of organizing. As the name alludes, PAR is based in these relationships, which would serve to guide and open the possibilities of the research.

Data Promises

Very early in the conversations with PHAR about doing the oral history, I sat down with Joy Johnson to talk about how best to move forward with the project. This was a part of a series of verbal conversations that we had to get down to the root of what it meant when they expressed an interest in telling the story of public housing residents. These happened on multiple occasions and constituted a means of developing a specific vision of what they were seeking to accomplish, and these conversations also allowed residents to consider how best to align the oral history work in relation to the work that PHAR was leading at the time. A constant refrain in these conversations was about aligning PHAR's mission of centering public housing residents in the work both in doing the oral histories and in using the oral histories as a platform for their experiences and perspectives.

As we were coming to the end of meeting Joy said she had one other question. "Who would own the data? There is a long history of UVA showing up here in

Westhaven and we never hear what came of those conversations." She then went on to share how PHAR had once been attending a conference of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. They were resting between sessions and getting a bite to each. When a colleague in their broader organizing network mentioned that there was a talk about public housing in Charlottesville and research that had been done on Westhaven. Joy and the others immediately walked over to the session and listened in as they heard a UVA faculty member present research that was done about their lives. "I couldn't believe what I was listening to. She was there telling our stories and we were not even involved. We didn't even know about it." From this experience, Joy vowed never to let a UVA faculty ever do any type of research in public housing without letting PHAR know. Again, she repeated her question. "Who is going to own the data that comes out of the oral history?"

My answer was simple. First of all, the tellers that were going to share their stories and PHAR. I never felt that this was my knowledge to own. Moreover, the oral history project was an opportunity to share the wealth of knowledge that public housing residents held and a platform for making that knowledge accessible to the broader community in creative ways.

She then asked where the oral histories would be kept and I shared how the IRB required that they would be housed in a secure space. Based on her past experience, this was not acceptable as the knowledge needed to be kept in the community. It needed to be accessible to public housing residents at all times. So, we created a secure space on PHAR's internal system in which to keep the recordings

Ownership of the data is a central theme that the oral history project team would continue to discuss throughout the project. Joy was clear, and based on her experience, that the data had to be held in relation to public housing residents, either through PHAR as a representative of residents or in a way that made the information accessible to residents. It could not be squirreled away into a space or an institution that was not directly responsible to the residents. This would be reinforced with the consent forms and through our recruitment of tellers. Not only would the knowledge and experiences stay in the community, but we would both create opportunities for the community to experience that knowledge and get their input on ways to make sure it stayed accessible.

Resourcing the Research

With the commitments and desire to support both PHAR, the oral history team, and the oral history participants, the project needed to raise resources to move the project forward. The question that arose is what does it mean to collectively resource a participatory action research which seeks to create a community of care? How do we ensure that those who are involved are supported in such a way that enables them to be active participants? We approached these questions in a variety of ways from thinking specifically about raising financial resources through grants to finding specific support in the community.

The PHAR Admin Committee and I began the process of exploring possible local and national funding sources. In doing so, PHAR set a few boundaries for moving forward. First, they didn't have a lot of time to spend writing grant proposals or budgets. This would fall on me to pursue, develop, and respond to. Before pursuing a grant,

PHAR had to approve the grantor. Since PHAR would be named as the applying applicant they wanted to vet the grants to make sure they aligned with their mission and did not complicate the various other funding partnerships with which PHAR was already involved. In the end, we pursued two specific grants. The first was a planning grant from Virginia Humanities and the other a grant from UVA that funded community based equity initiatives. The Virginia Humanities planning grant provided $3000 that would be used to support PHAR administrative costs, cover meeting expenses to further refine the scope and goals of the research, and hire an oral history consultant to develop the oral history initiative and implement a training program with public housing residents. The UVA funding would support stipends for the oral history team and the participants, cover equipment expenses, provide further admin support for PHAR, and give a small stipend to myself. In total this was $10,000. PHAR would be the primary applicant for these resources. They would have control and administer them. There were a multitude of other funders identified supporting community archive development and oral history projects. A collective decision was made to work within the funding we had secured, focusing on the immediate future, and as the project completed its goals we could begin to consider next steps.

Doing the Research

The actual process of doing the research would take five phases - resetting scope, recruitment, training, oral history interviews, and analysis. These would be done with an expanding collective of partners, building on the initial individual conversations that defined both the dissertation proposal and the IRB protocol. At the start of the project the partners included: PHAR leadership (Joy Johnson and Audrey Oliver),

PHAR Staff (Shelby Edwards and Cecilia Barber), the Marian Cheek Jackson Center (Della Pollock), Legal Aid Justice Center (Emily Dreyfus) and other public housing residents. Though it would also expand in important ways to include a wealth of other documents and resources that arose as the project developed, further opening opportunities for shared research.

Resetting Scope

Throughout 2019, I had a variety of individual conversations and contact with Audrey Oliver, Joy Johnson, and Emily Dreyfus (at the time serving as the interim director of PHAR) about moving forward with the oral history research. As noted above, there was a broad desire to move forward with the research, noting previous attempts had not been successful; a reinforcement that the research had to center public housing residents; a general consensus on the focus of the work, and guidance as to how best to move forward. To gain further institutional support, we sat down with the PHAR Administrative Committee, a mix of staff, board members, and advisors, to have a more collective conversation and get broader internal buy-in. There we laid out the general scope of the research and discussed ways that the oral history project could intertwine with the wealth of work that was taking place around redevelopment and resident engagement.

This took place in February 2020 just weeks before the Covid-19 pandemic would impose a general quarantine. It would be some time before we were able to reconvene. PHAR shifted its attention to crisis response both from a health standpoint and also in terms of limiting the economic impact that the pandemic would have on public housing residents. Led by residents and other organizations, mutual aid initiatives

sprung up to provide resources for residents. Funders stepped in to mitigate possible evictions as residents would fall behind in their rent. At the same time, PHAR was in the process of hiring its first executive director, Shelby Edwards. Both the pandemic and the leadership change would result in internal changes in PHAR. With a new director and new staff, it would also demand a bit of a restart for the research in terms of getting by and making sure everyone was aware of the oral history efforts.

In the Spring of 2021, we reconvened the core team for a series of meetings to re-establish the scope of the research. This included reviewing the process that had been originally discussed, making sure themes still seemed prudent, and delving into specific questions about who we might interview. It also meant developing a relationship with the Marian Cheek Jackson Center that would consult and support the training efforts of the oral history team. With over 20 years of using oral histories as a form of community development and organizing in Chapel Hill, NC, they would share their vital experience and resources to help guide our efforts as we stepped into the project. We chose the Jackson Center based on recommendations from a trip to Durham, NC that we all had participated in in 2018. They would provide us with their guidebook for doing oral histories, training support, and consulting on next steps.

Resident Recruitment

After re-establishing the foundations of the collective research, we began an effort to recruit public housing members that would serve on the oral history team. This was done by attending a series of events that PHAR had organized during May and June of 2021, outreach via PHAR communications with public housing residents, doing door to door engagement, placing posters on community spaces in public housing, and

emailing specific contacts that PHAR members believed would be interested in participating.

For this we redesigned a handout to share with public housing residents that not only aligned with the original IRB recruitment material, but also identified PHAR and was culturally resonant to public housing residents. The poster specifically focused on providing residents with an opportunity to not only share their experiences, but also be at the center of developing a platform for others to add their voices. Visually, the poster showed both Joy and Audrey interviewing each other and used a PHAR brand book so that it would have some resonance. Six people responded with interest in participating in the oral history team, and we did a very informal interview process to not only share the expectations of the research process, but to understand their interests in being a part of the research. Either through conflicts or lack of response, we ended up with 4 public housing residents that committed to participating. This included Audrey Oliver, a long time resident of South 1st St., Sonia Bell, a longtime resident of Riverside Drive, Rosia Parker, a relatively new resident at Westhaven, and Frances Tibbs, a younger, former resident of Westhaven who now lived in section 8 housing in Albemarle County.

Oral History Training

Starting in August of 2021, the team convened and began training to be effective oral historians and researchers. The initial focus of weekly meetings focused on building relationships between the team members and beginning to listen to some oral histories. Collectively we wanted to begin to listen to a few oral histories and define what makes a good oral history. Accessing oral histories available at UVA and at the local library, we both collectively and individually started to listen and reflect on what we were hearing.

How were the listeners asking questions? How were the tellers responding? What makes a good recording? This was intermixed with time for the team members to begin to interview and talk to each other as a way to both build rapport in the process and between each other. Team members then recorded audio on their own phones based on questions we collectively developed. These we then brought back to our meetings to listen to and reflect on together. Next we did sessions on research ethics and consent. Working with the Jackson Center we considered how we engaged people and what it meant to be an authentic, deep listener. We shared, reviewed, and practiced using the consent forms. How do we share these forms with the tellers in ways that did not feel contractual or extractive? How do we recognize their control and power over their knowledge and the process? What are some of the ethical concerns when doing oral history research? Several sessions covered the technology of recording and ways to get good audio. The team continued to practice and build these skills, becoming more and more adept at listening, hearing, and asking questions.

Again, working with the Jackson Center, we placed attention on what is a good question and what questions we were seeking to answer. Going back to our initial research frame and goals, we developed a series of 4 core questions that would frame our overarching interview process and be a platform for expanding upon as the teller shared their experiences. Recognizing the void of history that preceded the destruction of Vinegar Hill and its prominence in the Black community, we began by asking if the teller had any memories of the neighborhood. What was it like? Who was there? What did people do there? We wanted to explore the social and physical geography of that space and its importance as the center of Black culture and economic life. We then

shifted to what took place after the neighborhood was gone. How did the community respond? Where did they go? What did they do? This was meant to understand how the community responded to the destruction of their social fabric. We then focused our attention on the development of Westhaven. What did people think of public housing? Who moved there? How did they build community? These questions were designed to understand how the community was rebuilt and the processes that were used. Lastly, we explored the beginning of PHAR and its role in supporting public housing residents. What role did they see PHAR playing? How did they get involved? What impact has PHAR had? These were questions that explored the development of power and advocacy efforts led by public housing residents. These created a platform for the residents to share their lived experiences from which the team focused on gathering details about their meaning and impact in people's lives.

The training was completed by considering a list of possible tellers. Together we began to make a list of names of people that the team knew or thought would be interesting to speak to. With the keen memory of Joy, we assembled a list of over 30 people. From this, we ranked the tellers by those we thought would have information to share and also be amenable to meeting with us. The team then split this list and committed to reaching out to those they knew or had possible contact.

Interviews

In order to build some momentum and to do an interview we knew would produce some results, our first interview took place with Joy Johnson with the entire team. Each member of the team was responsible for asking a core question, and as the interview developed, we individually asked follow up or clarifying questions that we were curious

about. This was followed by sitting down with Audrey Oliver and then Sonia Bell. Again, we used these moments to practice these new skills and become better listeners. In between, based on notes or remembrances, we would reflect on what we heard. What went well? What could have gone better? What were some of the themes that we thought were important? This we documented through notes and other recordings continuing to layer personal experience and other forms of knowledge onto what we were hearing. We were constructing a geography of these experiences and the meaning they held.

Moving in the fall of 2021, the team continued to pursue possible tellers and we did a few more collective interviews before the end of the year with varying results. Sometimes the teller did not have much to say. It began to be hard to get commitments from people. Team members would reach out to people, leave a message, and even talk to them. But, eventually we found it difficult to commit to an interview. While being flexible in our timing and ability to meet them as they saw fit, we struggled with this. Three things came forward. One, we didn't necessarily have access to the contacts that we hoped to talk to. Our growing list of names was a best case scenario and we needed to explore ways of getting access to people. Secondly, there was a hesitance to participate. From what we heard, this was due to an uncertainty with having their stories documented, but also complicated interpersonal relationships with PHAR and those involved. Thirdly, there was a hesitancy even within the oral history team. Whether through being busy with work, family or other projects, several members found it difficult to ask people they had committed to talking to. We found it difficult to balance the persistence it takes to ask and bothering people too much. Coming into the Spring of

2022, we changed our approach. This included making specific concrete asks of possible tellers about dates and times of doing interviews. We explored ways to build up to a more official interview through more conversational meetings that strengthened the tellers comfortability and preparation. Lastly, we re-evaluated the list of people we thought we could speak to confirm who we had direct contact with and make plans for how best to reach them. By the end of Spring of 2022, we had completed 5 more interviews for a total of 12 and with that we concluded the process.

There was also an evolution of interview processes as the oral history project developed. In the early training, our goals were to develop open-ended questions that would guide the teller into their memories. As listeners we would then sit back and let them describe their experience, creating space for these experiences to come to life. It was very much a process of posing a question, letting the teller speak, and then follow up as needed. Slowly this began to shift as the oral histories shifted more towards conversations. The team would pose a question, let the teller share their thoughts, but the public housing members of the team would interject with questions or their own experiences. Many times these developed as clarifications of relationships to places and people. “Was that house next to the blue house on the corner of ____?” “Was she the mother or grandmother of so and so?” This would situate the story in the minds and the experiences of the team members and add layers of meaning. Instead of a call and then response mode of engaging, the interview process became a weaving of knowledge, geographies, and relationships between those in the room. Those on the oral history team would confirm and collaborate these narratives in relation to their own experience.

Those of us either representing UVA or PHAR staff would confirm in relation to archival materials, reading, or from other interviews/conversations. The interview would shift from a formal research exercise into more of a dialogue between people holding a shared interest.

Collective Review

The review process began in earnest shortly after the completion of the interviews. This would consist of transcribing the recordings so that we had a text based document to reference, continuing our deep listening, and then exploring themes that arose during the conversations, which served as a coding exercise. We transcribed using the online transcription service Trint. We would upload the audio recording to the site, it would transcribe the audio to text, and then we would edit the text to make sure that it aligned with the audio. While the service is extensive in its ability to transcribe a plethora of languages, we found it lacking in terms of being able to translate African American Vernacular English. It was not capable of picking up on the varying terminologies and inflections that were deeply a part of how the tellers spoke, even with very clean audio. We spent extra time making sure that these transcriptions directly reflected the voice of the teller and as accurately as possible reflected the language they used. We were not there to anglicize the language, but allow their voice to have the power it expressed.

Once several of the transcriptions were completed, the team began meeting weekly to listen to the recordings and review the transcripts. We would select a teller that we wanted to spend some time with and then play the audio. At moments when a question would arise or there was a clarification, we would stop the audio and discuss

what we heard. Much like the evolution of the interview process, this continued to layer meaning and build relationships between ideas, moments in team, and make visible relationships between people. It also brought forward new threads and stories from the team. Conversations about themes that came up, would open up experiences that would further add to our understanding of Black Charlottesville. When appropriate, we recorded these conversations and took notes about the ideas they produced. The oral histories were not an end in themselves but a process for building understanding and allowing threads to come forward that warranted further exploration.

Beyond the Oral Histories

In parallel to the development and implementation of the oral history initiative, the research took on several other practices and projects that would further deepen the knowledge and understanding of PHAR's work both past and present. This would open up opportunities and develop connections to this important history, but also make present a wealth of material that resided in the shadows (closets, old filing cabinets, storage).

In order to build further solidarity and to experience their work first hand, it was important to be present for PHAR and public housing residents. As was possible, I made myself available to support public events, do outreach, attend meetings, and fold fundraising letters. From grilling burgers at a neighborhood cook-out to going door to door, I wanted to experience and see how engagement took place. What did it look like and feel to be in relationship to public housing residents beyond looking in from the outside. This allowed me to get to know people as people, humans being, and them me. What others in cultural anthropology might consider "deep hanging out (Geertz, 1998;

Rosaldo).” I saw it more as what it means to be in each other's lives. It meant running up to get Joy’s mail so that she didn’t have to walk up the steps. Standing outside the Westhaven Community Center in the sun on a warm spring day. Sharing honey from the bee hives that I tended. Getting a flower and pot for Ms. Betty so that she could spruce up her patio. Walking with Claude as he showed me all the work he had done around his apartment. Here there was no intention of exchange or extraction, more it was just about being with each other and enjoying what it meant to be in each other's company. I purposefully did not document these experiences as ‘research’, but more centered on being in connection with others and establishing a relationship by just being with others. The main difference was that I could easily walk away and drive to my own home. I could step away from the realities of crime, drugs, and health problems that are still very present in public housing. There were many times that I would drive into Westhaven in the morning, wave to those sitting on their front porches, exchange hellos, and then walk into a conversation about some specific crisis that was taking place. It was possible to use my privilege to remain unaware, but in becoming intertwined in these people's lives, a responsibility would grow for maintaining connections and being there for each other as much as I could

Emergent Archives

As our planning process with the oral history initiative began to develop, a wealth of historical materials began to emerge. This was partially spurred by the reconstruction of Crescent Halls and the movement of CRHA offices that would see old files cabinets and boxes move from storage spaces. This then shifted other materials, unearthing documents that had not been seen in some time. Early in May, Joy opened a closet at

the Westhaven community center. She wanted me to look at several boxes that had last been kept in a closet at the Westhaven Clinic. Seven boxes in total, they held a trove of documents, handwritten notes, grant proposals, conference materials, memos, and a series of folios with neatly organized newspaper clippings that dated back to 1975. Much of this was administrative documentation of PHAR and its predecessor the Westhaven Tenants Association. Over that summer, I began to review, organize, and do an initial catalog of this material. I created a spreadsheet that documented the location of the document, date of the document, a description of the document, and a short description of the document's subject matter. Upon completion, over 1700 documents were recorded. The documents provided further existence of those who have been involved with public housing in Charlottesville and a general timeline of public housing organizing activity dating back to the 1950's. In addition to this it became apparent that further boxes of materials have been kept at the Legal Aid Justice Center, held by specific public housing organizers (Joy, Audrey, and others), and even by public housing residents. This also led to a search for any archival material that might be held at UVA's Special Collections Library, the Albemarle Historical Society, the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center or other institutional settings. Various efforts were completed to review what materials were available in these collections. Similarly, an initial review of newspaper archives was done to explore what information might have been available around specific moments in PHAR's and public housing's history.

Those of us working on the oral history project examined some of those materials together. This led to enduring conversations about the range and continuity of Charlottesville public housing. A folder of meeting minutes from the year PHAR officially

started noted partnerships, resident involvement, and initial projects. A folder of documents showed the work of residents exploring the creation of a resident management council and a keynote of Jack Kemp, then director of HUD, advocating for resident ownership of public housing. These continued to add depth to the research we were doing with the oral histories. Though they also provided another layer of meaning for the oral histories. Questions arose as to how best to use this information and how to share it with the PHAR leadership and staff. Even more importantly we discussed how to preserve it in a way that did not overburden staff and the research project as a whole. While we considered the archive in several discussions, our focus would stay centered on the oral histories and seek moments to reference the documents.

What could come next

There is a significant amount of work still to do in the partnership with PHAR. We have in no way exhausted what is possible. Moreover, we have barely established relationships, experimented with practices, and dreamed about opportunities. There is so much more to do.

The first thing that needs further consideration is the relationship that this project has as a part of PHAR. At the moment, it resides outside the organizing work that is being done, more of a pet project of several public housing leaders than a part of a more comprehensive strategy. At the moment, steps are being taken to involve the staff and the PHAR board to explore ways of integrating the oral histories to strengthen the work that is already being done. Examples abound of the ways that oral histories serve as a platform making present the voices and histories of the Black community on their terms.

Secondly, there are immense opportunities for partnership. The partnership with Jackson Center provided specific knowledge and infrastructure for doing the oral histories. It would be easy to return to them and explore ways of being in conversation on a much deeper level. There are other oral history initiatives which could further strengthen the goals and possibilities of this project. Black Appalachia has developed a series of programs that use storytelling and the sharing of documents as a means to build advocacy efforts, sustain culture, and impact policy. The Texas Freedom Colonies Project and the Detroit Geographical Expedition and Institute are important examples of how the academy can be in service to the community in the pursuit of community led research and skill development. The National Public Housing Museum has been developing an oral history program in parallel to establish a museum in Chicago. Initial conversations have been had about ways to provide training to residents, pursue national level grants, and even support the development of a community archive. With broader interest in documenting and sharing community knowledge, there are a wealth of resources at our disposal.

Thirdly and more concretely, we need to start to develop a community archive for PHAR that addresses how the oral histories are shared and how to preserve the documents before they disappear. We are at a moment with the review of the material and the transcriptions done that we need to work with PHAR and public housing residents to find ways to make this knowledge public. Whether that be posters, murals, a graphic novel, events it is vital that the stories we hear be made accessible to others. In doing so continue the cycle of exchange and remembering. The documents in many ways seem the most fragile, not because they are going to disintegrate, but because

they are so easily overlooked. They hold important information that needs to be understood, explored and acknowledged. It is easy to see them as boxes of old paper, but they are vital life stories of what it means to struggle as a low-income person in a Southern city, especially the ways that people seek to disentangle themselves from systems and institutions that do not support their humanity. At the same time, we need to think about how this history is being made in the present. Information and materials that are only just now being imagined need to be collected and stored in the future. The archive isn't just about saving the past but being a present actor in the present.

Methodological Reflections

Temporalities of PAR Research

As with any emergent or responsive process, the temporalities of the research were in continuous flux. Demands placed on the process by institutions, PHAR, the oral history team, cancer, a pandemic, family, and myself would lead to ongoing shifts in how the process would move forward. These could come into conflict and required continued response. One perspective is defined by the University that sets a timeline for completion of the dissertation within 5 years from the start of course work. This is an expectation assuming the development of the research progressing from day one and building from there. Another are the demands of collective, which is a negotiation of individual and group needs within the context of the oral history project. This is a continual process of checking in, reflecting, and responding to various moments that require attention to be placed elsewhere. Finally, PAR sets forward its own rhythm of plan, act, observe, and reflect that can be bound in a finite time, setting boundaries, or

become perpetual, building on itself in spirals that overlap and move off into space. In the case of this research project, I found myself writing, revising, or creating new timelines of research on a regular basis. There were the phases of research defined in the initial research proposal, those defined in the IRB protocol, and those created for the oral history team process. All of which held a hopeful understanding of how the research would proceed. These would continually come into conflict with the reality of the research process. They would serve as initial holding of the commitment to doing the research, but be discussed, extended, revised, changed based on the moments we found ourselves. There were moments of alignment with these trajectories. Where the demands of the institution, the individuals, the collective would come into sync. Yet there are times of divergence, unannounced, uncommunicated, short, fast, voids that are held together by a temporarily of the project as a whole. These would even jump across planes of time. The present would mix with the future, past as we went back in history, then leapt forward imagining the future of Charlottesville, before coming back to the present as we sat around a table. Time was intertwined through memory, the presence of our bodies, and hopes for what could happen. We jumped back and forth between these states.

There was PHAR time and PAR time. We would establish moments to be together, which usually began anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes after what we agreed upon. This was the reality of a bus not coming on time, a meeting that ran long, a crisis that needed attending. Then when we did sit down together, it required that we take the time to understand how we each were coming to the moments together. Creating space to recognize how our lives impact our ability to be in relationship to each other. We

needed to be honest about what we could or could not do and be happy with the fact that we were in space together. At the same time, the more clear steps of plan, act, observe, and reflect to a non linear hold. It was more fractal in nature. Planning and acting would lead back to more planning and acting interspersed with reflection, which would then lead to acting and observing. This would depend on the perspective in which the group was taking as a whole or the moments in which we were living as individuals. Threads of reflection and action would take place between two people that would then lead back to the group informing how we observed and planned. While this may be linear when stepping back, the dynamics of the research would require it to ebb and flow, stop and start, shift and change. We would have to go back to our initial plans, coming back to the scope and the questions to center ourselves and make sure what we had initially proposed seemed correct. Actions would either result in unexpected consequences and require that we take the time to sit with what we had encountered, not necessarily trying to analyze the meaning, but more let it wash over ourselves.

The research project took on its own time. Funding to pay the team would come to an end and we would discuss our next course of action. Did we want to put a clean ending on these efforts, set it as a naturally occurring end point or continue to meet informally, keeping up with each other. Energy to continue pursuing interviews would wane. Then an encounter would take place, leading to renewed desire to be in conversation with others. It would then take time to make these come to pass, extending hope and interest. There is the belief and hope that the project as a whole could continue and questions arose as to the desire and infrastructure needed to make that a reality. The spiral could continue to build on itself, go in new directions, including

new people. In doing so new temporality would continue to be developed and perpetuated.

The value of labor and knowledge

As mentioned above, there was a broad concern for providing various levels of support that would allow those involved in the research project to be actively engaged. Early in the project we sat down together to think through what would make that possible. What could the project provide that would allow us to work together to achieve the goals we had for listening to and documenting the stories of Black led organizing in Charlottesville. The funding was there to support stipends for the public housing residents on the oral history team. We had allocated $1000 each for four people. If they were paid $15 per hr that would give us about 66 hours to work together for the next few months. Generally breaking that down to 4 hours per week (2 for meeting and 2 for recording) we could have 16 weeks to complete the planning and training process, collect 10-12 interviews, and then spend the time doing the reflection and coding that would come at the end of the research process. At the very first meeting of the oral history team, I presented this timeline to the others and we talked through what the various moments in the process would look like. As this was the first time we had been doing this, we recognized a need for some flexibility and a need to respond should things change, but there was overall agreement that this was a doable timeline.

Two primary questions came out of this. How would this affect my rent check? What would be the best/most simple way to pay the team and the tellers? Again, these questions point to the complexity of what it means to ethically stand for remunerating those that are involved in research and the impact that that remuneration has on the

lives of those that you are working with. The simple desire to pay someone for their knowledge and time is a good standard to follow, but how it is put into practice is a completely different situation. In the case of the first question, there are direct impacts to public housing residents' lives in terms of how income is accounted for and how that then changes the services that they receive. There is an entire bureaucratic administrative system of accounting that has been created which continually tracks and assesses the support the public housing residents receive. This has a direct impact on how much their rent will be or the food benefits they might receive. While the perception that all people in public housing pay very low rents, the reality is that some people pay quite a bit more again based on their income. The bureaucracy of the system is a point of constant negotiation as even a minor change in income or funds into a bank account can drastically increase the rent. Once a change in income is noted an immediate shift in rent occurs. Should that income then change back, it can take time before that is reflected in the rent. Public housing residents are bound to this system of accounting, bureaucracy, and review which on the outside was established as a way to limit social welfare, but is also a form of carceral culture that entangles residents into systems that constrain and punish their efforts to live. The question of “How would the effect of my rent check?” is not only one of financial transactions but about the relationship that residents have with these systems and their continual struggle to have control of their lives. In a system that is predicated on a particular type of control of public housing residents lives, public housing residents are trying to define some level of stability and agency, which does not require them to expound the mental and emotional energy of dealing with local, state and federal systems.

In order to respond to this concern, several different things came forward. First, from the oral history team, there was a desire to not impact their rent and at the same time not perpetuate any further entanglement with the housing authority. As public residents were given stipends for attending housing authority events or participating in PHAR's internship program, they saw the oral history project as an extension of those experiences. Yet, when exploring this with CRHA that was not necessarily the case. As stated in public housing code, residents can receive stipends that have no effect on their rent check when participating in housing related administrative meetings and training that provide specific workforce development skills. Upon an initial review, it was not clear if the oral history project could fall into these categories. It was neither a CRHA designated program nor specifically focused on workforce development in a traditional sense, even though the training did provide specific interview, media development, and research skills. In response and with the general support of PHAR and CRHA, created a small syllabus and curriculum for the oral history project that described the project and noted specific skills that would be provided. This was then sent to the regional HUD offices for approval. Upon review, the proposal was denied. We then went back to CRHA and PHAR for further advice and realized there was not much more that could be done, especially without affecting the work we were already starting to do. When I shared this with the team there were continued questions and disgust. Ultimately, we had to make a decision about how best to move forward. How could we both make sure that the team received the support that we had raised, but at the same time not have it make a significant impact. Noting the IRS limits for reporting income, which set $600 as a threshold, the team decided to stay below the boundary and then redesign our

research process. The funding would support their involvement with the training and the interview process. After which we would organize meetings to collectively listen to the recordings, using the remaining funding to provide food. Again, this would shift the overall timeline and process of the research. Anything beyond the immediate focus on the interviews would ask the team to participate in a voluntary role, which some were willing to do. A smaller group continued to meet and still is meeting.

In terms of the payments, prepaid debit cards were used, which is a standard for both providing research stipends and how public housing residents are paid for involvement with housing authority and PHAR meetings. These both incentivize and recognize the time being contributed by those involved. Understanding the possibility of how they can impact consent, consistent conversations and practices developed throughout the research to both follow through on remuneration as a commitment. Broadly there was concern about how payments may or may not influence both the tellers and the oral history team. There were multiple times where concerns that people would only participate on the oral history team or the interviews for the funding. Because of this we integrated questions into the recruitment to ask about this. It was explained in our recruitment literature and noted in the consent agreement, but we didn't necessarily center it. At the end of an interview, we would graciously give the teller a gift card and thank them. In general, tellers were surprised that we would pay them for their time. I see this pointing to the fact that tellers were more inclined to participate based on being asked than the oral history work itself.

In the case of the oral history team, we provided an intended schedule of payments as the project progressed. A percentage would be paid upon completion of

the training and the rest upon collection of 2 cycles of interviews. With the training process being finite, with specific time commitments, weekly meetings, and outputs, the completion of the work was easy to assess. The interviews were more complicated as the ability to engage and get people to commit to being a part of an interview had uncontrollable circumstances. After the first rounds of engagement, we continued to assess our process and the responses we were getting. We made changes to our language, sharing the consent forms, and the process for engaging tellers. At the same time, we set some standards and timelines for ourselves, noting that payment would not happen until we each organized an interview. While we were accepting of the complications, in the case of one of the oral history members, this became problematic. Due to this and other demands on their time, they decided to stop being a part of the process. There was also a moment when there was difficulty with the gift cards themselves. A team member was given a card after completing their interviews, but when they went to use it to purchase groceries for the month, the card was empty. This placed her in the embarrassing position of having to take back the groceries while in line at the store and resulting in a host of texts and phone calls seeking to remedy the problem. Beyond these specific instances, a general concern by PHAR emerged about using gift cards to provide payment. This developed based on the ways that Black led organizations are continually audited as a form of administrative punishment and racism. In response to this we took extra steps to document acceptance of the payments to create transparency should an agency desire to review how funding was being allocated.

The moments described above bring forward a question as to how we value the labor and knowledge of doing community based research. While important to document and understand, the logistics of doing community engaged research cannot encompass the whole reality of what it means to do this type of work. Much of what I note is a description of an exchange of resources and the development of systems to make that exchange possible. Thinking back and reading it now, much of it feels transactional in nature. When labor was accomplished it was rewarded with a monetary benefit. In this case, while limited in scale, the benefit was based on what a living wage might be for doing this work. This was an attempt at seeing a foundation for how this type of work could and should take place. This was working then on two levels. Both seek to establish a standard for remunerating community collaborators and assigning a value to their labor. In parallel, these efforts also began to assign a value to the knowledge that these community members held. This is a knowledge that for the most part is shared and exchanged when people gather together on front porches, at a meal, or after a meeting. The oral history project was an initiative to make this knowledge seen and heard, beyond these personal exchanges. Knowledge became something that had value. The meager funding that was set aside to pay the tellers and the team for their time, leadership and vision, gave this knowledge a different meaning. If we interpret the shyness and lack of interest in participating in the interviews from this frame, it sheds a light on what it means to make this knowledge into a commodity. While there is an opportunity to use a Marxist - use vs exchange value - lens to analyze this further, it does not seem to suffice.

The broader question then becomes how the value of this labor and knowledge is held and who holds it. In the context of creating spaces of care, labor is not simply completing a task. It is the emotional and mental environment that is created around accomplishing collective work and the ability for each member to manifest their whole selves. The labor of telling stories is both about weaving knowledge in relationship to each other, but also developing the space for people to be comfortable in sharing those stories. It emphasizes the energy of responsiveness to specific needs of the teller, the team, and the project both individually and as a whole. Here, labor includes exploring ways to redress administrative boundaries that are perpetuated by institutions of power, and in doing so, challenging the traditional conception of labor, as was experienced in questioning how the oral history process fits into workforce development standards. Yes, the oral history initiative required a form of labor, but it was one that was held by us all, each taking up specific roles and responsibilities in pursuit of common causes.

We are still developing an answer in regards to the value of knowledge. The initial promise of data ownership and the way the consent forms center the teller as in control of their knowledge set the tone for this. The knowledge will continue to be held by the community and seek to be available to the community so that they can access the wealth that it can sustain. What that means in terms of how it is stored and how it is shared is based on those needs. There are endless opportunities to share the knowledge in various forms - murals, plays, books, articles, and oral histories. What is important here is to continue to make present and explore the meaning of this knowledge. To continue to allow the knowledge to be a space for reflection and exploration. Not letting it fall back into the shadows of a lone closet, but being present

for the community. It should perpetuate the spaces of care created by the oral history team, bringing other stories, other knowledge and other people into conversation with each other. The value of the knowledge should be set not by the publication of a dissertation or some external interest, but by the retelling of these histories within the community. The value should reside there.

Reflecting on PAR

The threads of collaborative, participatory engagement and research have flowed throughout my artistic and academic careers. From working with a community to explore the ways a polluted urban stream could become a community resource or telling the stories of food access as a part of a food justice publication, the collaborative environment is one that I have always relished and thrived in. I continued to pursue this when attending PAR training in New York, with the Highlander Center, and personal study. The historical commitments of PAR appealed to how I wanted to pursue research, as an investment in the lives of people and their ability to influence the decisions that impact their lives. While at the University of Virginia, I have seen, experienced, discussed, and worked to develop modes of community engaged research practice. Yet, like most radically centered thought and practice, my experience is that much of these ideas are peripheral. Maybe they are tangentially mentioned in a course or alluded to at the end of a semester. We can talk about participatory methods, but the reality of moving beyond the middling rungs of confirmation and engagement are far from the reality we actually live in. On several occasions, when in conversation with faculty or administration, a critique emerges as to how a commitment to/demands of pursuing transformative research comes into conflict with the publish or perish culture. For many

faculty, working within the academic system, there is neither the support nor valuation of community based research until the tethers of a pursuit of tenure are released. Again if we look back at the history of participatory action research, many of those who pursued PAR either had to leave the academy or do so beyond the regular demands of the institution. At best there is a rhetorical enunciation to serve the public, but the reality is that the structures that define the university are resolutely captured by neoliberal and capitalist practices. The tensions that arose in this research buoyed by my own desire to use PAR, and the limits that arise in terms of higher education's norms. This provides a clear understanding about how those in the academy with less power are limited in their ability to pursue liberatory modes of research.

There are a few things that made this a possibility in my case. The first centers on the relationship that I had with PHAR, which predates even the beginning of my time at the University of Virginia, noted at the beginning of this chapter. In this case the trust that is needed to pursue PAR was built long before. It was based on my time working with public housing residents, attending events, showing up in support at city council meetings, and being present in all the small ways that are required of trust. These are the same reasons that I was not able to engage with the other sites. I had not put the time in nor was it possible to include an outsider in the work. At least not in the time frame that doing a PhD provides. Because of these relationships, I was given access to people and materials that most would have never seen. Because of this there is a continued responsibility to this effort both on my own terms and with PHAR. Even so, I would say that there is a level of access that I will never have, as I am not a public housing resident, a Black community member, or a member of the PHAR staff. There

were times when doors were shut for private conversations or I was not included in a meeting. To me these continue to manifest the reality of the organizing work that is taking place. This is something that I have to respect and honor. Another reason the project was possible was because PHAR asked and I happened to listen. On multiple occasions, Joy expressed a desire to find a way for public housing residents to tell their own story, their own history. I happened to hear this. It was not until later that I understood efforts had been explored, but they had not come to fruition. When pairing that with my desire to use my research as a means to understand and support social transformation there was a confluence of interests that could be met. What makes this project unique is this alignment of community need with both the resources that a research project can provide and the ethical frameworks that PAR sets forward.

Amplifying Infrastructures

Much like the infrastructures that PHAR has long been creating to center public housing residents in the decisions that impact their lives and as an important part of Charlottesville, I see the mix of theory and action, relationships and commitments, struggles and opportunities, manifesting another form of infrastructure. It takes as its formation the physical, social, economic, and affective attributes that were delineated in the literature review, but continues to explore them, challenge them, question them. What do these infrastructures amplify? What do they make possible? What do they do they limit? This brings forward questions of power, the value of knowledge, and the complicated connections that have brought community, a phd student, and the university together. From an inside position, this research does not necessarily fit. It does not follow the prescribed traditions and practices that are taught in a methods

course. At times it can feel like we were grasping for breath in a vacuum of uncertainty. In our commitment to emergence, the pathway is being made as it is being done, based on the desire to be in line with the voices and lives of those that were involved. Internal and external conflict seem to abound. But, importantly, we sat within this uncertainty and made it present. We reflected collectively on how it came into being and taking the time to understand these conflicts, we began to see new opportunities for being something else. In doing so, we started to create another infrastructure, another world, that in turn creates you. The question is how do we continue to feed, situate, and use that infrastructure in the continued support of each other.

Early in this process, with a tendency to challenge and question the boundaries before me, I recognized that if this project was to be a success (however that is measured) it would require more than the prescribed connections. The committee that institutionally was assembled as a means of completing the dissertation needed to be much broader. A group of people in dialogue to guide the process, to confirm our decisions, and to invest in the research based on their own experiences. I said multiple times that I did not necessarily need an advisory committee, but a community of shared vision. If the relationships that were established before the research even began set the stage for what is possible, it was the connections that emerged within the research that gave it meaning and substance. These were made real in the text meeting reminders, the problems with the gift cards, and the integration of an MOU, a legal agreement that entwined us in new ways. They were platforms for constructing this community for building an infrastructure of care and support. Here I think about bell hooks and her discussion of the beloved community based in a community defined in a shared

commitment to struggle (hooks, 1995). In which conflict is a part, but not only the conflict. It is how those conflicts are resolved and the manner of care in which that resolution takes place. Through the research we were able to collectively explore histories that are overlooked and be with each other even when cancer impacts a key part of the team. We have built an infrastructure to continue work that rests on love, hope, and humanizing each other.

Chapter 4 - In-betweenness as a identity, agency and Infrastructure

For the moment we sat in silence. Audrey had just spent the last hour slowly reading through a small folder of documents that had been tucked away in a box, relegated to the back of a closet, lost to history. A little brown at the edges yet sharp to the touch, the pages had been kept safe in a folder, compressed by a wealth of other papers, now coming back to life, living in a new present. She opened the folder and looked at the first page, taking her time to see and be with what was in front of her. Her eyes moved across the page, giving reverence to the text, allowing each word the time it deserved. She turned the pages gently. Her forefinger delicately sliding under each page. Her thumb applied some pressure before raising the paper and then with a movement of the hand turning it over and nestling the page down without causing any harm. As she read, her hand would come to her mouth and then point to a sentence, noting a specific point in the text. This she would reread, making sure she had it right, cementing the text in her mind and beginning the process of reconstructing connections to the past. Her own past. The past of her community. After completing the last page, she sat with the folder in her lap for a few moments. Still open. Staring at what she had just seen and the text staring back at her. She then slowly closed the folder. Slide it onto the table in front of her. The weight of the contents having greater significance than its actual mass. She rested her hands in her lap and we just sat there in silence. Not a silence of uncomfort, but one that recognized the magnitude of what Audrey was reading, taking in, and remembering.

The documents that Audrey was reviewing encompassed a pivotal moment in both her own history and that of the work of PHAR. While community organizing had

been taking place since the establishment of the first public housing site in Charlottesville, as a way of reknitting community together after the impact of urban renewal and the destruction of Vinegar Hill, in 1998 PHAR was asserting a new role. Instead of individual tenants associations at the various public housing sites around the city, PHAR was going to coalesce these efforts and in doing so build the power and capacity to place demands on the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority, the Charlottesville City Council, and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. This role was defined in HUD policy and supported through minor financial contributions based on the number of housing units. A role that PHAR was going to take up and assert. Some of these demands were simple. Needs to clean up trash, fix broken downspouts, or mow patches of grass. Others were more complex. They consisted of fixing drainage that was causing mold to grow in the housing units, leading to health impacts. They wanted to challenge policy changes that were being implemented to increase rental deposits and changes to rent amounts even though contracts had been signed. This also included collaborative research with students at the University of Virginia and the Legal Aid Society to consider how the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program was impacting public housing residents.

After several minutes that wavered between uncomfort and deep presence, I asked Audrey what was on her mind? What thoughts were coming to her after reading the agendas and the handwritten notes in the margins? Again silence. I could see the thoughts running through her mind. The memories and experiences she had gone through sparking deep feelings. A bit of sorrow or melancholy expressed in her face. Her eyes began to water, yet holding strong. Then she spoke. “We are dealing with the

same things today that we went through before." She paused again and had a few more moments of self-reflection. "The issues that we were fighting then are the exact same issues we continue to fight for today." Another pause. More reflection. "Our focus is on uplifting the community, but I'm not sure if we are succeeding." I asked her how that made her feel. She sat for a few more moments. "It is going to take me some time to think about that."

The collaboration of this research, the relationships of solidarity that were being developed, reside in this moment of silence. The void. The emptiness. The in-betweenness of that moment. Yet it is not beholden to it. It begins in the emptiness of a place that once held a thriving community of businesses and homes, a need for affordable housing that continually is not met, a promise of a better life, a culture of exclusion and disinvestment, a community that is continually fractured, and a history of racial segregation that is written into the landscape and lives of people who live in Charlottesville. While we tend to focus on the ways these insidious policies, actions, and thoughts reinforce the status quo, we forget to recognize the continual struggle to move beyond them. These take many forms. They are seen in the attendance at continuous meetings, making their presence known and challenging efforts that do not benefit low income residents. They are in the annual lighting of a christmas tree, stopping by the clinic and the rec center for halloween treats, and the many bake sales to raise money for reading programs. There were parades to challenge the impact of drug sales and assert a community driven form of public safety. All of these efforts provide a means to build the consciousness of a community's power and respond to the vulnerability of standing before city council to make demands. The struggle can be recognized in small

gestures of community care to violent responses to the many harms being inflicted on these communities. And still this in-betweenness is present.

In this chapter, I will explore this betweenness, both physically and emotionally, but also how it serves as a platform for continued struggle. I want to consider this idea in relation to ideas of double consciousness and intersectionality that position Black communities within broader physical and political contexts. Instead of being defined by a duality or the compounded layering of identity, in-betweenness can be seen as a site of geographical, political, and racial struggle. It takes in account the multiple positionalities that public housing residents encounter in their lives and how these provide a context for their response. It is the imposition of in-betweenness through which public housing residents create infrastructures that work to move beyond the past and into the future. In this way I see in-betweenness as a space of agency, the underlying concern, that perpetuates the creation of the marvelous.

The shape of Inbetweeness

It is important to start by witnessing the broader context of which public housing residents are working. To begin at the societal level, by considering the harm that has been done and the depth to which people and institutions have gone to contain, use, and erase Black people in America. This is a darkness that has been woven into communities, starting with the ongoing physical and emotional trauma that began during a trans-Atlantic crossing and continues to be carried today. It continued with the punishment of the whip and the endless days of labor that defined chattel slavery. During Jim Crow it continued as separate but equal came to mean the difference between well resourced schools and ramshackle out buildings or limited access to

voting and the ability to build political power. To the 1970's where the promise of new housing equaled a cement block building that lacked the needed air conditioning to overcome the heat of summer. Infant mortality statistics that show Black children are 4 times more likely to die and the mold that creeps not only into your home, but into your lungs. It also includes the slow, but inevitable loss of the Black community in Charlottesville, a city that never was, nor will ever truly be, for them.

This is a darkness that is written into the landscape in overt and covert ways. The most obvious and recent example being the struggle to remove a series of statues that were purposely placed into public spaces to reinforce racial, hierarchical logics. Stories of power and domination become concrete in the guise of cast bronze that asserts unquestioned values. Yet, when Zyanha Bryant creates a petition that brings the meaning of these statues into question, a new consciousness is created. This perpetuates civic dialogue, an unearthing of the past, multiple assaults by white supremacist forces, and the ultimate election of Charlottesvilles first Black, female mayor. Even so, it is not until a shift in the interpretation of the Virginia Constitution plays out in court, supported through a change in political party control, that these symbols are removed.

Though it is the less obvious ways that the landscape and these logics of domination continue to shape the city. This can be seen in the way that zoning, infrastructure investment, and racial covenants work to reinforce segregation. Defacto and dejure legal standards have rippling effects that continue to haunt what Charlottesville is and can become (Rothstein, 2017). Then there are the sites that are slowly fading into the past, traces of how things once were, only distinguishable to those

that have the courage to remember them. The side entrance to a downtown theater. The take out window at a white owned restaurant that historically was the only space where Black customers were served. The invisible boundary of 6th Street, designating the separation of white Belmont from Black Ridge St., one that Black children were never supposed to cross. The history of crossing the street by white members of the community when walking past the bustling activity of Vinegar Hill. The way that the school district boundaries distribute children throughout the city.

Recognizing the complexity of these situations, the fractal nature of the violence encountered and how this impacts the everyday Black experience, we have to consider how others have described and mapped the way that these encounters. Especially the way they entwine and bind Black bodies and community. Caught between the breadth of structures and systems that have so deeply rooted themselves that they are hard to see. While theoretical concepts and descriptions, based on direct experience, it seems important to sit with them, much like Audrey sat with the agendas and meeting notes.

W.E.B Dubois begins *The Souls of Black Folk* in a similar frame of mind. “Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question . . .” This is the space of constant negotiation, of unanswered queries, that situate Black society between their individuality and the reality that is being imposed upon them. “A world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world.” This understanding allows Dubois to describe a double consciousness, of seeing oneself through the eyes of others. This is a mirror that produces not only a distorted reflection, but an alternative you. It is the struggle between these two manifestations of the individual that Black America must struggle. Dubois

believes the ultimate goal is to overcome the dichotomy of this situation and resolve the distinction between Black and America, synthesizing what is perpetually, historically has been in conflict. If we are to take the few examples above as reference, this struggle has a complex geography. Not only playing out in the mind and soul, but in the legal, political, and physical worlds that solidify and reinforce these worlds.

Franz Fanon refers to another form of in-betweenness in *Black Skin, White Mask*. He expands the territory of contestation that Dubois set forth, rooting it in the perceived superiority of whiteness and the complication of overcoming the hegemony this incites. Here two processes are in play. First is the flattening of Black identity and culture into a stereotypical trope. “Yes, the black man is supposed to be a good nigger; once this has been laid down, the rest follows of itself. To make him talk pidgin is to fasten him to the effigy of him, to snare him, to imprison him, the eternal victim of an essence, of an appearance for which he is not responsible (Fanon, 1952).” While at the same time, Fanon sees Black people as bound by the normativity of whiteness, a logic that defines all ultimate goals. No matter their desire to realize their humanity and validity, the circumstances are always in relation to the domination of whiteness. These perpetuate an inferiority that is manifested through an economic system based in hierarchy, which at the same time is reinforced internally. Blackness and whiteness come to define the boundaries of this in betweenness with whiteness being the ever dominant reference. Fanon sees this as having a temporal impact. ‘The architecture of this work is rooted in the temporal. Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time. Ideally, the present will always contribute to the building of the future

(Fanon, 1952).” Thus these systems of domination propagate this inferiority in perpetuity.

Later, Paul Gilroy engages the oppositionality of occupying spaces that reside between nationalist and ethnically absolutist ideas in his cultural studies writing on the *Black Atlantic*. Here the polarization of European and Blackness defines the boundaries of an in-betweenness that “remains locked symbiotically in an antagonistic relationship marked out by the symbolism of colours, black and white (Gilroy,1993).” They are reinforced by languages of national belonging and racial identity which work to place ideas, people, and cultures in distinct groups. Gilory sees these classifications as emerging from modern thinking and they reinforce power dynamics that “sealed (these distinctions) off hermetically from each other.” In our inability to recognize hybridity, a world of antagonisms and hierarchies are produced that position and exclude. The world is forever polarized by a perception of homogeneity that then asserts the value of one over another, overlooking a millennia of interaction and cultural exchange.

Another way to consider this in-betweenness arrives in the description of intersectionality, long a focus of global feminist writers. This asks us to diversify the foundations and the boundaries upon which we might consider in-betweenness. No longer focused on the simple, but digestible polarizations of Black/white, Modern/Postmodern, European/Non-European dichotomies might present, intersectionality requires a recognition of the complexity of identity and the infinite geographies we all experience. These can be seen as vectors of knowledge and experience that weave internal and external patterns. In a society where hierarchies are

dominant, we have to consider where these locate bodies and minds, recognizing how in-equity is manifested.

In her initial writing on intersectionality and Black women, Kimberlé Crenshaw begins by challenging the dominant dualism of gender and race as it has come to define the identity politics of the late 20th century. Her focus is to complicate the grounding of these positions and dig deeper into the ways they reside in a construction of the world (Crenshaw, 2017). She does this by considering the structural, political, and representational forms of intersectionality that come to define the experience of Black women. Structurally she wants us to consider how "women of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds." Based on research of battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers, Crenshaw notes how the power dynamics inherent in marital relationships and institutional service provision reinforce structural barriers that overlook the reality of women's lives. Politically, Crenshaw recognizes the duality of Black women's experience. "The need to split one's political energies between two sometimes opposing groups is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of color and white women seldom confront. Indeed, their specific race and gendered experiences, although intersectional, often define as well as confine the interests of the entire group."

We can see this as being caught between the flattened dominance of constructed social boundaries. The categories of Black and women are defined in such a way that precludes the experience of Black women, forcing them to either assert a new ground or bounce between concretized positions that do not necessarily fit. Finally representational intersectionality considers "how the production of images of women of

color and the contestations over those images tend to ignore the intersectional interests of women of color." In this way, the hegemony of culturally produced narratives define and reinforce an understanding of what it means to be a woman of color. Since these images are divorced from the actual experiences of Black women, they perpetuate continued violence and trauma.

While these authors provided both a theoretical and experiential opportunity to map and imagine a vital conversation about in-betweenness, Antje Daniel engages the concept more directly in her research on women's social movement in Kenya. Recognizing a gap in how social movement literature considers the societal and political context of movements, she advances in-betweenness as an opportunity to examine how women's social movements serve as brokers between political and social structures, which provides a more nuanced understanding of these movements (Daniel, 2016). In this work she defines three specific manifestations of in-betweenness. The first is based in class distinctions between middle and low class activists, with the lower class women feeling disenfranchised from what is meant to be a multi-class struggle. The second refers to how the development of collective identity within the movement comes in conflict with ethnic distinctions. This produces specific tension during moments of broader socio-political activity, when the platforms of ethnically situated identities take precedence to the activism of these movements. Women are asked where their affinities lie and in doing so demand that women work to overcome internal and external distinctions. Finally, Daniel sees these movements as continuously negotiating between these societal and political institutions. The movements become mediators between state and society (Daniel, 2016). Thus emphasizing a mode of

action that centers on interrelations. Similar to Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, the movement is a site of negotiation between the affective responses that these women are having and the institutions that define what is possible.

Acknowledging the importance of these theoretical considerations, they set a foundation for an understanding not only of what is in-betweenness, but how in-betweenness is experienced. The most immediate perception of in-betweenness resides in the way it is bounded metaphorically, ideologically, and culturally by dualisms. Society is caught in the middle of a set of polarities that are continually antagonistic, which demand continued attention and negotiation. If Dubois describes the social, physical, and mental context of these positions through an understanding of double consciousness, it is Fanon that asserts the weightedness of their presence. These ideas are initial infrastructures for recognizing the landscape that in-betweenness produces. One being the architecture between the individual and the social positions, and the other recognizing the heft of the materiality that this architecture is realized. This holds the dualism in place, but also gives value to one side or the other. These positions can seem fixed, producing limits, which constrain possible actions. Though, I would argue that the defined rigidity is less determinate. What if we see them as something else entirely?

Gilroy's ideas create a dualistic geography of place and mind. The Black Atlantic is something tangible, a real space, but also emotional and mental. If that is the case then we have to consider their volatility, as they erode, shift, or sublimate under the complexities of being. In this case dualisms become a part of a lived landscape. As much as the metaphor of a ship traversing the Atlantic concretizes the dualisms,

intersectionality alternatively makes these dualities both permeable, a membrane through which these logics move, and produce a multi-dimensionality. We have gone from an image, to a map, to a 4 dimensional space. The geographies and weightedness are still there, but they are no longer so rigid, a bit more opaque. Intersectionality sees Identities as formed from the convergence and layering of society norms onto bodies as the two interact. The trajectories of which compound and omit, embed and rebound, coming from multiple angles.

These theories also contest in-betweenness as a void in which the individual resides. What then are the spatial sensibilities of in-betweenness? If not a void then what? Metaphors abound, from a socio-cultural vice that applies differential pressures to a contained space in which one is moving from side to side, bouncing between planes of experience. Intersectionality, spatially, as a complex set of multiplying vectors, is a web of entangled threads that are stitched together from our racial, cultural, gendered experiences, becoming more dense over time and requiring greater and greater energy to shift and adjust.

As mentioned above, Gilroy's oceanic metaphor provides a more specific geography in which to immerse ourselves. It is defined by a vast expanse of water. The movement from one side to the other provides the space for two competing cultural-temporal experiences to play out. Yet, I wonder about how this metaphor masks what lies beneath, the magnifying action of wind and waves. The flat surface of the water, dynamic and undulating, covers mountains, canyons, and vast flats, which provide further texture to an understanding of inbetweeenness.

Daniel sees these in-between spaces as active, generative spaces that reside between affective consciousness and the material realities of our socio-political world. Social movements are agents for defining and imagining alternatives which then have to contest concretized social systems. We can think about other models that share this dialectic relationship, Marxian or Gramscian bases and superstructures. Social institutions and political-economies shaping and maintaining everyday life. I would even argue that they are more dynamic. Not just a landscape which we inhabit but one that we constantly carry with us. It is a landscape held in both our bones and our brain. A construction of a world that is internally unique, which we then seek to share. It is the mediating between what is external and internal that provides a context in which action takes on meaning.

in-betweenness is both an individual and social experience. The dualisms and the landscapes are those which we hold within our person, and they also exist outside of who we are. Norms and ideologies shape us in different ways as we reject or take hold of what they provide. Dubois situates “me” and the “other world”. Me is a contained thing and yet it evolves, moves, reflects. While at the same time “the other world” is a dynamic flux of interactions, laws, and expectations. The other world inflicts norms and bounds possibilities, which that “me” must contend. What I want to impress here is the dialectic nature of these engagements. Neither does the world define me nor does me (singularly) define the world. It isn’t necessarily in the struggle between the multiple positions that we find meaning. But in the continuous tensions between the “me” and the world that we create a reality. This requires a need to question and critique that which does not make sense. Never letting the social solely be as it wants, but

continuously prodding and poking at what it provides. And, at the same time continuously refining and reflecting on our own actions. Questioning assumptions and querying how habits form, which is not an easy task.

The inbetween is then this milieu of actions, institutions, identities, and geographies that I define as a site of emotional, physical, social, and political contestation. It is how we all live in the world, an everyday experience, but As Crenshaw notes, it has magnifying effects for those who our society positions at the bottom. While we must recognize these hierarchies, they also do not necessarily define who we are. They are a site of agency that one can accept or engage. In the case of public housing residents we see a lineage of challenging the administration of their lives and advocacy that is always testing the boundaries of the inbetween.

Triangulating In-betweenness in Charlottesville

Leaving behind the abstraction of ideas and theories, I want to come back to Charlottesville, considering how in-betweenness manifests itself in the context of public housing. Audrey's experience is a microcosm that is both specific to public housing residents, but also the much broader experience of Black life. This requires us to ask how in-betweenness both limits and opens the opportunities for enacting change? What defines the boundaries and landscapes of in-betweenness? How do experiences and normativity come to situate Black people in these spaces? I want to share how these ideas came forward in the voices of those we spoke to. How in-betweenness is experienced within geographies of race, through history, and in relationship to institutions of power.

Geographies of racial In-betweenness

Thinking back to Gilroy's description of the Black Atlantic as a site of in-betweenness, it cannot be overlooked that the physical geography of place is bound deeply to the daily struggles of the Black lived experience. For those living in Charlottesville, this was a continual point of reference in the voices of those that were at the center of this research. Historically, Charlottesville is a city of ridges and valleys of hierarchy that map race, class, wealth. The plantation on the hill is emblematic of these racial dichotomies. In the case of Charlottesville, they can be readily recognized and referenced in sites like Monticello, the University of Virginia, and a multitude of homes that have receded into the background as the pace of urban development has intensified. Like many urban spaces, no matter their direct presence, these sites are continually being contested. While, the value and meaning of space (neighborhoods, streets, cities) shifts and changes. These relationships continue to be realized both in ways that emerge from direct experience but also in the unseen/unrecognized spatial knowledge that Black residents hold.

Sonia's experience of Charlottesville is one that many others shared. Having lived in Charlottesville her entire life, she shared a continuing experience of negotiating geographies of race that played out across the distinctions of white and black neighborhoods. She describes an experience of movement, of continually traversing and negotiating spaces that may or may not pose direct danger. Originally growing up on Page Street with her parents, she later lived with her grandparents on the east side of town, before moving to various parts of the city. The house on East Main was provided to her grandfather as he was a driver for Ms. Venable, a prominent white

family in Charlottesville. Over time they would come to own the house in what was a white neighborhood. She described the difficulties of living there. “Back then, it was hard being a black person living in an all white neighborhood. You got called all different kinds of names. Our house, somebody set it on fire when I was younger (Bell, 2021).”

This experience is by no means special. As is documented in the lived experiences of any Black person living in a racialized world, the way race is inscribed onto neighborhoods would take many forms that were meant to delineate who was accepted and who was not. On one level, there is the direct racism that Sonia describes above. Overt hostilities that took the form of verbal abuse and direct action against their homes. It is also important to note the administrative and legal means that reinforces these dynamics, from racial covenants that made owning a home in a neighborhood impossible for a Black family to the way that redlining came to concretize racial segregation and at the same time poverty. (Cutler, Glaeser, Vigdor, 1999) While she alludes to this, we have to consider how deep these standards go. The simplest of encounters reinforced these social boundaries. In Sonia’s case they extended throughout the city. She shared how walking to school, at Clark Elementary, was a daily experience of having to traverse these boundaries and the opportunity for abuse. She deeply understood that she was not to travel any further into neighborhoods that were predominantly white. Similar boundaries were on 5th street. Neighborhoods to the south of Tonsler Park were also places they weren’t allowed to go. In an effort to escape, she spent time in the historically Black 10th and Page neighborhood. “I felt more comfortable on that side of town because there's so much racism there where I lived

(Bell, 2021).” While she would spend time playing with friends, she would eventually have to return home.

“I had a couple of friends that we would come over here (10th and Page). We would come play over here for a while. But when it got dark, we had to be out of Hardy drive. So my grandparents raised me and I remember my grandfather always telling us and I have family members. . . They always said, Go home before it gets dark. Because, you know, he always had to feel like something was going to happen, but not most of the time something would happen. But mostly I was always over here, but I knew I had to be home before the lights came on. I knew I had to be there on Market Street before the street lights because my grandfather had come, Get me. I wouldn't have liked it. My granddad didn't feel real comfortable with us being down here (Bell, 2021).” This was further reinforced. As Sonia and others also remembered the call of the fire station bell that could be heard nightly throughout the city. This was another signal for Black children to be home. The night was a time of possible trouble, of encounters with police, that grandparents and parents sought to protect their children from. Yet, the boundaries were clear. Marked by streets and neighborhoods that could mean trouble or safety.

After living at various places around Charlottesville, Sonia would later move to Riverside, a public housing site not far from where her grandparents had lived. “That's when we moved to Riverside in public housing, and it was wild back then when I lived down there, we moved in when they first built it. Still, racism was going on down there anyway, because it was right up from where my grandparents had their house. ” Yet, Sonia described how Riverside would provide a space for her and others to build

community. “It wasn't bad living in public housing back then. I mean, you could sit outside. I can say this, you could sit outside in your yard. And you can have a cookout in the backyard. And everybody got along. And when you did something all your neighbors would join in together.” They would spend time down near the river, swimming and fishing. The boundaries that she experienced as a child had shifted. They were able to build community and live beyond the confinements of how things had previously been. Though, Sonia recognized change. The development of housing and parks in that area made it more difficult as new people came into the neighborhood. Where before Riverside faced out onto a wild expanse that extended from road to river, new homes have brought an evolving community of people.

In Sonia’s memories of Charlottesville we can readily see an in-betweenness defined by racial geographies. This is by no means unique either in Virginia or across the nation, then or now. In other interviews, we heard stories of the ways that racial geographies defined Charlottesville. They included what side of the street you might walk on. Whites on one side. Black on the other. Encounters on sidewalks that would force Black children into the street. Even in the present, teens from public housing sites stop when they walk up to South 6th Street. Their grandparents and parents have warned them of going into Belmont. The boundaries that Sonia experienced when she was young are still present.

It is also important to witness how these spaces of in-betweenness can also be unseen, but deeply present. This works across racial temporal boundaries of knowledge and experience of Charlottesville. These are interstitial spaces whose function and meaning has moved into the background, but for the Black community are very present.

While public statues, primarily those upholding white supremacy and the history of “Lost cause” narratives, are a very present example of the way that racial geographies are normalized, many more examples persist throughout the city that go unrecognized.

In listening to the memories of Black residents living in Charlottesville, the understanding of place and the history of place continually came to the forefront. It wasn’t simply a remembrance of a moment, but always led to a deeper sharing of what it meant to live in Charlottesville. Hot dogs at one of many neighborhood restaurants. The best fries were at Humpty Dumpty’s. A site that is now a Mexican restaurant on Main St. Going to Ms. Tilly’s to get shoes for school, because they had the best shoes. Or stopping at Mr. Inge’s store to get cookies with him reminding the kids to leave the correct change on the counter. Memory inscribes an understanding of the city that is held and lived by people. Yet, what also came to light was an understanding of small places, easily overlooked spaces, that still hold meaning. A recurring example being the walk up food service window.

In the present moment, the walk up food window doesn’t have much of a presence in Charlottesville. The closest encounter might be at a food cart on the corner of 250 and High St. or a community event. But, if you begin to look at the various small neighborhood restaurants, they begin to emerge. Most are no longer used. Boxes and posters now block their use as a site of exchange of food, money, and people. Of an experience that was just another part of living in Charlottesville.

Audrey and others spoke about what it was like to be a customer at one of these spaces. She remembered going to the Korner Corner Restaurant at the corner of Cherry and 10th streets. The people working there were always nice, always polite. Yet,

the interior was off limits. As a Black person, you had to order from the service window, staying outside. They would get their food and either sit down outside or go elsewhere. The experience in many ways was just what it was. The social and racial boundaries were understood and you followed them.

In 2013, I met with a young, Black organizer for breakfast as a means of building connections. Dee had grown up in Charlottesville with his family having been in the city for several generations. He was working as a part of an afterschool program at Friendship Court.. We had just met and wanted to take the opportunity to get to know one another as a part of some ongoing organizing work with a small area planning process the City of Charlottesville was implementing. At a recent meeting, I had mentioned getting breakfast at a local restaurant, which he agreed to for the following week.. I arrived at the restaurant, a bit late, to see him sitting alone at one of the tables and quickly recognized that something was amiss. It was something about the ways his eyes glanced quickly around the room, and then focused on his menu. He was nervous, uncomfortable. I immediately asked him if he was ok? His response was that things were alright. I asked him if something was wrong and he said yes, but he would tell me later. So, we went on with breakfast, talking a bit about what it was like growing up in Charlottesville and the hopes that we had for this project. Some of the initial tension subsided with the conversation.

Upon finishing up the meal, we walked outside and I asked him what was wrong. He gestured to keep walking to get away from the building. Once we crossed the street, Dee stopped and turned back. “Do you really want to hear why I was nervous?” “Yes, definitely!” That is when he told me to turn back and look toward the restaurant. “You

see that old walk up window? That is where my family would have gotten food from this restaurant. We would never have been allowed inside." As someone that was relatively new to Charlottesville, I was totally unaware of the different landscapes in which people move. That certain spaces have meaning that privilege tends to mask. This is a form of in-betweenness that is unseen by many, very present for others.

On one hand you have a space that holds deeply racialized meanings. While no longer used or even recognized, the hierarchical logics remain intact. They are present not only physically, but experientially and emotionally. They harken back to the way things once were and continue to remain. What was once overt, a Jim Crow mode of receiving food, has now become covert. The meaning of this window was still present, activated by memories that have been passed down through the community. It is important to recognize that these sites are littered throughout the city. They may now seem mundane, but the muscle and mental memory is still there. Their power is no longer so directly oppressive. But, they are still there. For those that know, they are a constant reminder.

McKittrick and Woods specifically engage the seen and the unseen, which demands the telling of these complicated entanglements with space. They see Black geographies as racially produced, racial "demarcated", but also forgotten and made invisible. While place gives meaning to Black lives, it also seeks to hide their role in producing those spaces. "Identifying the "where" of blackness in positivist terms [which] can reduce black lives to essential measurable "facts" rather than presenting communities that have struggled, resisted, and significantly contributed to the

production of space (McKittrick and Woods, 2007).” They see Black Geographies as complicating material notions of bounded or physical territories.

We can see this in the stories of Sonia, Audrey, and Dee. I think about what it meant for Sonia to traverse the boundaries of white and Black Charlottesville on a daily basis. What it meant to know that crossing the street meant was a transgressive act. How those acts, done over and over, created a very specific picture and experience of Charlottesville for Sonia. Of where she could or could not go. Though it also gave her a space to engage and react. She had the opportunity to push, reconceive, and challenge. These everyday acts of resistance build muscle, mental, and then physical understanding of space (Scott, 2016). Audrey and Dee hold in their memories the understanding of these spaces. They are told and transgressed when needed. Distances are kept. But their remembrance keeps them alive. Their in-betweenness is still present.

Conversely, it is the everydayness, the fact that something can be so readily overlooked, that makes what is unseen so powerful. There is a privilege in not knowing and not recognizing the meaning that specific objects in our environment hold. Not that they are readily ignored, but they are also not sought out. Their absolute emptiness of meaning, hides this real power. The naivety of that position reinforces hierarchical logics. Audrey and Dee provided an insight into this unseen in-betweenness, one that did not exist in my and many others' reality. What had been an innocuous event, positioned them directly in the historical racial power dynamics of Charlottesville as signified in a service window. I was able to experience and see it, if from my own distance. At the same time, it allowed me to recognize how not seeing is an

in-betweenness in itself. It is so easy to not see, not know. Which perpetuates the privilege of whiteness, of gender, of class, and of a lack of knowledge about the realities of Charlottesville.

Audrey reinforces the understanding of racial geographies as a youth. She remembers being guarded from what was taking place. “You were blindfolded about what was going on. But you weren't dumbfounded. You were black, but you were taught how to act. You were taught who to watch out for. You know, but it wasn't that you weren't taught to be, to watch out for it in a scary way. You were. You were taught to watch out for it as a safety to be aware of a safety mechanism for you and for whoever you were with. That's why you travel in groups. When you went to Rio together, you came back together and then you had to come back together, you know, that kind of stuff. So you weren't you weren't taught to be afraid of it. You were just taught to be safe to keep yourself safe.” (Oliver, 2021)

The Historical in-betweenness of Vinegar Hill

Vinegar Hill was a once thriving Black neighborhood that stood at the western border of the downtown business district. It consisted of homes, businesses, schools, and churches that were a significant part of the social and civic fabric of Black Charlottesville. Saunders and Shackleford note the way that this neighborhood developed in the post-bellum south as a contained site of Black economic and social production. It was a site of community that ran across class. Where people lived and worked together for the benefit of each other. Whether getting groceries at Inge’s on West Main, attending one of the many mutual aid organization meeting at a local church, the rhythm of visiting a barber, or attending classes at the primary Black school

in the community, Vinegar Hill was an epicenter of Black life in Charlottesville that then connected to the other Black neighborhoods along Ridge St., Gospel Hill, 10th and Page, and Kellytown.

In 1964 this changed as the culmination of federal subsidies, the legacy of mass resistance, and racially driven policies disguised as economic development, erased the physical reality of the neighborhood from the city. While deep seated racial ideologies and their manifestation in physical reality cannot be overlooked, decisions taking place at the federal level set a foundation for the removal of Vinegar Hill. Ten years before, in 1954, Congress passed the Housing Act of 1954 and the US Supreme Court would rule on Brown v. Board of Education. The Housing Act provided funding for the construction of public housing for cities wishing to address “blighted” neighborhoods. This would then spur cities across the county, North and South/East and West, to take advantage of federal funds to support redevelopment efforts in the name of progress, which would directly impact historically disinvested and disenfranchised Black neighborhoods. New federal laws requiring the desegregation of schools would lead Lyndsay Almond, the Governor of Virginia, to close every public school in the state. Mass resistance would spur a habit of flight by white communities from public schools and reinforce the long held battles between states rights over federal policies. These two forces, federal stimulus and underlying racial tensions, would reflect in local action that would lead to the identification of primarily Black neighborhoods as blighted, the creation of documentation to substantiate those claims, and then the ultimate removal of not only the buildings that sat on this land, but the fracturing of the social fabric of these

communities. One has to wonder what could have been if those funds had been used to revitalize versus remove.

The removal of Vinegar Hill is a community trauma, an open wound that may never heal. It is a generational harm that directly affected those that once lived there, but continues to ripple through minds and bodies. An act that no apology nor symbolic gesture can ever repair as the ramifications are still being felt, seen, and remembered. It is important to recognize what these acts have created. Charlottesville needs to look at the images of the homes that once stood, see the maps to recognize the boundaries, experience the tears from those that still hold the memories of what was once there, and hold the meaning of the loss. Charlottesville remains, and rightly so, in the shadow of such a violent action. Seeing how blatantly racial decisions can impact a community. It is something that must never be forgotten.

Audrey, and others, remembered Vinegar Hill, even though they were young at the time of its demise. “You know, it was a close knit neighborhood. People watch each other, they watch each other's kids. They watch, you know, kids watch out for each other. It was just a close knit neighborhood (Oliver, 2021).” These point to a social infrastructure that was supporting a thriving community. All of the people that we spoke to could name the various businesses that stretched from Inge’s on the corner of Main and 4th street to the Greek restaurant that once sat where Main connected with the downtown, the entire stretch now taken up by hotels, a federal courthouse, and office buildings. They talked of the church events and the house parties they would go to that were open to all. The importance of the school as a site of Black education and excellence. The Elks club, the Oddfellows Hall, and other social venues along Preston

Avenue and Market Street, several of which are still present, but are now used by other businesses, marked the other edge of the neighborhood. While parts of the neighborhood may have needed improvement, the memory of a thriving community has a strong hold.

Alice Washington makes the starkness of the impact of the loss of Vinegar Hill more tangible, but also puts it in relation to the move to Westhaven. **“**Well at that time, I know that the people were happy to have decent housing, but they were not happy about the way that it came about. To be put out of your home, to be put out, away from where you have been all your life where you had bought a home or have rented it for years and you just come and you just go and take it. I mean, you know, it was like being deported, honestly. It was like them being raped (Washington, 2022).” She brings forward the physical and emotional trauma that urban renewal inflicted on the community. This was not simply a shifting of community from one place to another, but an uprooting of traditions, culture and livelihoods that had been present for over one hundred years.

These would be forever severed, rupturing and fracturing the connections that allowed people to live. And yet it went deeper. Alice shared the thinking of those that were displaced. “You know I worked hard, I bought this little piece of property, it's mine. It may be run down and may not have the running water in the house. It may not have the fancy bathrooms and stuff, but it's mine. And you stole it (Washington, 2022).” Here she emphasizes the way in which a sense of autonomy and ownership was taken away. In the eyes of the white controlled systems of power, the Vinegar Hill was “blighted”, land that was not serving a specific economic purpose. But for those living there and

those that still remember, it was a site of belonging. Black residents had ownership and control of their lives, at whatever level that might be.

When finally the neighborhood was demolished, Alice talked of the way the community was fractured. “You lost some of your neighbors, even though a lot of them moved, but some of your closer ones might have moved elsewhere and there was no transportation to see them. Didn't everybody have a phone at that time. So, I mean, you know, you lost a lot, not just a house and your land, but you lost friends and family because, you know, it was restrictions if you were a certain age and you didn't have a disability. You know, you had to have your own place. It was devastating. And they just killed the whole complete community (Washington, 2022).” Alice is referring to the vital social and economic infrastructures that had sustained the Black community. Vinegar Hill not only was a space for businesses, homes, schools, and churches, but a dynamic social node for the entire Black community. We can see the neighborhood as an important convening point, a vital site of exchange that would allow the community to survive. The loss rippled throughout the city and required rebuilding.

Yet, the trauma would continue. After the demolition of the area and the construction of new transportation infrastructure, much of the site would remain empty. Where homes and businesses had been, there would be an open field. While visioning done by the City had explored housing being built in connection to the creation of the pedestrian mall, it would not be until the late 1970’s that any redevelopment of the site would take place. With ongoing local political battles about the control of Charlottesville Housing and Redevelopment Authority and broader economic uncertainty, as commercial concentration of business shifted to the periphery of the city, the siting of

the Omni Hotel, the building of the Commonwealth Center, and then later the Kings Grocery would start to see development of the former neighborhood. Until that time, the space was blank. 10 to 15 years of empty space that had once been the site of a community. Now fractured and working to rebuild connections, some of which would never be found. Alice shared how this impacted the community. “I mean, you know, to see your whole neighborhood and to knock it down and do nothing with it. For many years. And still when they built on it, it still was nothing to benefit us (Alice, 2022).” What had been a space of opportunity, supported through community connections, had been wiped clean. There was no effort, other than minor remuneration for moving or the market price of the property, to recognize the broader social infrastructure that supported the community.

Beyond this, many of those living in Vinegar did not necessarily have the means to move, to rebuild the life they had at the moment. Alice thought back to those most impacted by these events and how they must have felt. “You know, and can you imagine the heartbreak every time you had to go downtown. You had to see that. You know that was just opening the wound up every time you went anywhere (Washington, 2022).” This trauma was continual. It was ongoing. Reinforced by what people saw and remembered. For many who directly experienced these events, it continues to this day. As some of those we spoke to repeated - urban renewal was Black removal. The loss has become an ongoing in-betweenness, that frames their interactions between friends, institutions, and how they see themselves within the city.

While those that experienced the destruction of Vinegar Hill first hand have a more tangible connection, there is ongoing concern that present and future generations

will not remember this defining history. Much like the sites mentioned above, interstitial spaces of meaning, Audrey and Mary hold a deep concern with the future of this history and how that history informs who they are. Audrey particularly sees the need for making this history present, not just read, but tangible in ways that future generations can see how it has impacted them and continues to impact them. “You've got to start with the black history of this town. And to get people who are very knowledgeable about what really happened. To sit down and to listen. Because we've had people who sat at this table who had no idea what Vinegar Hill was. I mean, these are young ladies like, you know, in their late, late twenties, early thirties. And we have really, really, really smart children these days, especially in public housing. The kids are so knowledgeable about everything. Except for the one thing that they really need is black history and I think that we have to start teaching them at a very young age because they're very smart, they're ready for it. And I think that if we could do that, that, you know. We want to see you. What are you talking about (Oliver, 2021)?” This is not a simple concern with knowing the dates and spaces, but of how this history lives on in the lives of people. She is concerned with how the loss of that history is the separation of who the community truly is and their connection to their own identities.

Mary went further in her consideration of the importance of remembering Vinegar Hill. “I think it's more of a cultural thing. They need to start with the culture because they don't understand the cultural part of it. Is the history part of it? Because if you look around if you look around everything that reflects this country, actually this world comes out of black history. The culture part is taking the culture from the black history part of it (M. Carey, 2022).” In the case of Charlottesville, she sees the schools as playing a role

in making this history present. Before school desegregation, Black schools were able to teach this history directly. As schools function now, she sees a purposeful desire to not teach history nor the culture. Because they don't want them to learn that culture. This breakdown hides the ability to make these connections. "If they can learn that culture and see where they came from. They can understand how it affects where they are going (M. Carey, 2022)."

Public Housing as a Home

Another lens in which to consider in-betweenness is that of public housing as a home. There is a broad conception of public housing as a transitional space, as a temporary shelter for those most in need of affordable housing. Yet, examples from around the US show the deep community bonds have developed (Fuerst, 2005; Bennett, 2015; Rodriguez, 2021). In the stories told of Atlanta, Chicago, Richmond, and others, public housing is much more than simply a place to live, but a rich connection of people that have made these spaces their own, developing a deep attachment to not only the spaces, but also the people. For many, what might have been an initial temporary stay, twenty years later they are still living in public housing. In that time, they have come to see themselves as a part of a broader community of people.

In the case of Charlottesville, based in the violent history of urban renewal, Westhaven became an initial site of reconnecting and rebuilding the community. While the social infrastructure that had long defined the neighborhood could never truly be replicated, those that did move into the site established a variety of groups, in concert with support from the housing authority, focused on building connections and being together. The Westhaven Recreation Center became a site of many events. The Ladies

Auxiliary held regular bake sales. The Westhaven Tenants association coordinated events like the decoration of a Christmas Tree at the holidays along with afterschool programs for children. Trips to go to UVA basketball games. Clean up days. These served to stitch together connections between those that lived there.

Initially, Westhaven was seen as an alternative to the difficulty of finding affordable housing for the Black community, an ongoing problem that many residents were continually contending with. At the time, public housing was a significant upgrade to the homes that many had access to. They provided indoor plumbing and heating. The construction was modern, built with modern materials. From those that we spoke to for the oral history project, there was general consensus that Westhaven was an improvement to what had been. They were described as nice (M. Carey, 2022). A desirable alternative to the other housing that was available. Even pursuing them, but not necessarily being able to get access.

Though Alice challenged this perspective, especially in relation to what Vinegar Hill had provided. “The apartments were nice. I mean, it was nicer than what they had, but it wasn't theirs. This is not my home. This is not really MY home. This is just where they put me (Washington, 2022).” She is making this distinction between what it meant to have housing that provided a standard of living, but at the same time questioning what people gave up. She describes the limits and trade offs that public housing provided the community. “I mean, you know, Westhaven was nice. And it was nice then and. But okay, you didn’t get to have your little garden at home. You know, you could do stuff in your yard at home. That you couldn't do there. I mean, so you lost some of your freedom?” Where previously those living in Vinegar Hill could grow a garden, raise

chickens, and live their lives as they saw fit, Westhaven restricted these possibilities. She described how the grounds were bare and there was little ability to make the space one's own. Instead the housing authority mandated and controlled the site.

Audrey added to this discussion from a more material experience of public housing. After living at various family homes throughout Charlottesville, she later moved into Michie Drive. She shared the feeling of others, that public housing initially was nice. With new floors and new walls that shone. Yet, She focused on the materiality of public housing, what the buildings were made of and what surrounded them in terms of making them home. When talking about public housing, she shared what she thought of the building materials, especially the hardness of the surfaces, which had broader associations. "You never thought about the walls being cinder brick . . . You know that when you come down the steps in these units over here, these concrete steps, they don't bend, they don't give. They don't do anything. They're dangerous. You know, and the floors are hard, you know, concrete floors you. You have. You have the tile on it but it is still hard floors. You go, it's just not, it's not homey at all." Audrey goes on to talk about how dangerous these spaces were for children. How the spaces weren't made for children to play, but constantly coming into contact, causing harm. This brings forward the physical relationship an individual has with a space as a means for feeling or creating a home.

Though the connotations of the cinder brick had greater meaning as Audrey grew older. "For me today to see the cinder brick, because I was a correctional matron at the local jail when they first built the local jail on Avon Street. That's all you saw in there. It's the same kind of cinder brick that you see in these units over here and basically the

same color.” (Oliver, 2021) Here she is making connections to broader institutional relationships. She is recognizing the shared materiality of public housing and places of incarceration. In doing so, she is making connections between the meaning of these spaces. How on various levels they serve to hold, constrain the lives of those that experience them. It is not necessarily a direct correlation, but a visual and physical connection that reinforces the impact of these sites. Especially as ones that are defined as home. This is specifically why, which she shared, Audrey has sought public housing apartments that do not have these characteristics, allowing her to feel more at home.

This extends beyond the interior of public housing. As Alice noted, there are limits to what residents can do to make the exterior spaces of their units feel like home. Their ability to imprint their own identity and build attachment is contained by the perception of transition, of simply being housing. This is a part of the ongoing history of public housing. There is an understanding of the space around the apartments as secondary to fulfilling its primary function. Audrey and others have seen the slow evolution of public housing. “Back then, you know, there weren't a lot of trees. There wasn't a lot of grass or anything in the yards and stuff. They did that in later years. But I guess because, you know, they had just built it that I guess they just didn't plan for the outside like they did and that it was they were more focused on building it and having people move in and not really thinking about. I don't even think the playground was there. I can remember it being muddy and they weren't all that great either (Oliver, 2021).”

In noting these concerns, I am not saying that public housing residents do not care about where they live. Nor are they not committed to creating a home. One has to

only see the front doors and patios of residents to see their commitment to making a home. Spaces that are designed to be institutional, to be easily removed of any identity, to be erased, hold great meaning for residents. The annual growing of banana trees in the front of Joy's apartment is a symbol of her commitment to the community. They are not only a representation of her background as a Jamaican, but are a temporal manifestation of her presence. The banana tree's uniqueness in the Virginia landscape stands out as a document of Joy's life at Westhaven and an invitation into the vibrancy of the community. Similarly, Audrey's front door has lights and decorations that invite you in. They are a representation of her life there. Ms. Betty tends to her plants on the edge of her patio. These show the deep connection and attachment that they have to public housing as a place to live but as a home.

bell hooks further delineates the meaning of the outside and inside dynamics in her writing on homeplace. She defines home as a site of dignity, as a space where life happens, separate from the demands and cruelties of the outside world that Black communities encounter. Home is a space of affirmation and support that could heal the traumas inflicted by the world even when these places were tenuous. In doing so home became a site of radical community resistance. "Homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist (hooks, 1997)." Black women (Joy, Audrey, Betty, and others) are an important part of making this humanization present. "Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation (hooks, 1997)."

In the stories of Audrey and Alice, there is an ongoing realization of the positionality of public housing as a site that seeks not to harm, but to humanize. Yet, they are continually resisting the ability of the space and its materiality to define them. They understand this, living it each day. But, they are not beholden to it. The in-betweenness in this sense is a space of agency. An opportunity to respond to the boundaries that society has placed upon public housing residents. It is an ongoing fight for dignity and control of their surroundings and asserting a vibrancy when that policy and politics seeks to strip it away. As hooks notes, this task of making a homeplace is about making a community of resistance. (hooks, 1997)

Feldman and Stall, in their study of public housing organizing, see homeplace as a site of spatial appropriation and social reproduction. Home in this case is the primary space of struggle “for the material and spatial resources “ critical for life. Not only does it become a site of physical security, but also a space of psychological well-being and a space of empowerment. It is where residents have the most control of their lives and then are able to “redress social inequities and economic inequalities.” Yet, the boundaries of home can extend beyond the apartment, bridging the private and the public. Home extends to the borders of the public housing site or even the broader community. While centered in sustaining families, this broader understanding of home is a platform for organizing and participation in protecting and providing for their communities that become everyday forms of resistance (Feldman and Stall, 1994).

Institutional In-betweenness

Another mode of in-betweenness that emerges in the voices of residents is a recognition of the way that institutions play in situating their lives. Vinegar Hill, while

very much living in the historical memory of residents, also is an example of how institutions have conspired to impact the lives of Black residents. In that case, a mixture of local and federal institutions, the City of Charlottesville, private business interest, and the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, perpetuated an opportunity based in white supremacy to erase a thriving Black neighborhood. Federal housing and redevelopment policy, along with the funding to enact that policy, entwined with an ongoing effort by City officials and local business for economic development to create the demand for Vinegar Hill's removal. Actions that took place throughout the United States. In the name of progress, these forces came to enact this reality even when voters in the City continued to not be convinced either due to their sense of federal influence on local control or the ability to locate a space for public housing in Charlottesville. (Saunders and Shackelford, 2004) Public housing residents are continually positioned between the City, the Housing Authority, the Housing and Urban Development, and other institutions in Charlottesville from the most minor of actions to federal policy.

In their everyday experience, residents shared their ongoing entanglement with the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority. This consists of the maintenance of aging and quickly built housing to the annual negotiation of apartment leases, the process of documenting their income to manage their rent costs to envisioning the future of public housing in Charlottesville. Beyond what would be the typical management of daily life, public housing residents are intertwined within a system of bureaucracy that requires constant administration and management of one's life. The accounting of public resources, a demand that comes at both federal and local

levels, requires residents to constantly maintain their positionality in relation to these institutions. Poverty produces a form of administration residents, which as long as those in need access these resources, situates them within countervailing forms of oppression. This constantly forces residents to decide how they might respond to the situations they find themselves in.

Policy plays a significant role in institutional forms of in-betweenness. While overarching policy is defined at the federal level, it is at the local level where policy is enacted and comes to impact the lives of public housing residents. This sets a broader standard of action defined in the code of federal regulation that housing authorities are expected to follow and residents live by. Yet, how these policies manifest themself is far from standard.

The initial interaction between residents and these institutions takes place with the submission of an application for public housing. Here residents declare their need for housing, their qualification as homeless, elderly or disabled, and their connection locally, having either lived or employed there. Added to this are the composition of their household, documenting the names, relation, social security, sex race, date and place of birth, and possible custody status. Financially, they share the income, the sources of that income, assets, and child care expenses. Adults have to document their status as students, relationships to the housing authority, criminal history, previous landlords, and disability information. All adults have to sign the application and an authorization for the release of information. This places both the resident and their family in a review process to see if they qualify and if there is space for them. Once approved, residents sign a one year lease and pay a security deposit that is equal to one month's rent or "a reasonable

fixed amount as may be required by the PHA." Their monthly rent is calculated annually based on their annual income minus deductions not to exceed 30%, 10% of monthly income, welfare rent or a minimum set by the housing authority. These initial steps intertwine the lives of residents within these broader systems of poverty administration that situates public housing with a myriad of other bureaucracies that continually document and define the lives of public housing residents.

Listening to residents, they are continually negotiating these boundaries, seeking to minimize the impact and administration of their lives. Several shared how even a minor or temporary change in their income can affect both their rent and any benefits they might be receiving. In the accounting of these changes, they recognized how a short term impact could have longer term consequences. An opportunity might arise to make a little extra money, but if that is noted in their annual income documentation, even in the short term, it will raise their monthly rent. Once that action is taken, it then sets a new standard, which should the opportunity go away, continues to perpetuate, forcing residents to have to engage the housing authority to make a change. Instead of further interacting with the housing authority, they do what they can to limit their exposure. To keep some semblance of autonomy so that they might have control over their lives.

Sonia described how the failure of a mechanical system in her apartment forced her and her son to contend with such a moment . "My water tank had busted. And it was coming down through my heating vent, so I called housing (Bell, 2021)." With the aging of public housing in Charlottesville and the ongoing need for maintenance, residents are regularly calling on the housing authority to resolve problems like this with mixed

results. Whether, like in this case, a water heater causes significant flooding or, as has happened in high rise housing in Charlottesville, where the functioning of elevators has stranded residents unable to traverse the stairs. The acute mix of aging infrastructure, the lack of investment by the housing authority, and the precarity of residents puts them into a position where they have few choices. Their distrust of the housing authority forces them to look elsewhere for support. For Sonia the water heater led to greater interaction, at first with maintenance staff and then moving onto property management. “I called her and the first thing she told me, ‘I can give you a blow up mattress and put you in an empty apartment.’ And I remember saying to her, Do you live like that? I shouldn't have to live like that (Bell, 2021).”

The history of disinvestment and mismanagement of public housing nationally is well documented (Goetz, 2012; Heathcott, 2012; Huth, 1981) . A 2010 study of the capital needs of Public Housing across the country noted a significant need in both the existing and future maintenance of public housing. Across the 1,085,407 units in the inspection universe, the estimate of inspection-based existing capital needs is about $21 billion in 2010 dollars. This included another $3.4 billion annually to support the ongoing upkeep of public housing. While these numbers were less than a similar study in 1998, there were also 9% fewer units. Due to the aging of the housing, this meant an average $3,155 needed to be invested per unit across the entirety of public housing in the US. In 2020 the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority recognized how this history of disinvestment and mismanagement has played out in Charlottesville (CRHA, 2020). In part due to the slashing of HUD funding over the last several decades, the understaffing of maintenance, regular review of sites, and a significant

amount of overdue rent payments, the overall state of public housing needed intervention. New leadership was taking the steps to improve oversight, improve policy with resident input, and request funding to resolve these issues. What this does not account for is the way in which the decline of the housing itself directly impacted residents like Sonia. Requiring residents to take action both collectively and politically to address their needs.

Though, it also plays out in who is at the table making those decisions. Joy spoke about two specific moments where policy places a burden on resident's lives. "After Vinegar Hill, when people moved in here, some of the deposits were $15, some were $25, some $75. And what Gene Arrington was trying to do was get those, the residents who were already here to increase their deposit. And the senior section was more against it than anybody because they basically said they were on fixed income and that was going to be a stretch (Johnson, 2021)." Based on HUD policy, security deposits are paid on the execution of a lease and are equal to one month's rent or $50, whichever is higher. Residents in this case were being asked to respond to a policy decision, made as a way of generating revenue with the ongoing cuts to federal funding, with little to no input. In response, a group of community advocates, made up of several non profit organizations, came together in support of public housing residents to challenge this change. Together they wrote a statement to push back against this change, which they then had to go before the Housing Authority board to read. In taking this action, Joy notes that the elder public housing residents were afraid to challenge what was then an all white board, which at the time consisted of the City Council.

At the time, she noted it was rare to see a Black member of City Council, and with the long history of white dominance in city politics. With the experience that the elderly residents had, they were reticent to challenge or even engage. “Nobody would read it, and so Ed Wayland asked me, since I've been coming to the meetings. Would I go to see the council and read it? And I was like, Sure. So, I went downtown to the basement conference room and read the statement, and I thought that was all I needed to do (Johnson, 2021) .” While the elders had been active in the Westhaven Tenants Association, they rarely engaged in these types of challenges. Instead focusing primarily on internal social events and community organizing. “And so this became the first political thing that the senior group was getting ready to do was to try to change our policy, which was that they wouldn't have to pay that increase in the deposit. But they would sunshine it in so that whoever else is moving in, new residents will have to pay that deposit. And the way they have it. The existing people will pay the $100 deposit. But other residents, their deposit could be higher, which it's kind of still the same way now (Johnson, 2021) .”

In this history there are multiple factors at play in terms of in-betweenness. There is the housing authority board making policy decisions. As a quasi governmental agency, a separate entity from local government, but at the same time working with local government and local business interests, the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority served as the primary redevelopment agency in the city in the late 1950’s. It was established in support of ongoing efforts to modernize the city that took place in the 1960s and 70’s. Much of its board of directors came from local government and the business community interested in accessing federal funding for infrastructure

improvements and development of the city. While this body would change over time, primarily due to political challenges around the use of federal funding, it would not be until the 1990's that a public resident would serve on this board.

It is also another example of the way in which racial hierarchies perpetuate power dynamics in the city. The reticence of the older residents of public housing to engage with these systems of power is an ongoing manifestation of the history white supremacy has played in Charlottesville. Their unwillingness to step forward and make demands on these institutions of power is a result of their experiences both in their everyday encounters and their experience of moments like Vinegar HIll. That dominance limits the ability of residents to have a voice in the policies that impact their lives. It is only through a younger organizer, with an interest in public housing advocacy, along with a network of agencies and supporters, that sets the stage for making a demand, which eventually results in a change. This a form of in-betweenness imbued within historical racial power dynamics, but is not beholden to it. Joy's desire and action to make not only her but others the voices heard, seeks to overcome the inevitability that these forms of power and geography perpetuate.

These are not the only examples of how public housing residents are positioned in-between institutional powers in Charlottesville. Another example emerged in the 197O's in response to concerns over criminal activity in public housing, but also tensions between residents and police. Defined as "racial unrest", residents blockaded, protested, and defended Westhaven from police after several youths were chased through the neighborhood. (Pardue, 1975) This resulted in the Community Service Operators program developed by CRHA, in coordination with the Charlottesville Police

Department, that would patrol the neighborhood to provide an ongoing security presence, build relationships with residents and also decrease illegal activity. Rosenblith argues that, while these actions had the intention of deterring crime, what they actually accomplished was turning public housing into a criminal space and allowed the housing authority to police residents on a much deeper level. CSO's were tasked with patrolling the neighborhood and giving warnings for violating housing policies or city codes. They also documented the lives of residents, with the intention of providing support. Over time, while recognizing those intentions, Rosenblish documents how these activities defined a punitive turn in broader public housing policy that entangled residents both with the carceral systems and narratives that served to dehumanize public housing residents.

In discussing these moments in history, Joy acknowledged the realities of public housing at that time. She talked about the impact that crime, specifically the availability of drugs, was having on residents. This was compounded by an antagonistic relationship between the housing authority, the police, and residents.

In-betweenness at the federal level

At the federal level, the distances between public housing residents and institutions of power are even further apart. Decisions made by elected officials filter down through layers of bureaucracies to impact residents. These shift and change based on which party is in political power and their ability to use funding and the administrative power of the US government to influence housing policy. The Housing Acts of 1937, 1954, 1974 set specific precedents. Building from a 1934 Act that was focused on steaming the flood of blank foreclosures during the Great Depression, the

1937 Wagner-Steagall Act created the political, administrative, and economic infrastructure that would create public housing. This included the creation of state and locally defined public housing authorities, set guidelines for how public housing would operate, establish standards for who it would serve, and require that for every unit built an unsanitary unit had to be eliminated. This would see the building of significant amounts of housing around the country and the clearing of vast acres of land deemed slums. How these goals were executed would be far from equitable, with the Jim Crow era social policies influencing who had access, and really only responded to the most immediate needs for housing, which did not take into consideration the need for integrated economic development (Friedmand,1966; Hirsch, 2009). The subsequent Housing Act of 1954 would again place emphasis on slum eradication and continue a focus on the development of urban communities. This had a specific interest in creating pathways to home ownership through insurance and mortgage credit, but also encouraging private investment (Flanagan, 1997). Again, the limitations of these policies would be manifest in both de jure and de facto actions that would limit communities of color access for participation (Rothstein, 2017). Not until 1968, with the Civil Rights Act and the Fair Housing act, did forms of housing discrimination be legally addressed.

Even still the entanglement of public housing residents takes on new forms through programs that emerge in relationship to these policies. The One Strike Program that emerged during the Clinton Administration made public housing residents directly responsible for the actions of family members, guests, and friends. While legally contestable, residents would face eviction for crimes or even the accusation of crimes

by others, both on and off public housing property (Rodriguez, 2021). Programs like the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), meant to give public housing authorities a tool for the preservation and redevelopment of public housing authorities, served as a way to move publicly owned housing into private markets and extend vouchers to low income families to find housing on the private market. Internal research done by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development documents a general satisfaction with the quality of the housing even with the movement of ownership and responsibility from quasi-public institutions into private hands. Though, they note the ongoing need for PHA's to "ensure the needs of residents are addressed through the RAD planning process." Yet questions remained unanswered as to how this shift to the private market impacts the rights of residents, making accountability and transparency for the provision of decent housing more opaque.

There are multiple examples of how these policies have and still do impact public housing residents in Charlottesville. A specific example is a policy focus that emerged in the 1970's, funded by several national philanthropic foundations, and began to become more real during consecutive Republican presidencies, that allows residents to directly manage public housing sites.

Resident Management emerged in the 1970's as a response to the breakdown of housing authority management and the desire by President Nixon to "get the Federal Government out of the housing business (Rosenblith, 2020; Koebel and Cavell, 1995)." This took place in relation to architect and city planner Oscar Newman's publishing of Defensible Space in 1972. (Newman, 1997) There he defined a theory on defensible space that argued that the physical characteristics of a place impact the ability of

residents to ensure the security of those places. Using the factors of territoriality, natural surveillance, image, milieu, and safe adjoining space, he argued for the connection between the sense of safety, ownership, and responsibility that could play in reducing crime and giving people pride of place. This became a critical reference point in the HUD's overarching policy for combating crime and improving quality of life.

In 1975 the Ford Foundation would partner with HUD to implement and study seven specific demonstration cases of resident management (Seessel, 1979). The focus of this work was to "expand tenant involvement in the management and operation of public housing." This they saw as leading to improved maintenance and general operations, lessen vandalism, greater security, ownership of the housing,and that they can continue to make it better. Through a primary investment by HUD in deferred maintenance and the Ford Foundation to support implementation, resident management could achieve these aims. It was through the creation of Tenant Management Boards that residents and the housing authority could more collectively maintain the property. At the conclusion of the first year, reports documented both successes and difficulties. These were based on the ability of the programs to rebuild relationships of mutual trust between residents and the PHA, the different speed at which work was able to be accomplished, and the demands that these new forms of management placed on the already busy lives of residents.

Even with the mixed results, public housing residents saw resident management as a way of taking control of their homes and serving as a mode of self determination. Early adoption took place in St. Louis, where with the demolition of the Igoe-Pruitt housing site, Bertha Gilkey organized residents at Cochran Gardens through small wins

to eventually take control of the site in 1978. The primary argument for these efforts was the poor management of the housing by local administration that did not have to live in these communities (Deparle, 1992). Eventually the Cochran Resident Management Corporation would be in charge of over $3.2 million of rent and federal subsidies that the St. Louis Housing Authority received, being responsible for the physical and social needs of the residents. This improved the housing and improved the local neighborhood through small business development. In Washington D.C., Kimi Gray would follow a similar pathway at Kenilworth Gardens. After dealing with the loss of hot water and heat, along with the deterioration of the buildings, in 1981 Mayor Marion Barry handed the site over to the Kenilworth Parkside Resident Management Corporation. As a part of this the KPRMC instituted a series of programs meant to serve the needs of residents, but also put in place a series of standards for residents to stay in the housing. This resulted in improvement of rent collection and the site as a whole. In 1988, in collaboration with HUD and as a part of a Republican policy, Kenilworth Gardens became the first public housing site to be owned by its residents. With a $32 million dollar renovation by HUD, the site was then turned over to the KPRMC for $1 and then gradually residents could purchase their housing for what would be a sum of $10,000. KPRMC would manage the site until all the apartments were sold (Kulman, 1992). As Gilkey would attest in a Congressional hearing leading up to the passage of 1987 Housing Act, giving greater legal status to resident management policy, “We are not saying that tenant management is the answer for every public housing site. We are saying that we have experienced everybody coming into our community telling us and

doing for us. We see the opportunity in tenant management as a way to do for ourselves."

From within Congress two specific fronts come to support resident management as a means to address the state of public housing. Both Walter Fauntroy, the Democratic Representative of Washington D.C, and Jack Kemp, the Republican Senator of New York, would co-patron legislation for the Housing Act of 1986 to support resident management.

At the March 25, 1986 meeting of the House Subcommittee on Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs, Fauntroy, Gilkey, Gray, and others would advocate for HR 4026, a bill that would amend the Housing Act of 1937 to provide the vital legal and financial infrastructures to realize resident management more broadly. On the whole the bill focused on creating the means for resident management success by providing funding for the improvement of public housing sites, permitting the maintenance of revenues, and funding the development of governance for resident management councils. Using much the same language as the residents, Fauntroy argued for support based on the belief in public housing residents to manage themselves. "Unlike private housing managers, Government managers tend to work an 8-hour day; they don't live on the site, and have no real stake in the condition of the property." He recognized the work of Gray and Gilkey in "demonstrating that tenants taking an active role in their project management produce results far better than those typical of public housing." Rosenblith sees Fauntroy, and the support of others by Black congresspeople in resident management, as a concern with self-determination and in trying to humanize public housing residents. They used the platform of Congress to argue for this legislation as

both a way of addressing the government's role in public housing, but also to empower tenants (Fauntroy, 1986).

Republicans shared an interest in these ideas. A primary advocate for these efforts as an elected official and later as head of HUD, Jack Kemp played a significant role in aligning the efforts of residents interested in taking control of their housing needs with a Republican focus on addressing urban poverty through market driven, neoliberal policies. In a 1989 speech to the National Convention on Resident Management and Urban Homesteading, he argued seven points to strengthen resident management in relationship to a desire to hand management and ownership of public housing over to residents. With the power of the ideas of empowerment, self-help, and opportunity, he was focused on clearing the “logjam of bureaucracy” that hampered residents from taking control of housing. The points of actions he was going to take included continued removal of barriers to resident management, stabilities nuclear families, greater inclusion of residents in policy, providing funding for training assistance, the development of new business opportunities for public housing residents, denying access to public housing for those involved in drug related offenses, and general efforts for further partnership and collective organizing around resident management. These were wrapped in the language of dignity and hope, based in traditional values and pursuit of the American dream.

It was in this context that Charlottesville would consider resident management in 1990. This was an opportunity for shifting control of public housing from the housing authority to residents. With federal funding being made available, public housing resident organizers in Charlottesville began to move forward with putting in place the

required infrastructure to make this a reality. This began with the application to HUD in 1989 for a Technical Assistance Grant. This was a funding program developed by HUD to provide initial start-up funding for Housing Authorities to pursue projects and programs like resident management. CRHA received notice in April 1990 that they received $79,000 to support planning and coordination around efforts to pursue resident management at Westhaven. Between CRHA and the housing authority, they would then have to develop a broader work plan for how they would use these funds.

Shortly after receiving that notice, three public housing residents would travel to the National Association of Resident Management Council Conference that was taking place in Dallas, TX. There they would split up to attend a variety of sessions with those leading the resident management movement, academics, and government officials. From a schedule held in the PHAR Archive, we can see that it is specifically focused on learning more about such subjects as rent calculation, partnering with public housing authorities, being their own bosses, working with the private sector, and the pros and cons of resident management. They would also receive materials touting the history of resident management, especially the work of Kimi Gray. Who at the time was the director of the National Association of Resident Management Councils.

The attendance at the conference led to only ongoing efforts to begin a Resident Management initiative in Charlottesville. There would be visits by HUD staff in the summer of 1990. Information gathering, conversations, and meetings took place between Charlottesville and the resident management work at Kenilworth Parkside in Washington DC. They exchanged by-laws and practices that were helping to inform public housing residents in Charlottesville. Local meetings in August 1990 would shift

the Westhaven Tenants Association name to the Westhaven Resident Management Council. Concerted efforts would be focused on developing an advisory council and preparing a work plan that would be sent to HUD before they would grant funds. This was submitted in December 1990. Documents and meeting minutes at the time show the WRMC bringing together the organizational structure and strategically considering partnerships and funding to see the initiative on the right foundation.

With the granting of the funding in early 1991, efforts would further deepen. In March residents would come back together to review the work plan. They would set priorities of doing resident surveys, hiring an accountant, develop a training timeline, defining a board schedule, consider specific programs, and regularly be visited by HUD staff. In August of 1991, they elected the board of directors, all of which were public housing residents and gained their legal status from the State Corporate Commission. The by-laws of the new organization would state the following purposes for the Westhaven Resident Management Corporation: promote economic development and employment opportunities, develop a system of resident led management of public housing, and create programs that increase the well-being and quality of life for public housing residents. Later in the year they would seek proposals and eventually hire a consulting firm, Vinelle and Associates, to lead them through a rigorous training process to move toward resident management. This included both skill and leadership training for residents, but also technical training on real estate and housing management.

In an April 1991 article in the Charlottesville *Daily Progress*, Joy is interviewed about the hopes for resident management. Noting her strong ongoing opposition to the housing authority, she describes the process they were going through to create the

resident council and put in place specific organizational structures. She stated the following goal. “Tenants are going to become self-sufficient.” They were going to train residents with the needed financial and organization skills to run the housing, but also land a job and later move out of public housing. According to their work plan, by mid-1993 their hope was to have 126 families in Westhaven participating.

By 1995, this wouldn’t be the case. Letters show that the Resident Management Council had not renewed their state incorporation documents. They had also gone through an assessment of the process and evaluation. Working with Harris Engineering and Planning, they would define efforts to draw now the funds that were provided by HUD. They would also explore ways that the resident management efforts to develop new partnerships, seek other funding sources, and refine the organizational structure.

When talking to Joy about this process, she shared that ultimately the weight of managing public housing was too much for residents. They needed the help of the housing authority to make sure the housing remained affordable and stable. While the broader goals of self-sufficiency and access to opportunities would continue, resident management would not be that catalyst. A 1993 report by HUD, would come to similar conclusions. In studying 80 different initiatives around the US, only 4% had actually achieved resident control, with most working in a middle ground in partnership with local housing authorities. While the resources provided by HUD helped to initiate these efforts, there was not significant enough ongoing support to overcome the economic and social challenges at each site. Broader support was needed, outside of HUD, to make resident management viable. Authors at the time were bringing forward similar questions. Specifically academics were critiquing the promises that politicians were

touting around impact, empowerment, and the organizational strengthening needed to achieve those promises (Monti, 1998; Chandler, 1991; Peterman, 1996). As Koebel and Cavell note, by 1996 the political forces and policy reform efforts that pushed resident management forward were uncertain (Koebel and Cavell, 1995). Even by the time public housing residents in Charlottesville began to act on resident management in 1993 the support and funding was coming to an end.

This example is in no way comprehensive of the ways in which federal policy impacts the lives of public housing residents. There are many ways that political decisions made at the federal level then led to policy which is interpreted at the local level. That does not even take into consideration how public housing residents interpret or respond to how these rules constrain or open opportunities for their lives to be better. Where I do see this as being important is the way that public housing residents in Charlottesville took up this opportunity and sought to make it their own. Ultimately it led to little tangible change, but can be seen as a precursor to efforts that would lead to the establishment of PHAR later in the 1990's. The practice of taking up federal policy and making it their own, advocating for self-sufficiency on their own terms, is part of why we see public housing realize redevelopment. They are not beholden to the in-betweenness that is produced, but use it as a platform for change.

Conclusion - Agency, Structure and Action

From the examples above, the in-betweenness that the public housing residents find themselves is one that is being imposed onto them. Sonia had no control of where her grandparents lived. Public housing residents did not wish to raise their rental deposits. The actions to destroy a Black neighborhood in 1964 still ripple through the

lives and memories of the Black community. Resident management emerges in response to the governments' desire to disabuse itself of providing housing to the poor. All of these encounters are done to public housing residents with little to no control of their own. Even so they are not without a response. Their agency emerges from these moments. While impacted by these circumstances, residents are not beholden to them. Policies and politics bring people together, finding commonality, that then serve as platforms for continued action, even if that action is simply living.

In Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning, Ruth Wilson Gilmore discusses the syncretic nature of forgotten places. She describes that while capital, ideology, and race combine to constrain through dispossession, domination, and development, these are not "insurmountable barriers." It is the awareness of being "neither/nor" that opens up the possibility for imminent and ineluctable change, for people to organize themselves at novel resolutions. In this sense structure and agency are then bound together. While many too easily assign agency as an exclusive by-product of oppressed peoples struggles, it is the modalities that people use in relationship to these structures where change is produced. Structure seeks to fix reality. While agency is an active counterpoint to the concrete. in-betweenness is then an infrastructure for thinking and practicing this agency. It is a space that provides a means to challenge, a means to push, against what seeks to define us and realize both our own and our collective self-sufficiency.

Chapter 5 - Infrastructures of Power

In the fall of 2017, with the city still traumatized from the Summer of Hate, Charlottesville City Council meetings were raucous events. Activists, from varying positions, had come together believing that local government was complicit in the events that had taken place. Individual after individual came forward to announce their pain and demand that the City take action. This included demands for specific members of council, City staff, and the police department to step down for their roles. There was a significant amount of anger and tears that came forth during “topics by the public” as person after person stepped to the lectern, peered up at the stone faces of the council, and spoke their truth. The three minutes allotted to those who had luckily won a lottery to speak never found it to be enough time to express the amount of sorrow they held. It generally wasn’t. Stone faced, City Council had to accept this outpouring. While expressions of solidarity, their own sorrow, and actions that could be taken, the apologies were never enough.

This space and these encounters, maybe not to this level, were familiar to Joy Johnson and PHAR. They had not only been here before, but did so on a regular basis. Almost every meeting. It was a rare occurrence not to see Joy in the row of seats at the back of City Council chambers. Next to her or sprinkled throughout the audience would be other public housing residents and PHAR supporters. Each clad in a bright red shirt that reinforced their identity. They were there and they wanted to be seen. Being Present. These council meetings were not just a place for PHAR to advocate for the needs of public housing residents, but a vital training ground for residents to stand before power, share their stories, and make their voices heard.

On this night, with the maelstrom of shouts, jeers, and calls for resignations swirling about, Joy stepped to the microphone. The audience went quiet. A sign of respect for her ongoing organizing work and wisdom. She had prepared some notes about an action item that had come before the City Council a month ago. Joy was not happy with the response that had ensued. The City Manager had not given it the proper attention nor time. She now stood before them to make sure they renewed their focus. Joy clearly stated her demand, asked for answers to several very specific questions, set a specific date by which she expected a response, and asked for a meeting with several of the council members to discuss her concerns further. Her words were succinct, pointed, and direct. Council and staff responded immediately. Dates were agreed to and meetings set to address her concerns. This exact encounter had happened many times before and Joy was in control.

Joy then turned away for a moment, the red light now blinking that her time had ended, and then she stepped back up to the dias, having to say one last thing. “When you say “we” you mean “you”. When I say “we”, I mean us.” As she did this she gestured to the entire audience, but it included a much larger community in Charlottesville. In this moment, Joy made a significant distinction between the power that the City holds, the institution that those sitting on that dias represent, and the rest of the community. There was a clear demarcation of interests and by saying these two short sentences, her allegiance was clear.

I had sat in the audience over the last few months, watching speaker after speaker step forward to individually challenge the powers that be. Statements of collectivity rarely codified any differences. Yet, consensus was palatable, but had not

become concrete. One could confuse the distinction between what council members were saying as individuals or as a member of that elected body. Joy's words drew the lines that made this distinction much clearer. Lines were being crossed on personal terms, which in the moment was understandable with the amount of grief being held. But it also masked the edifice that stood behind them. The City had the power to act, to bring resources to bear, but it had not done so. In that light, the community questioned its lack of action, which could be seen as complicit. Joy was asking us not to confuse this positionality with the confrontations, beatings, and the death that residents of the city encountered on streets during August 11th and 12th.

Her words also congealed a body politic. By speaking of "we" and "us", a collective identity emerged. Individual expressions of trauma, harm, anger, now became one. We looked around the room and saw how intertwined our feelings were. "We" galvanize people together. This extended beyond the council chambers. It included others holding the weight of the moment in Charlottesville. It connected histories of struggle. It even included those around the nation that shared in this trauma if from a distance. The actions of that summer were collectively held and could be used to collectively respond. "We" was a boundary marker, a distinction that connected and defined. You were either on the side of the people or the side of hate. One could no longer hide behind the edifice of bureaucracy and administration to hold a position.

In this chapter, I will explore how this dynamic and distinction, working both within and against forms of institutional power, a dual inside and outside positionality, has manifested itself throughout the history of PHAR organizing. More than simply a rhetorical device, I will argue that it is at the heart of their strategy for centering the

voices of public housing residents in the decisions that impact their lives. By holding institutions accountable, using policy, and the federal funding that comes with it, as a space to gain access to resources, expanding their collective identity, and developing pathways for public housing residents leadership, PHAR has been able to center itself and the public housing residents it represents at the center of a much larger conversation about Black control and power. While other authors acknowledge both the tactical and intrinsic ways that those in poverty make claims against the state, PHAR has developed modes of dual power that are not only continually practiced, but have been at the core of establishing a new paradigm for public housing resident control. Strategies that are deeply in sync with the Black radical tradition, but also have set a new paradigm for the future of public housing in Charlottesville.

As I sought to describe in the previous chapter, public housing residents are continually contending with their positionality in relation to racial, geographic, and institutional entanglements that place demands on their lives. What I was arguing for was for a more complex understanding of how these modes of oppression are not simply defacto, all consuming pressures, but are constant points of response that public housing residents are negotiating. They are not beholden to them, even though these forces are constantly at play in their lives. The interplay of structure and agency, opens up a field of negotiation that reinforces the status quo or provides a space where a response emerges. In these moments power dynamics emerge, are performed, and responded to. So how does power work? How have public housing residents not only responded to power, but sought to establish their own power.

Power as (infra)structure

We conceive of power as a form of coercion or influence of one person over another. As the ability of one individual to force another person to do what they want. Yet, authors, in various periods of history, have unlocked how power functions. How it is able to exert influence. The various scales in which power is manifested. The way power is reinforced. Broadly, power is seen as a multidimensional force that works within social contexts to impact behaviors and actions. It is a socially constructed infrastructure that has specific material and spatial impacts. In the mid 1970's, a more rigorous conception of power emerged that sought to define these dimensions, putting a face to this force that plays out in both large and small ways.

The primary dimension of power, as stated above, centers on the ability of one individual to exert power over another. This is seen as a form of power centered in moments of decision making where conflicts arise. Am I able to get you to do what I want? These are behavioral events that function in more or less significant moments, from relatively minor encounters around smaller decisions to more complex and impactful decisions. This first dimension can also be understood as having to do with the use and access of resources. Seeing individuals, groups, and institutions as having equal opportunity to affect outcomes, power emerges when the coalescing of financial, social, intellectual, and experiential resources allows one to benefit over another (Gaventa, 1982). Power is not simply an exchange, but how various scales of social interaction make decisions about resources and put them to use in affecting decisions. Power is then a relationship between a person and their environment. It is both an ability to overcome interests that might come into conflict with one's own interests, but

also the way in which one could inflict hurtful or helpful impacts on others. (Parenti, 1970)

Secondly, power is the ability to define what is possible. It is the constraining of the field of decision or the limiting of resources to effect a specific outcome. This manifests itself in the definition of an agenda or policies that define the opportunity for dissent, thus creating barriers to conflicting opinions. Power is manifested not only in what is possible but also what is even considered. In doing so, power has a normative function. Gaventa, borrowing from Bachrach and Baratz, notes the “mobilization of bias.” In this case morals, policies, and procedures operate to benefit specific groups, exercising a power over those that reside inside these social systems. This defines the space of participation in which power plays. In doing so it creates a political space of constraint. It also impacts those who function outside these systems, creating a sense of apathy and fatalism that removes their voice from inclusion. Parenti takes this a step further by recognizing the way that power is not solely generated individually, but is acquired through others. Within this relational field, occasions of power are determined by the definition of interest, which are culturally and socially constructed, leading to the possibility of asymmetrical relationships. Ultimately, Parenti sees power as a systemic force that has contextual dimensions.

A third dimension of power works to reinforce these normative influences. Lukes conception focused on the way that people act contrary to their own interests (Lukes, 1986). This emerges through the creation of ideologies and habits that form false consciousness. This is a power of domination through unconscious means. Whereas, Gaventa focused specifically on the narrativizing of normative approaches. Power is

socialized to produce a psychological adaptation that “influences, shapes or determines conceptions of the necessities, possibilities, and strategies of challenge in situations of latent conflict (Gaventa, 1982).” Much of this builds from Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony that understands the ways that “spontaneous” consent is provided in relationship to historical relationships of class as defined by who controls the means of production.

These abstract conceptions of power take on greater meaning when expanded upon in specific contexts. Foucault in his lectures on biopower brought forward the concept of governmentality (Foucault, 1982). He was concerned with how governing happens and how governing is thought. Sharing Lukes and Gaventa’s concern, governmentality is centered on how governing controls possible modes of action. In these terms, Foucault was interested in the way these constraints produced a subject (i.e. citizen) through the development of institutions, procedures, analysis, and tactics that work to shape a population. This concern with the hegemony of power systems is further referenced in writers like Laura Pulido and Glen Coulthard as they engage racial and colonial constructs of power. Pulido, when considering the impact of environmental racism, demands for an understanding of racism not as discrete acts perpetrated by individuals, but as structural, socio-spatial processes (Pulido, 2016). Coulthard in *Red Skins, White Mask* problematize a politics of recognition, believing it to be another way for the government to assert authority over Indigenous peoples (Coulthard, 2014). In recognizing Indigenous communities and giving them rights, the state sets the boundaries for action and in turn makes them subjects.

Public housing residents are both beholden to and enact these forms of power. They are continually entangled in paternalistic manifestations of power that due to their race and/or class and/or gender situate them in subordinate roles. In the United States, where the resourcing of welfare is always stigmatized, it is the intersectionality of these positions in which public housing residents continually have to contend. At moments, they have little choice as decisions are socially and politically made for them. And yet, they continually seek to express their power. From decorating their homes, when public housing is meant to be a blank space, devoid of meaning, community, and joy, to being present in front of the housing authority, making these institutions accountable to the people that they are serving. Federal policies trickle down and shift base on who is in power, laced with the values set by two dominating political parties. These institutions are more interested in maintaining their power and gaining votes that truly addressing the needs of low income people. Political distances are only minimized when expedient. Though, public housing residents show up. They express their presence, challenge values that vaguely have them in mind and assert values that they hold. Narratives of "the hustle" and the welfare queen are constructed to dominate and punish. These narratives are deployed as a way of dehumanizing those in poverty, easy mechanisms that assert oppression. This requires residents to construct their own narratives that invert, recast, and express their hopes and dreams.

Much of what these authors are concerned with are the way that power controls the lives, the consciousness, the reality of those who do not hold power. Of how broader institutions maintain control. In this framing, public housing residents are always seen in relation to dominant power dynamics. This doesn't take into account the way they

express their own power or how they have constructed power as means to assert the role that public housing residents have in defining their own lives. Alternatively they have deployed a means of power that works both within the status quo, but also outside to circumvent and imagine other ways of being. While Gaventa was concerned with the way that power both limits and negates one's ability to participate, ideas of dual power see both spaces as active means of response.

The concept of dual power emerged at the beginning of the 20th century as ideas of democracy and the social contract were taking deeper hold, but also the dominant ideological battles between socialism and capitalism were developing in Europe. Grounded in the writing of Proudhon and further developed by Lenin, dual power realizes the need for building power outside of dominant systems in order to enact change (Lenin, 1917; Proudhon, 1927). This primarily centers on the negation of power held by the nation state. In the context of anti-colonial, anti-global movements, dual power means working both outside and inside political institutions to enact change. In doing so, multidimensional power opens broader platforms for future struggles. Importantly this does not ignore the power of the state, but instead recognizes it as a primary space of contention, but again, is not beholden to it. Even so, authors critique the validity of dual power, seeing it more as a transitory concept that initiates the transformation of political power (Price, 2023). Its role is initiating volatility more than being the culminating force. Others see dual power as residing in more descriptive terms (Vieta, 2020). More a historical analysis of power than a tactic.

Dual power takes on a greater meaning when it comes to Black communities and movements in the United States. It is both a tactic and a strategy to overcome the

power that racism and colonization have over their bodies, minds and environments, working at micro, meso, and macro scales. I would argue that is at the core of black struggle. It is present in the labor power of the enslaved as they worked the cotton fields of the South, the creation of the pathways to freedom in the underground railroad, and the expressions of culture that humanized these communities. In the aftermath of the Civil War, it can be seen in the creation of freetowns and community cooperatives that served to mitigate racial and financial risks. Dual power is a driving force of the Universal Negro Improvement Association which sought to instill racial pride and develop economic self-sufficiency. Dual power is present in the Civil Rights movement's efforts to overcome the racial hierarchies of segregation, the disenfranchisement and disinvestment that it produced at the electoral, economic, and political scale (Joseph, 2006). Dual power shifts during the emergence of the Black Power movement. Less focused on demanding their rights within a corrupt system, the focus becomes more centered on autonomy and the creation of parallel institutions that are directly focused on supporting the needs of their communities. The Black Panthers, while very much focused on political education as means to raise the consciousness of Black communities, are also developing their own “survival” programs that fulfill vital needs in their communities (Self, 2006). Even in the present, dual power is manifested in the demand that “Black Lives Matter” (Taylor, 2016). These are all modes of exerting power. All challenging the status quo. All responding to the dominance of racial logic.

In each instance, we can see a different level or context for dual power. Some work in harmony of white society and others reject those standards. Manning Marable sees these distinctions as a polarity of integration and black nationalism rooted in the

dualisms of the Black experience. On one hand there is the desire for coalition building that is rooted in a belief that black people, by themselves, could not advance their own interests to any degree of certainty or success within a multiracial society." The nationalist position rejects this belief focusing on Black group exclusivity, self awareness and cultural unity.

In relation to the role of Black independent education programs in spurring the radical imagination, Rickford considers dual power as a "rationale for constructing within black neighborhoods institutional models of a free and just society (Rickford, 2016)." Here dual power is a way of undermining the structures of white elite power while gradually subverting their control over black life. In practice dual power is then a way for Black people to design viable prototypes of a society they wish to inhabit. While focused very much on the future, dual power is based in the present. A tangible means to enact these futures in the now. Even so, he sees several contradictions. He emphasizes the need to build sustainable, long term change through power and not simply realize a "spontaneous eruption" seeking revolution. In dual power he sees a tension between both the utopian and the material. While their efforts to address community ideas were tangible, dual power has a tendency to place false expectations on the future. Rickford is acknowledging that utopia may remain just that utopian. There is a need to keep the reality of the present in balance with the future. Lastly, Rickford understands that the expression of dual power is not determinative free.. Even though it can be seen as seeking liberation, dual power can both realize egalitarian and authoritative formations. At times both.

As both a coercive and a countervailing force, power can be understood as a specific vector of social infrastructure. It is a structure of relationships that impacts people at the behavioral, material, and political levels. In its ability to reside below, to exist without being seen and at the same time defining the territories of what is possible, it obfuscates the dynamics of these social relations. What I want to take from these theoretical positions is an understanding of the dynamics of power. How it comes into being. How it is expressed. How it is magnified. By recognizing this foundation, I want to explore how PHAR has used various forms of power throughout its history. In doing so, how does this work to not only achieve its primary mission of centering public housing residents in the decisions that impact their lives, but also impacting the historical dynamics of power at play at the local, state, and federal levels?

Evolutions of Resident Power - Federal Regulation

The history of public housing residents contesting systems of power and building power is extensive. Rent strikes swept the nation in the mid 1960's (Karp, 2014). These combined the ongoing troubles of management, milieu of Civil Rights and Black Power organizing, and the declining economies of urban America to assert control over public housing. Black women led efforts created both tangible and ongoing impact. Actions across the country would be codified in local and federal practices. The 1969 Housing Act would establish the Brooke Amendment that set a federal rental standard, based on the actions of these women. It was an example of an expression of bottom up power.

Early in her involvement as a public housing organizer, Joy Johnson remembered a meeting with other organizers from around the state that took place in Richmond. In attendance was Alma Barlow, a long-time public housing advocate in

Richmond. While intimidated by the power that Alma held, Joy took note of her advice. That advice was to make sure they knew the law, especially how it stipulates the rights of tenants. This was not only to make sure that the housing authority was doing its job, but to understand where tenants could exert their power. The refrain still echoed for Joy - "Know 24 CFR 964" (Johnson, 2021).

24 CFR 964 is an important cornerstone that defines the involvement of public housing residents in the processes and decision making that takes place at local housing authorities. Added to the 1937 Housing Authority Act in 1986, this codified the relationship between public housing residents and their local public housing authorities. The policy built on a more general policy that promoted "active involvement of residents in all aspects of a Housing Authority's overall mission and operation. Residents have a right to organize and elect a resident council to represent their interests (US FR,1986)." Stated within this act, were specifications for the role that residents would play in "sound management practices' and later the allocation of funding to support programs for tenants. Each of these were meant to create "effective" relationships between housing authorities and residents. "The Department believes that good PHA-tenant relationships are essential to the success of local public housing programs, and that the PHD as well as residents will benefit from constructive participation of residents (USFR, 1986)." The addition of Part 964 set the foundation for relationships that "contribute to efficient and economical project operations and satisfying tenant needs."

24 CFR 964 spells out specific standards for tenant participation. Its purpose was to "recognize the importance of tenants in creating a positive living environment and in contributing to the successful operation of public housing (FR, 1986)." It further set out a

definition of tenant participation as a “process of consultation” between tenants and the housing authority meant to focus on management processes. Participation included providing information and giving tenants opportunities to respond on an “advisory basis” about specific plans and decisions. The policy acknowledged the importance of tenant organizations to support these activities and set out specific guidelines under which they should function. These included recognition as a formal organization representing tenants, the organization must be representative of the tenants at the housing site, the need for democratic leadership procedures, and ultimately a legal document guiding the relationship between the housing authority and the tenant organization.

Throughout these standards it was clear that the local housing authority held the ultimate power for the activities of the housing site. This can be directly seen in the framing of the role of tenants as consultants. Tenants have limited actual authority over decisions as they continue to reside outside the levers of control. Power is restricted to those with final say. Consultation creates an illusion of control, providing a space for differing ideas to be heard, but not requiring they actually be integrated. This position allows those in power to show their willingness to hear, but it does not necessarily require what is being heard to have any influence over the ultimate decision. What is being witnessed is more an expression of participation than actually power.

At the same time, 24 CFR 964 locates positions of power and avenues of access based on the definition of the tenant organization. In defining a singular organization as the representative of tenants, housing authorities have only one point of contention to engage. The voices of tenants, no matter how diverse or in agreement, are expressed through this organization. This requires tenants to negotiate through levels of

administration and advocacy to gain that broader support. Tenants are required to use these means for voicing their opinions, which may diverge. While democratically elected, there is also the possibility of the housing authority holding some influence over the members of the tenant organization. Co-optation of tenants is a possibility. Lastly, a legal document defining the relationship between the housing authority and tenants concretizes the relationship. In doing so, it places this relationship into a binding position, which has specific temporal, legal boundaries. In the best of situations, the housing authority and tenants work in collaboration seeking the best outcomes for each. Even so, these definitions are stacked in the favor of the housing authority as the legitimized actor in the eyes of HUD. It must be recognized that the vagueness of the language of the act there is limited actual clarity as to how any power is manifested, allowing both HUD and the housing authority to exert control as it sees fit.

Subsequent additions to these policies, seek to further define the relationship between housing authorities and residents. In 1998 the *Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act*, while specifically focusing on devolving power to local control, would mandate further requirements. This would set up Resident Advisory Boards to have a say in the annual or 5-year planning processes of housing authorities. These would add another layer of administration for tenants to engage in relation to the housing authority. It also required that the board of directors of the housing authority include at least one tenant. Also included in this bill was the Faircloth Amendment. It both set limits on the number of public housing units nationally to that of 1999 numbers and established minimum rents and requirements for public service (Hunt, 1998). Several years later, in 2001, HUD specified a new policy that provided resident councils and organizations

funding based on the number of units. $25 per unit was set as a threshold of which the housing authority could use $10 to support administrative work to support these organizations. Since then subsequent actions have been in consideration for continuing to limit the methods and modes of tenant participation (Rubin, 2009). These are regularly delineated in the *HUD Public Housing Occupancy Guidebook*, which is meant to provide the most up to date information for housing agencies and families in public housing.

The entirety of Section 24, and in particularly 964, spells out an ongoing relationship between HUD, the local Housing Authority, and residents. Yet, how these relationships play out is vastly different. It is in how these regulations are interpreted, enacted, and enforced that they come to have meaning. In much of the early public housing advocacy work that took place in Charlottesville in the 1980's, these regulations became a ripe space for residents to make claims, explore their voice, and exert power. When asked to describe CFR in their own words, Audrey and Joy understood the importance of these laws. They described them as regulations authorized by federal agencies that go through an important process to be created. In doing so they hold a power that authorizes these powers. Yet it is in implementation where they saw their importance. "We have to familiarize ourselves, because one little paragraph has great meaning. It is not just about how we organize, but gives resident organizations the right to organize (Johnson, 2021)."

Power of Eligibility and Legibility - Using the law to exert power

While these laws granted powers to the local housing authority, in talking with public housing residents we heard how both in small and large ways they were

contesting and challenging this power. This includes everything from the way residents pay their rent to the negotiation for their lease statements, from the continual failure of mechanical systems to oversights in the use of capital funds for replacing aging appliances. They result in direct interactions between residents and the housing authority. Most of which are waged on an individual basis and are examples of the continual in-betweenness that residents experience, mentioned in the previous chapter. It is them against the larger bureaucracy. Yet, these are also moments to exert power. Especially when residents feel they have been wronged.

Public housing residents are always having to contend with their rent. With their income continually being monitored, even minor changes can have longer term effects. While the purpose of public housing is to provide subsidized housing for those most in need, public housing residents are paying a range of rental fees. Joy noted that some residents are paying what can be considered market rates ($1200 per month) in the highly competitive housing market of Charlottesville.

Ed Wayland, former Director of the Legal Aid Justice Center in Charlottesville, noted how these dynamics impact residents in terms of eligibility. “Public housing is a program where you are eligible to be provided housing and have housing provided to you. But you had to be qualified. Qualification meant your income and assets had to be a certain amount (Wayland, 2022).” He went on to describe the limits of this form of eligibility, noting what made public housing accessible to residents. “People who had very limited income were found to be eligible and could be provided with housing. The rules were that in addition to being provided with housing, they would have to pay something and the amount they would have to pay was again calculated based on their

income." These rules are defined in 24 CFR, noting that residents would have to pay at most 30% of their income. But, if their income was nothing, then their rent would be nothing. The connections between income and having access to housing is then a space of continual tension.

Much of Ed's work at LAJC centered on supporting a breadth of people in accessing federal social benefits. This included social security, food stamps and public housing. In this work, public housing residents were coming to him seeking to contest their rents, believing that the Housing Authority was improperly calculating these amounts and charging them more than the law stated. "And one of the kinds of cases I did on a repeated basis was for people who would come to me to challenge their rent. . . So a lot of times when people will come to me, I mean, one of the things I would do is I would study the programs. I would see how they work. I would see, you know what the benefits were that people were entitled to and what the rules were about how much they were going to get. And often the rules said that how much they were going to get was dependent on their level of income if they had income. And what I found in many cases dealing with the social services department, dealing with Social Security people and dealing with public housing was that my calculation of what people were required to pay or entitled to and benefits was different from what those organizations came up with. And so for a lot of my clients, what I did was try to fix that. And for a lot of my clients, I was able to fix that (Wayland, 2022)." In repeated efforts around this work, Ed found that a lot of the time the housing authority or social services did not calculate the rent correctly. "And that was certainly true in the Public Housing Administration that would charge people and had to make them pay more than they should have had to pay."

Ed worked with the public housing resident to make a calculation, based on what the law said and then compare the calculation done by the housing authority. When there was a difference he would then partner with the resident to follow a process for correcting that change and making appeals if it didn't result in a change. "There would be additional things you could do, places you could go and appeals you could make to continue the claim if you thought they were wrong."

The importance of this experience is two fold. One it shows public housing residents, with the support of an organization like Legal Aid, making claims against the institutions that hold power over them. They are exerting power in response to the way that the housing authority engages them, not solely being beholden to the institution. They are doing so in active ways that address specific issues in their lives. Secondly, it is important to recognize that they are not solely respondent to the law, but making sure the law responds to them. Regulations defined at the federal level and implemented at the local, require both enforcement and accountability. If they were to quietly accept these as concrete ways of being, they become subservient to them. HUD and the housing authority would have total control of how they are enacted

Joy sees this as vital to the work of PHAR. She shared about the importance of regulations. "Congress made a policy that is a statute and then the statute is broken down into regulations, and the regulation is what social service, CRHA, Social Security have to adhere to. And most people don't know what those are." This includes the housing authority. A continual refrain in her organizing has then become "What does the law say?" In order to hold these institutions accountable, knowing the law was important. It is important then that public housing residents understand what the

regulations say. “Understanding what is in 24 CFR and what it means and how you translate it is very important. It’s the only thing we have. Those are the rules (Johnson, 2021).” Ed added, ”You can’t make up rules, they are what they are, but you can try to change them.”

While regulations and laws like 24 CRF are meant to define the relationship that public housing residents have with their local housing authorities, they are also opportunities for residents to challenge them. It is not simply something that is enforced but a space for contestation. Not only over the law but about how these laws impact public housing residents. Ed discussed the importance of the law. “There were always details that you might question, but basically it's needed. It's needed. And like I said it because of the law and the way it's set up, there is federal funding that makes these things possible. And that's good. That's good. And it's just a matter of making it work and living with it in a way that allows people to live their lives the way they should be allowed to.” (Wayland, 2022)

I would also argue that the law not only is about setting the terms of eligibility, but also legibility. The law in this case serves as a guidebook for how relationships are meant to take place. It is meant to define the boundaries and setting expectations, creating pathways for how things should be. But, that is rarely the case. As efforts to digitize and mechanize the system, they also dehumanize, shifting residents from being people to numbers or the sum of their income. But it is impossible to abstract housing from the people who call public housing home. In these moments where residents are challenging their rent checks, they are making themselves legible to this system. They are asking to be seen under the law and demanding that the law allow them to live in

ways that acknowledge their autonomy and self-determination. The many struggles that public housing residents encounter are manifestations of their legibility. In the episodic, but not necessarily linear, manner they are expressing power to make their voices heard. The recurring nature of these movements support opportunities for making demands so that public housing residents have a real say in their individual future and the future of their communities.

Organizing for Power

Throughout the history of public housing in Charlottesville, there are many moments of individuals expressing their power in response to the impact of policy and inaction. In many of the interviews we heard of specific moments when housing residents took action. In the light of the transition from Vinegar Hill to Westhaven and later with the scattered sites, a history of community organizing develops that is focused on rebuilding the social infrastructure to support those living in public housing. Initially this is purely social in nature as residents come together to celebrate holidays, coordinate opportunities for youth, or host events that bring the community together. Later this evolves with the establishment of a Tenants Association, which takes on a more specific role of coordination and later engagement with the housing authority. It is with the creation of PHAR that a more concerted effort was made to not only serve the needs of the public housing community but to coalesce the political power of public housing residents to take collective action. It is the evolution of these relationships from social in function to specifically focused on building political power that is at the core of what has allowed PHAR to achieve its work.

Both in the voices of those that we interviewed and documents a history emerges of the Black community rebuilding the social infrastructures that were lost when Vinegar Hill was demolished. With the ongoing difficulties of finding affordable housing for the Black community in Charlottesville, those moving into Westhaven saw the site as an important alternative. The housing was described as modern with electric heating and new appliances. Pete Carey described how people were generally excited about moving into Westhaven. He tried to move to the site having recently gotten married. “When Westhaven first opened, everyone was trying to get a place . . . Everyone was really thrilled when it first opened (P. Carey, 2022).” While he applied he wasn’t able to get an apartment. Even so he shared how Westhaven in many ways became a new focal point for the Black community. While Vinegar Hill was gone, sites like Westhaven, local churches, and local parks, especially Washington Park became spaces for the community to come together. His Uncle, Rudolph Carey, would play an important role in making the Westhaven Recreation Center a site for those living there. “If you were a kid and lived in the neighborhood, anyone could come over and play games. My Uncle would teach them the facts of life.” (P. Carey, 2022) This also included regular events, and as a local musician, Pete would regularly play rhythm and blues concerts for block parties on the weekends. People would prepare food and listen to music as a means to build community.

Similarly, the female elders of the community would come together to host events and organize fundraisers to support the neighborhood. This was formalized as a woman’s auxiliary which would host quarterly bake sales with proceeds going to support childcare and other community activities. An Ebony Social Club met on a monthly basis

organized by both those living in Westhaven and others outside of public housing. Eventually there were both Boy and Girl Scout troops meeting, a 4-H Club, and ongoing partnerships with community and university groups providing training for the community. Much of this included ongoing support by community workers hired by the Housing Authority, coordinating activities, but also serving as a connector to services and resources that might be available to public housing residents through local agencies. Documenting Westhaven in 1975, 10 years after its construction, the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority printed a multi page “Report of Citizens”. It described the Westhaven Recreation Center as a site of friendship and generosity displaying the spirit of residents (*Daily Progress*, 1975).

In 1970’s and 1980’s that public housing residents began to organize formal tenant councils in Charlottesville. This worked in parallel to federal policy focusing and supporting resident organizing in response to the ongoing work nationally to give those living in public housing a voice in how sites are managed. In Charlottesville it would also come as further public housing was developed through a scatter site plan. Over time a multitude of tenant associations would soon develop at multiple sites in the city, mimicking the broad development of tenants councils across the country.

In this context, the tenants association became a force for working with and against local public housing authorities to transform the physical spaces of the housing developments to reflect the political development of participating and nonparticipating tenants (Rodriguez, 2021). In doing so they provided important forums for discussion, advocacy campaigns, and ultimately political education, what Rodriguez defines as Black political geographies. Spaces of political action and advocacy where residents

can assert their voices. In the tenant associations there was vital potential to provide divergent perspectives to those in power, and support a more democratic process at multiple scales (community, local, state, and federal) (Rodriguez, 2021). This ultimately provides greater legitimacy for public housing residents.

In Charlottesville they would continue to function primarily as sites of social interaction and community reproduction. Joy began living in public housing just as these associations were starting to develop. Her early perception is that they developed in relationship to the organizing efforts of elders in public housing. “They were all seniors and there were a few families who were also a part of it. And, some of the family members who were living here, who were seniors with families, with the families who were living in the development (Johnson, 2021).” Because of this they remained focused on responding to daily needs, fixing specific issues and getting new appliances. At the same they developed both a beautification committee focused on cleaning up and planting flowers throughout Westhaven. In partnership with the City Parks and Recreation department, they would plant seedlings throughout Westhaven. They were also instrumental in responding to issues of dust that would blow up from dried land by placing boulders and dogwood trees to resolve the problem. They also created a kitchen committee that made sure those needing food had well stocked kitchens. This continued to mimic the early organizing efforts, rarely challenging the housing authority in any specific way. Tenant organizing at Westhaven continued to focus on the physical infrastructure of the site.

Over time, due to the scattered site approach of public housing development in Charlottesville, multiple tenant associations would be developed at South 1st Street,

Michie Drive, and Crescent Hall. These developed based on a core group of residents working to support their community in various ways from regular trash pick up to cook outs, exchanging childcare to coordinating community events. Yet, over time, many of them faded from existence due to people moving, work schedules, or the loss of elder leaders in the community. With smaller numbers of residents, these tenants associations were not able to sustain themselves much beyond these moments of social connection. We see an ebbing and flowing of organizing efforts. When there were emergent community needs, tenants would come together in response. Though as that issue was addressed these groups would fade. For the sites that did not have formal associations, there were more informal gatherings. Sonia shared how Riverside was never large enough to sustain a tenant association, but with the smallness of the housing site, tenants were regularly in conversation and organizing social events with each other. Westhaven, as the largest public housing site in Charlottesville, had the energy to maintain a tenant organization, with others developing as needed.

This would begin to change in response to the actions of the housing authority to seek higher rental deposits. Led by then CRHA Director Gene Arrington, there was an effort to increase the rental deposits for all residents. This moment would coalesce residents and various supporters across Charlottesville. Joy shared the context of this challenge. “So after Vinegar Hill, when people moved in here, some of the deposits were $15, some were $25, and some were $75. CRHA was trying to both increase and standardize the deposits.” (Johnson, 2021) This would especially affect the senior residents that were on fixed incomes, many of whom had been in public housing since it was built in Charlottesville. Legal Aid, MACAA and other long term supporters of public

housing residents rallied to show solidarity. This resulted in a co-developed statement that was to be read at an upcoming CRHA board meeting. Even so, elders were reluctant to challenge the power of the housing authority board. Joy remembers, “As organized as the seniors were, they were afraid to go before an all white board. . . Nobody would read it, and so I was asked if I would do it, since I had been coming to meetings.” At the time the board met in the basement of City Hall. Joy went to the meeting, read the statement, and that was it. The next morning Joy remembered reporters showing up asking further questions. While there were other injustices going on, Joy remembered this moment as an important political action. One of the first that the group of seniors had considered doing. It led to CRHA grandfathering the new policy, taking effect for only new tenants. Importantly, it also showed the power that public housing residents had to inform the policies that impacted their lives. This would lead to a series of actions taken by residents to would note only express this power but continue to build it.

With this growing sense of strength and the loss due of regular programs based on budget cuts from HUD, residents continued to challenge the authority of the housing authority. As the board was made up of City Council members, much of the questions came directly from elected officials. In these efforts Joy was continually asked, “Are you speaking for yourself or are you speaking for the whole community.” She remembered how this angered her. “Yeah, I am speaking for myself, but I am also speaking for other residents.” This led her to talk with other residents, especially those that had been involved in the various tenants associations, to hear their perspectives. With a growing understanding of the power and identity that could be developed, there began to be a

sense of the possibilities that could be realized by working together. Ed Wayland, director of Legal Aid at the time, suggested that there was legal precedent for doing such a thing. After attending several trainings and further dialogue, a growing group of people came together. In late 1998's Public Housing Association of Residents was established as the collective voice and advocate for public housing residents in Charlottesville.

Alex Gulotta, a Legal Aid lawyer and later the Legal Aid director, shared the importance of these actions. "Different groups had different people at different times that sort of took leadership and exercised leadership. But there was not good city wide coordination, and the real vision behind PHAR was 'We need to not organize about getting the elevator fixed at Crescent Halls. We need to combine all of our power together. And all of us get the elevator fixed at Crescent Halls." Understanding that each site had different needs and issues, if they could do this together, form an organization, they could advocate for their collective best interests. Alex recognized the shift of short term response to long term power building as vital. Even with the difficulty of organizing 400 units and the needs of public housing residents, PHAR could maximize the ability to organize people that otherwise would find it difficult to organize. PHAR would serve as the enabling infrastructure to make that possible. While other public housing sites across the nation would struggle to collectively build power, especially with the scale of organizing across multiple sites, in Charlottesville PHAR would work to continue to serve the direct needs of residents, continuing the early organizing work that had taken place, but also work to address broader policy issues that manifest from HUD, CRHA, and the City. As their mission states, PHAR empowers

low income residents to protect and and improve communities through collective action. This inverts the perceived power that stymied the seniors in their attempts to challenge the deposit policy and in turn builds collective power around public housing resident needs.

Building Internal power

One of my first real encounters with how public housing residents exerted their power took place at a resident services meeting in 2014. Arriving early to the meeting at Crescent Halls, I sat at the back of the room as a few public housing residents began to take their seats. As we got closer to 2pm, when the meeting was scheduled to start, the housing authority staff came in. Connie Dunn, the director at the time, took a seat at the very end of a long table that had been set up at the front of the room. Then we waited. 10 minutes passed. 20 minutes passed. We continued to wait. It was just then that Joy Johnson and a few other public housing residents arrived filling out the table and several more chairs in the room. It was at this minute that you could feel the tension in the room grow. This was not necessarily going to be a fun meeting.

Resident services meetings are one of several monthly meetings that brings the housing authority and public housing residents together. They are an opportunity to publicly bring forward and address the concerns of residents about issues at the various public housing sites. In order to make sure that they are accessible to residents at all of the sites around Charlottesville, they generally move from one site to the next each month. Residents share ideas for ways to improve the services that the housing authority provides to them. This includes everything from maintenance needs to

program access. It is a more formal moment to express concerns before the housing authority leadership and hopefully see action taken.

In the case of this meeting, you could feel the level of hostility that had grown between the leadership and residents. In leading this meeting, Joy had a specific agenda. This centered on making sure that the housing authority responded directly to the needs and questions that residents were bringing forward. With minutes from the previous meeting in hand, Joy went one by one through the requests and asked for a full report from CRHA. This not only asked if the request had been noted, but also specific plans for how it was going to be done, who would address it, and the timeline for when it would be accomplished. Should the housing authority raise any excuses for why something had not been done, Joy was not having it. She wanted clear, concise action. Joy wanted to hold the housing authority responsible to residents.

Moments such as these are an opportunity for public housing residents to practice and realize their power. Where residents might individually come before a housing authority staff member or work within their own community networks to address a problem, these meetings are a platform where these issues are presented both publicly and formally to the housing authority, but also other residents and PHAR. They provide another means through which collective action can develop and come to bear. I would also argue they are significant opportunities for residents to be legible before the opacity of these institutions. When needed, they serve as a means for accountability and transparency. Both are foundations upon which power is realized.

Another avenue through which public housing residents have built power and control internal to the housing authority is through their direct inclusion in the Housing

Authority Board. The inclusion of residents on these boards was first formally specified in 1998 Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act (HUD, 1998). Section XIII of the Act requires that the board of directors of a PHA include at least one member who is directly assisted by the PHA and who may be elected by the residents. Though it excludes PHA's that have salaried commissioners and those under 300 units without a resident that wishes to serve. Again, this is a moment where the law provides a foundation upon which residents can seek power within the housing authority. While it means that residents have a singular voice in the broader decision making processes, it doesn't mean they have control of the board, which can be easily outnumbered by the other members. The evolution of the Charlottesville Housing Authority Board is a unique lens to see how public housing residents have come to play an important role in leading the vision for the housing authority.

Established as a quasi governmental agency in a 1954 referendum, the Charlottesville Redevelopment and Housing Authority came into being as a means to address economic development in the city during the post world war years. In response to the 1937 Housing Act, the Virginia State Assembly passed legislation in 1938 establishing the legal ability for local housing authorities. This gave any city in Virginia the authority to establish an organization and thereby access federal funding specifically for slum clearance and public housing development. It would not be until January of 1954 that the Charlottesville City Council would adopt a resolution concerned with "safe and sanitary dwelling accommodations" in the city that would later that year put to voters the question of creating a housing authority. In June of that year a referendum by 36 votes would pass establishing the housing authority. 5 years later, in 1960, another

referendum came before the city, required via the McCue Amendment, to accept federal funding to build public housing and begin the demolition of the Vinegar Hill neighborhood. At that time, the CRHA Board consisted of five citizen commissioners appointed by the city council, many of which represented business and legal interests in the city. This leadership remained consistent, with a broadening of inclusion to add University of Virginia faculty, specifically architecture faculty, and members of the Black business community.

In 1978, with over $500,000 of federal urban renewal funds yet to be spent, Vinegar Hill primarily empty land, and broader economic uncertainty being expressed both in City Council and in the local newspaper, a further change would take place (*Daily Progress*, 1978). With questions growing from HUD about the completion of the initial urban renewal work and funding provided by the federal government, pressure began to emerge from City Council to force CRHA to act. While meetings and conferences were taking place seeking to attract a significant business project (a mall) to anchor that end of the newly developed pedestrian mall, CRHA had not followed through on any plans. This was magnified with an overarching concern about the economic future of the downtown business district as Charlottesville began to follow a national trend toward suburban economic development. In August of 1977, City Council would begin a discussion of a possible take over of the CRHA board, which would require an amendment to the City Charter that would need approval by the State Assembly. Newspaper coverage of this change primarily centered around questions regarding the connection between economic development and politics, especially the role the City Council should play in broader economic development planning. After

arguing before the General Assembly in the Spring of 1978, a state bill allowing the City to take control of CRHA would pass and later that year City Council would become the de facto board for the housing authority (*Daily Progress,* 1978).

Another shift in the Housing Authority Board happened in 1990. The year before, HUD assessed CRHA giving it a poor review of its administrative and financial status, due in large part to residents exposing mismanagement (US District Court, 1989). With HUD threatening to disband the board, the City Council acts by opening the board to broader membership. This once again required changing the city charter to include two at-large members from the community. In early 1990 the charter change was approved by the General Assembly. Residents advocated to make sure at least one of the positions was filled by a public housing resident. Joy shared how they took two City Council members to task, reminding them that federal law advocated for their inclusion. Later that year two public housing residents were appointed to the CRHA board. Lona Denison and Martha Darnell, both active in the Westhaven and Crescent Halls Tenants Associations, become the first public housing residents to have a voice in general housing authority policy and decision making.

Even so, there would remain challenges as the City Council would retain primary control over the Housing Authority and public housing residents would not maintain these positions. Joy Johnson and Ben Thacker Gwaltney, a community organizer and early PHAR Staff member, remember the ongoing efforts to challenge the power of the housing authority board CRHA and in doing so also the City Council. They described it as “making trouble” at the board meetings by questioning the decisions and conversations that the board was having. This happened so much that Joy would

regularly be challenged by specific City Council members. She remembers being asked if she was speaking for herself or public housing. Growing more angry about this questioning, she eventually said that she was speaking both for herself and public housing residents, her community. For her there was no distinction between these identities or positions. Ben similarly expressed doubts about the board. “They didn't have a clear understanding of public housing or public housing residents or anything.” In parallel, he saw the board as representing a democratic establishment which had no specific broader effect. So, while they had power to make decisions, the decisions they made were of little to no consequence in the lives of public housing residents.

As PHAR began to coalesce in 1998 and with further alignment in Federal law, residents took greater action for internal power within CRHA. Having attended conferences and received training on, Residents began to advocate once again for greater inclusion of a public housing resident. “We really started to wrestle with them to appoint other people, appoint more residents. Get a more diverse group in (Thacker-Gwaltney, 2022).” Meeting notes from the time shows growing concerns that actions taken by the housing authority board were being done without the input of public housing residents. With a focus on collective organizing of all the public housing sites in Charlottesville, PHAR began to further advocate for change of the Housing Authority Board. This would diversify the board and minimize the role that City Council would have. At present, it includes two public housing residents, four at-large community members, and one representative from the City Council.

The culmination of this work is that the CRHA has a distinct connection to the vision and focus of public housing residents’ lives. This manifests itself not only in

including residents on the board but also a general consideration of what it means to be on this board. Alex Gulotta describes it this way. “I think if you wanted to get on the CRHA board today, you wouldn't ignore the fact that PHAR would be part of your life. And if you didn't want that, then you wouldn't get on the CRHA board. But that was not always the case. And that, you know, there was a period in time where residents weren't a piece of the equation in a way. And now residents really are. And that's like huge progress.” Joy sees a shift in the focus of the board. “Things have gotten a little easier once we got some power on the board and some more respect …” The demand for representation has evolved into a broader value of the role that public housing residents should play in the decisions that impact their lives. Power isn’t simply challenging systems of authority but is about a shift in thinking about the role that the housing authority plays as a venue for affordability and a home of low income people in Charlottesville.

Power of the mind - Consciousness building

When speaking with public housing residents there is a clear desire to limit the interactions that they have with the housing authority. Due to regulations and societal perceptions of low income communities, the housing authority is continually reviewing the lives of residents. This produces a tendency to keep one’s distance. Not only does this place the housing authority in a position of power, but it also further distances residents from the regulations that come to define their lives.

Sonia shared an example when talking about interactions with the housing authority with her lease. “When they brought my lease, you know, I guess they told me just sign my lease and drop it off or mail back.” What might be perceived as a minor administrative task takes on significant meaning. Residents simply take an action that binds them to a relationship without the greater understanding. Joy followed up, “I don't even think most people know what their base rent is anyway. I ask people that all the time, So how much is your rent? One thousand dollars? How much is your base rent? But most folks don't understand what their base rent is.”

This is a specific example of the work that PHAR has long dedicated itself to changing. Instead of residents being at the whim of the housing authority, PHAR has become a resource for residents to know their rights and make sure they are cognizant of the power that they hold. They have accomplished this by building the consciousness of residents to know 24 CFR 964 and how the intricacies of these laws play out in their lives. Though, it is also about building the capacity of residents to be in a position to advocate for themselves and their community. This has taken place through the creation of the PHAR internship program, and by taking residents to conferences and other meetings where they can build and express this power.

The PHAR Internship program emerged out of a desire to use federally provided funds in order to support the capacity of residents. Audrey described this as PHAR’s bread and butter. “We get $25 per occupied unit from HUD. And what that money is for is to build capacity. So if we do nothing else, we have to build capacity (Oliver, 2021).” The funding that she is referring to is the Tenant Participation Funds. Mandated in 24 CFR 964, these funds are given to the housing authority and then distributed by the

recognized resident council to support various forms of resident engagement. With a total of 376 units, CRHA receives a total of $9400 dollars annually. Stipulated in federal policy, the housing authority can use $10 per unit of these funds to cover general administration of these activities, leaving the rest to the resident council to use. There is a broad list of eligible uses for these funds including stipends for resident council leaders, consultation with public housing residents, leadership development, and training. Upon realizing that these funds were available, PHAR began development of a program that would provide residents a greater depth and breadth of understanding how they can impact the dynamics of their own housing.

Beyond the traditional sense of an internship, providing direct employment experience, the PHAR internship program is more holistic in its thinking and approach. Importantly it gives participants an understanding of public housing from a historical, policy, and advocacy at both national and local levels. This includes direct study of the structures, policies, and programs that define HUD work with public housing from the relationship that HUD has with Congress to a deep review of 24 CFR, from Housing Choice Voucher Program to Public Housing Agency Planning. At the local level the program gives a greater understanding of the structure, budget, and functions of CRHA. Internally, they explore the history, structure, and partnerships that have come to define PHAR. All of which is done in detail by reading policy documents, reviewing how various programs function, and discussing how these play into the present efforts around redevelopment. The goal being to give public housing residents an understanding of how these institutions intertwine and respond to each other to impact their housing.

The program also invests in public housing residents themselves by developing their individual and collective skills, but also their broader awareness of the public housing community. The internship becomes both a platform for education, but also employment and organizing. They begin by setting personal goals, including a significant amount of reflection, which allows them to develop a foundation upon which to consider their own agency and history. This is then paired with training on public speaking, conflict resolution, accessing community resources, and survey development. These are meant to both prepare them for participating in a variety of meetings and programs that are at the center of public housing advocacy but also to be responsive to the direct needs of others living in public housing. The internship then evolves into broader consideration of employment by exploring resources on job training and education, visiting the downtown jobs center, and identifying barriers to accessing jobs. Finally wrapping up with a focus on community organizing strategy and tactics that follows a pathway from initial planning to problem solving, then to communications and engagement methods. Within each of these threads, participants consider their own positionality, but also how these processes impact the broader public housing community. In doing so they are continuing to develop not only their own identity as a public housing advocate, but how that serves the broader goals of public housing across the city, state, and nation.

Sonia shared how the internship program allowed her to overcome her own feeling of powerlessness when it came to engaging with the housing authority. The processes and systems that she had felt beholden to become more clear. She could not only better understand the direct impact they might have, but also see them in a broader

perspective of public housing struggle. Sonia shared a greater agency when engaging with the Housing Authority. “When they came and knocked on your door, I would talk to them, but I never knew that they were using that against us. They wouldn't use it to benefit us.” In participating in the internship program, PHAR was seen as a resource for not only her needs, but others which she should argue from. “I remember going into a PHAR meeting one time and they were using big words and Audrey spoke up and said, If we don't understand, speak up and say, I don't understand what you're saying, do it in language that I can understand. So that was a I'm saying that being in housing and that gave me the experience to learn what PHAR and learn that just because I live in public housing, I have rights too (Bell, 2021).”

Though the experience of the internship program went beyond this. It was also a means to build solidarity. Sonia described how this was accomplished by picking up trash together at all of the public housing sites. “A part of the internship was we would go around to the neighborhoods and pick up trash. So every Sunday I would come over here and pick up trash during the week. I would go down to First Street and it was three of us and everybody else would not do it, and I'd end up out there all day picking up trash. And I mean, we have to talk about the value of the property, but you gotta put in effort to do it too.” Not only do actions like these seek to improve the look and feel of the public housing site, but are a means to connect and discuss broader issues. It is a form of collective action that builds relationships and understanding that then allows for greater advocacy and agency.

Audrey places the importance of the internship program in a broader context. “The intern program is for residents who are being trained to understand their rights.

And, you know, to be able to become leaders in a community, to be able to help residents understand what their rights are and, you know, help them with resources, knowing what resources are available for them. And even some, in some cases just born with them to, you know, different communities or different organizations to get help, you know, if they need assistance." She points to the broader implications of how the internship program instills and builds leadership. Again it serves a dual purpose of public housing residents knowing their rights, but also seeing their role in serving the community. In multiple examples, those coming out of the program have served on various city boards, helping to bring the experience of public housing residents into broader decision making processes taking place around the city. In other cases residents have stepped into jobs working with the housing authority, giving it a more direct connection to the lives of those they are serving.

In remarks made in 2007 by Sherrie Clark, as she graduated from the program, the internship program allowed her to reframe her understanding of what it meant to live in public housing (Clark, 2007). She remembered visiting her cousin who lived in the "projects" and heard the stereotypes of poverty that the kids in school shared and reinforced. For her, it was not necessarily something to be proud of. Though the internship program gave her a renewed sense. "So you see today, where I come from a project is good, as well as being a community and a home for where I live." Her consciousness of the community had changed. Instead of being one of disenfranchisement and disinvestment, the projects became one of possibility and full of collective action. Power came in recognizing the strengths of the community instead of being beholden to these stereotypes.

In connection to building the internal consciousness of how federal, state and local policies influence their lives, PHAR supports opportunities for residents to broaden their understanding of public housing advocacy and express their power. The internship program is the foundation of this. It not only provides a foundational understanding of the systems of public housing, but it also provides specific training on public speaking that prepares public housing residents to speak at CRHA board meetings, City Council Meetings, and a host of other public facing events. It is the dual role of knowing these systems and then providing ways to vocalize that knowledge in which completes the deepening of this consciousness. Taking this knowledge in is just one step, but repeating it back, on a host of levels (public/private, individual/collective), is where it becomes an expression of power.

Joy remembered the importance of this early in her own trajectory from public housing resident to advocate. After stepping forward to voice her thoughts during the fight over rental deposits, she shared how people like Ed Wayland and Holly Edwards would take her to the vast amount of meetings. In their roles at the Legal Aid Society and within City Council, Ed and Holly were cognizant of the many conversations that were taking place, the way these meetings impact broader decision making, and how they lacked any perspective from public housing residents. By attending a variety of meetings, Joy began to see how various forms of power worked in concert in Charlottesville. She began to see how housing conversations, connected to community health, connected to schools. Her presence also played a role in being able to bring what she heard back to her community. These conversations would then perpetuate

dialogue at PHAR as to how decisions being made would influence public housing or could be influenced by public housing residents to support community development.

Documents show ongoing travel and trips to various events, meetings, and training. There are visits to Florida and Texas for training on public housing organizing (PHAR Archive). There are multiple trips for resident management site visits and attending the national convenings. PHAR regularly attends state and national affordable housing conferences. There are state events that gather Legal Aid initiatives from around Virginia to share practices and projects. Even more recently, a group of public housing residents and PHAR staff went to the annual Low Income Housing Coalition's National conference in Washington DC. Joy, Audrey, and Sonia each shared how they would go to these events, split the various meetings amongst themselves, and then come back together to report on what they had heard. When a specific idea, grant, or program had relevance to their work in Charlottesville, they would share it with local organizers and partners, eventually developing a plan of action.

Then there are the smaller site visits where a group of public housing residents would join in. Presentations and conversations would take place. During these times, the individual residents would be invited to listen and share their own experiences. A visit to Durham in 2018 to meet with the financial services group Self-Help assembled 15 people from CRHA, PHAR, and City staff to explore the various housing redevelopment models that were taking place. At each meeting or while visiting the developments, space was created and residents were encouraged to share their responses to what they were hearing and seeing. Consciousness became more than a

taught, internalized knowledge, but a continual exposure to what might be possible and tangibly tying that to the experience of residents.

Power in numbers - Networks of Collaboration

Thus far, I have explored the contextual, individual, and internal nexus of power that PHAR has created to achieve their mission of public and affordable housing advocacy. In this next section, I turn to the broader connections and networks that PHAR has created to develop and exert power. What they have accomplished could not be done alone. It is through a rich network of collaboration and partnership at the local, state, and national level that their paradigm emerged. In these dynamic networks, many of them built through connections made at conferences and trips, others through ongoing partnerships locally, the reality of their vision solidified and moved closer to reality.

The relationships taking place at the local level have developed, emerged, acted and even dissolved over time. Several came together in response to the needs of public housing residents. Others developed along parallel organizing interests reaching out to and support of low income residents in Charlottesville. Some of these remain consistent, even to this day, magnifying and supporting each other. While some have faded due in part to the way power has been questioned and challenged by PHAR over time.

Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC), formerly the Chartlottesville-Albemarle Legal Aid Society, is an example of a consistent, steadfast partnership that started before PHAR was established in 1998 and continues to this day. In talking with Ed Wayland and Alex Gulatto, both former directors of Legal Aid, the connections emerged from the

ongoing needs of residents to access social benefits they were entitled to under the law. Initially this was about supporting elderly public housing residents to access their social security benefits. Later it expanded due to the mismanagement and misinterpretation of policies by the public housing authority. “What I found in many cases dealing with the social services department, dealing with Social Security people and dealing with public housing was that my calculation of what people were required to pay or entitled to and benefits was different from what those organizations came up with. And so for a lot of my clients, what I did was try to fix that (Wayland, 2022) .” It was primarily in accounting that LAJC found opportunities to work with public housing residents to hold local and federal institutions accountable.

Joy remembered a specific instance where this was the case. Time and time again, residents would come to the property manager to inquire about their rent statements. Most times they were trying to better understand the process for the charges, especially as their incomes would fluctuate. In return they were getting an answer “this is just what it is” without any written proof. They would then come to Joy and she would refer them to a Legal Aid attorney. In the case of one woman, “they were charging her almost $500 rent, but she didn't have the income and how it was arriving at that.” Joy sent her to LAJC, and a few weeks later, “she came running out of the house, she said. Miss Joy. Thank you for sending me to legal aid. So how is it that my rent went from 500 to 120 some dollars all this time.” Joy recognized the housing authority as forcing her into this. Because of the overpayment, she was falling behind on her rent which would eventually result in a warrant and losing her apartment.

In cases like this, Ed remembered learning more and more about how these systems functioned. They became advocates for residents rights in these immediate, tangible ways. This then set a foundation for further support later. “You know, we learned a lot. We learned a lot and we talked and we met and at some point decided that maybe it made sense for there to be an organization of tenants and Joy. It was, you know, the great leader and organizer when all that stuff happened and I was the lawyer and helped them as best I could.” Where as before residents would negotiate the opacity of these institutions alone, they now had a conduit to both address questions but also start to build collective power. He saw these other opportunities.

“Over the course of this, I mean, Joy and the Tenants Association became more and more involved in the organization and structure of the housing authority working with the housing authority to try to make things the way they thought it should be.”

LAJC would eventually be pivotal in helping to set up the various by-laws including with the West Haven Tenants Association, later the Resident Management Council, and then PHAR. But it would also be an important sounding board for the knowledge and practices that tenants were trying to act on. Whether challenging a change in zoning or a specific federal policy, PHAR partners with LAJC to look at how these policies are going to impact residents, explores the legal terrain, and then cultivates ways to educate the community to realize specific action.

While PHAR has developed a breadth of partnerships at the local level, not all partnerships are sustainable. Most begin through shared interests around specific community needs, allowing resources and vision to align. By working together trust is built and shared commitments are solidified. Even so, there are moments of divergence,

where specific influences force partners in new directions, especially when it comes to challenging the power of local institutions. This was the case with MACAA (Monticello Area Community Action Agency.

Beginning in the 1970's and in the 1980's, there are growing connections between the work that MACAA was doing and various efforts with public housing. MACAA began in 1965 with a specific focus on the eradication of poverty and improving the lives of low-income residents. Now centered more specifically on education, for many years they developed specific partnerships, organized residents, and did advocacy campaigns. Documentation shows a range of activities that paired with public housing residents. From advocating for fuel relief from the City of Charlottesville in response to the rise of oil prices due to energy crises in the late 1970's to participating in long range planning in the mid 1980's, from providing financial training to addressing state policy around landlord tenant relations in the 1990's. Joy remembered going with MACAA to a Virginia Neighborhood Association Conference in Richmond. "That was when I saw how active other residents were and how they were changing things and stuff like that." It was also when Joy first met Alma Barlow and learned about public housing organizing efforts in Richmond. With their general concern for low and middle class residents, MACAA was present at neighborhood associations and housing authority meetings as a way of making sure people were aware of activities that were taking place in their neighborhoods.

What had been alignment changes in the late 1990's. This coincides with the establishment of PHAR and a shift in staff organizing strategy at MACCA. As the resident council for public housing residents, PHAR begins to build resident power that

is meant to directly challenge both the city and the housing authority. At the same time MACAA staff begin to more directly address long held injustice.

Ben Thacker-Gwaltney, a MACAA organizer and later a PHAR staff member, shared how this played out. “I was doing community organizing and community development, which basically just meant that I reached out to the working class neighborhoods in Charlottesville and offered any help or services that I could.” This eventually led to partnering more with PHAR over time, based on long term relationships. “So I helped out a little bit and then we started to make some trouble with the housing authority and because residents didn't have the respect or power then that they have now. We would be at meetings and we would have all sorts of comments on policies and practices.” Supported by Legal Aid, they collectively did a lot of study and continually examined the reasoning behind and impact of policies that these institutions were enacting. “Sometimes they (referencing the City of Charlottesville and CRHA) were willing to listen and talk and sometimes they weren't.” As they began to exert greater and greater pressure, the City and CRHA began to question MACAA’s role. Ben remembered being called into a meeting with his supervisors and asked to curtail the work that he was doing. As he expressed it, “Can you please get him under control?” Which was less of a question and more of a demand. It was at this point that Ben realized he needed to make a change in career and began working with PHAR as an organizer and provide development support.

Alex Gulatto shared this perspective and placed it into the context of Charlottesville at the time. “Sometimes there are nonprofits that feel uncomfortable about standing up against injustice because that means going to City Hall that funds

you or, you know, various people who fund you and tell them what they're doing is appropriate. Legal Aid has always had the attitude. PHAR always had the attitude. Our job is to challenge people, even if there are people that fund us. And that's just that's just what we do and we need to like, be true to that always. But not not everyone always felt that way. And there was a period of time where at least the organizers were feeling like their ability to organize in the situation they were in was curtailed (Gulatto, 2022)."

My reason for sharing this is to describe the duality of how power is expressed in the context of Charlottesville. When an effort develops to exert power, there will always be forms that counter vail those efforts. In doing so, they seek to maintain the status quo. Power can come in the form of direct challenges, verbally and visually shared in public. But, there are also soft forms that must be understood and contended with. As both Ben and Alex shared, the City, with this role as a funder of the non-profit sector, has a variety of ways to exert its influence. When a non profit relies on these funds for its longevity, it is an avenue that can easily be enacted. This is the case with the relationship between PHAR and MACAA.

Yet, it does not necessarily mean that the fight is over. What is vital to understand is that while institutions may place barriers, the relationships persist. There are a host of both individual partnerships that continue beyond these moments. We see the development of new organizations that fill gaps as they arise. In Charlottesville there is a continual ebb and flow of solidarity and action that continues to support the ongoing efforts to support low-income communities. The Quality Community Council, begun by Karen Waters, a former MACAA organizer, was created in response to a shooting in a low income neighborhood with a focus on addressing the needs of low income

residents. Ben Thacker-Gwaltney began to work directly with PHAR and later with Virginia Organizing. These relationships, while not as direct, are maintained to this very day.

PHAR has also cultivated a wealth of relationships with those working at both the state and national level. Whether attending conferences, advocacy events, or training around specific policies, these provide means for accessing practices and ideas that could be brought back to Charlottesville, discussed, and enacted should public housing residents see their value. There are ongoing examples throughout the history of public housing organizing in Charlottesville from attending Resident Management Council events to the annual National Low Income Housing Coalition conference to the Virginia Association of Neighborhoods.

A key national partnership that PHAR built was with the Center for Community Change (CCC) and its coordination of national public housing organizations led by Othello Pullard. Emerging in the wake of continued changes in HUD policy that took place in the 1990's and the continued problems with public housing management, the Center for Community Change partnered with local organizing efforts to build a broader coalition, The Public Housing Residents National Organizing Campaign. As a part of this they focused on sharing information regarding these new policies - primarily the 1999 requirement for annual consolidated plans at the state and local level, but a renewed interest in the Community Block Development Grant program that the Ford administration enacted as a part of the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act. The efforts of CCC and the coalitions they were convening was focused on developing grassroots power to impact how these policies were being created and influence how

they were being realized. This sought to further legitimize the role that public housing residents would play in their communities (Hwang, 1997).

Poulard served for 30 years with CCC advocating for grassroots power and leadership. In a 1983 article written for the Ohio State Nation Center for Research in Vocational Training, Poulard shared his belief in the role of Community Based Organizations (CBO) in overcoming the distrust and ineptness of governmental agencies in serving poor communities (Poulard, 1983). He argued for CBO's as a legitimate means for serving the community through democratic representation, but also due to their adjacency, an ability to more directly and creatively respond to needs. CBO's then filled an important disjuncture between top down federal mandates and bottom up institutions responding to immediate needs.

Several years later, in 1989 as a part of hearings before Congress with the 1990 Housing and Community Development Act, Mr. Poulard would argue against the way that federal policy and funding was perpetuating demolition of public housing. In this he challenged the tension that had arisen based on the negative perceptions of public housing and the great need for affordable housing. The general perception of public housing was causing local housing authorities to let housing become derelict, which ultimately would lead to its removal. He saw public housing as "marked" without any true commitment for long term sustainability. He advocated for one for one replacement, greater legal recourse in how policies were translated at the local level, and clearer discussion of how violations that were being included would impact residents.

In both of these examples you can see a shared commitment between Poulards efforts and that of PHAR. They are not only committed to grassroots leadership, but also dispelling the myths around public housing and challenging the role of public policy in the lives of public housing residents. They both advocate for residents to be at the table in decision making, building the infrastructures that allow that to happen, and responding to the top down pressures being exerted by federal policy that are then being translated differently at the local level. These are parallel pathways working at distinct scales that would later come together around shared goals.

This was taking place in a regulatory moment that saw HUD require greater oversight of planning processes in order for local agencies to access federal funding. Beginning in 1974, with the Housing and Community Development Act, there was a consolidation of programs that gave HUD greater control over the content and process requirements of what local authorities could do. This began with the Community Development Block Grant and the Housing Assistance Plan, later included the HOME and the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy, and eventually the local Consolidated Plan requirement. In a report by Turner et al, documenting the evolution of these changes, they describe how these programs were imposed on local recipients, with regular rule changes, that placed further tension on local planning. For instance, local Public Housing Authorities were now required to create annual plans that aligned with local consolidated plans then were then approved by HUD. In 1995, Charlottesville was a part of a consortium plan effort led by the Thomas Jefferson Planning District that included minimal community participation. This identified both a great need for affordable housing, a significant amount of cost burden with housing, and lengthy

waiting list for both public housing and Section 8 vouchers. The following year, the consortium would develop an action plan with further detail and greater community engagement (HUD, 1996). This allocated $686,000 to support services and physical improvements for public housing and its residents.

It was at this time that CCC and PHAR would develop more direct connections. This came as PHAR began to establish itself as a center of power for public housing residents in Charlottesville and the CCC began to organize across the nation as a part of the Public Housing National Organizing Campaign. In 1995, CCC provided initial documents that were focused on educating public housing residents about the implementation of the Consolidated Plan. This was followed by further resources in 1996 that included more detailed information about the consolidated planning process in relation to the CDBG. In 1997, the relationship between CCC and public housing residents in Charlottesville shifted to job access and setting up standards for citizen participation with the regular planning process. In 1998, Poulard and others would visit Charlottesville to coordinate with PHAR, eventually working on a series of efforts to address issues that would challenge both HUD and Charlottesville Consolidated Planning efforts about the role that public housing residents would play in these broader efforts (CCC, 1996).

Much like the relationship that PHAR had with LAJC, the partnership with the Center for Community Change was one of solidarity and consciousness raising. The flow of information about specific federal policy was meant to provide a basis for local organizing and advocacy. The documents that CCC was providing gave PHAR a platform upon which to exert both their influence over how policies were impacting

public residents, but to develop a standard for which public housing residents should be involved in the development of these planning processes at the local level. They are working to open up the intricacies of federal actions, but at the same time empower residents to play a more direct role in how those policies were developed and the accessing funding that came out of those decisions.

The importance of these relationships was reinforced when we spoke to Alex Gulotta. “PHAR has smartly and thoughtfully cultivated relationships of power in the community with people that really respect them and trusted them, that they trusted and trusted them. And so that's how they've become a piece of the community and they have real supporters at various levels throughout the community. And that just doesn't happen by accident.” He noted that this didn’t happen overnight, but through conscious and thoughtful planning. He also pointed to PHAR’s desire for inclusion. “And there was a real effort to try and figure out how we can include the allies in the community that want to be supportive, that our real allies want to help us sort of realize what we want to realize. . . That's a real part of our success. To really thoughtfully and carefully figure out how to make and leverage allies has been, I think, really helpful to building movement power.” In the cases of both LAJC and the Center for Community Change, there was a deep alignment of how to bring resources (either funding or information) to residents and make sure that they are directly involved in the decisions that impact their lives.

Power in Standards

A final example of how PHAR has expressed and organized the power of public housing residents comes in the ongoing redevelopment of public housing that is taking

place in Charlottesville. While much of public housing across the US is either being demolished or redeveloped using mixed income models, in Charlottesville the commitment has been to save public housing and place residents at the center of those efforts. This is due in part to the ongoing challenges that public housing residents have made against local and federal policy and setting specific standards for how redevelopment could move forward in ways that maintain community.

Demolition and redevelopment has been pervasive since the 1990s and the initiation of the HOPE VI federal program. Predating the ramping of this work, the most iconic of which is the Pruitt Igoe housing in St. Louis, which suffered from long term mismanagement, and later was dynamited publicly on television in the 1970's. Various authors have documented the impact of the demolition of buildings, that many see as having come to the end of their useful lives, and the impact on the communities that called these places home. Crump documents the way that narratives of concentrated poverty were intertwined with neoliberal policies to create a context for demolition (Crump, 2002). In doing so, opening up valuable land for future development. Goetz compares these actions to forms of gentrification, mimicking the policies that drove urban renewal actions decades before (Goetz, 2011). Whereas, Rodriguez documents how the intentional shrinkage of Black feminist spatial politics, a denial of the social infrastructures of Atlanta's public housing community, made demolition an inevitability (Rodriguez, 2021). This doesn't take into account the many arguments both for and against redevelopment that consider health, welfare, and educational outcomes (Boston, 2005; Keene and Geronimus, 2011; Almagro, Chyn, and Stuart, 2023; Chyn, 2018).

In the aftermath of the demolition of Cabrini-Green in Chicago, a process fraught with contention between City, private developers, public housing residents, and housing rights organizations, Bennet and Reed imagine what a more inclusive and real form of neighborhood redevelopment might look like. This would move beyond the narratives of decay, rooted in racial and class logics, and policies that they directly link to the histories of urban renewal. This included four specific recommendations. The first being more inclusive negotiations that took a broader perspective on the neighborhood and those involved in defining a vision for the neighborhood. Secondly, they argue for a more holistic approach that doesn't simply focus on the physical materiality of redevelopment, but also includes the social infrastructure needed to sustain the community. Third, they see a need for an ongoing forum for airing community perspectives in order to local needs. Lastly, they recommend early investment by the City as a gesture of goodwill. In combination these actions would set a course for public housing redevelopment that does not replicate the dissolution of a community that has been enacted countless times elsewhere.

In the case of Charlottesville, we can see similar challenges and vision for an inclusive redevelopment process. This began with a clear understanding of what federal policies like HOPE VI meant for public housing. Joy did not mince words as she specifically saw the goals as being focused on tearing down public housing. She described it this way: "HOPE VI is something that was mandated thru Congress that by the year 2020, something they wanted to get rid of public housing. So they poured a lot of money into this program that had money for economic development, for rebuilding, for doing a whole lot of stuff. But what it was doing was tearing down all the public

housing. And public housing residents didn't couldn't come back so that they would give them more (Johnson, 2021).” There was a general belief that this funding was not for residents, but as Crump and Goertz noted, as a spatial fix that would remove Black communities. In doing so it would open up opportunities for developers to take advantage of what had become prime real estate. Ben Thacker-Gwaltney believed that without PHAR, Charlottesville would have easily followed the HOPE VI pathway.

The Resident Bill of Rights is a primary document that sets the tone for how public housing redevelopment would move forward in Charlottesville. While not legally binding, it was approved by both the CRHA Commission and the Charlottesville City Council in late 2008. Broadly the agreement lays out a redevelopment process that improves the quality of life in our public housing neighborhoods, involves residents in key redevelopment decisions, enhances housing and employment opportunities for residents, and guarantees that current residents will not be subject to permanent or long-term displacement or homelessness as a result of redevelopment. Key to this was the deep involvement by residents in any process that might seek to change public housing. The language of the document is critical. Terms used include “meaningful”, “enforceable”, and “substantive” that set a tone of what a redevelopment process might look like. This is a significantly higher level of engagement than the traditional informing or advisory role that these processes produce. Secondly, it places a demand that any redevelopment or replacement must be one for one. This took into consideration the broader low income communities needs, but also prioritized the access that present or displaced residents might have to the future housing. More broadly, it saw the redevelopment process as a part of a broader effort to support economic justice.

Redevelopment was a means to access jobs, move onto pathways for homeowners, and provide specific resources that addressed resident needs.

There have been varying effects of setting these standards. In 2016, Dede noted that the camaraderie that passed the Bill of Rights in 2008 had diminished by 2013. At the time CRHA took steps to apply for Rental Assistance Demonstration, which from a HUD perspective, was meant to provide greater capital for public housing renovation and redevelopment. Though has been criticized as a way of undermining resident involvement and great federal control of housing (Shelteforce, 2018). PHAR would challenge CRHA efforts to participate in RAD for not meeting the engagement standards that the Bill of Rights stated. This would eventually halt the housing authorities efforts to pursue these programs. Inversely, the Bill of Rights is continually referenced in various redevelopment plans that have come since. Launched in 2012, the City of Charlottesville began its first small area plan for the southside of the city, a historically black and lower income neighborhood, which included public housing and other affordable housing sites. Within efforts to envision a new future for the three neighborhoods, there was an explicit focus of working in concert with CRHA and honoring the Residents's Bill of Right. As mandated by the state, the City of Charlottesville began a comprehensive planning process in 2020, Cville Plans Together. Similarly, this included the Resident Bill of Rights as a document to define how the planning and successive zoning rewrite would move forward. It is important to note that the committee included multiple PHAR, public housing, and affordable housing advocates.

After years of challenging and constraining the actions of CRHA to enact federal policy, PHAR took a proactive step to define what redevelopment would look like in Charlottesville with the publication of the Resident Directed Positive Vision for Redevelopment in 2016. As was expressed by several public housing organizers , this was a major shift both in what redevelopment could do for the public housing community and the need to build relationships with CRHA, the City, funders, developers, and construction businesses that would help to achieve public housing residents goals. As is stated in the introduction, “The redevelopment process offers a time to come together, protect what is best about our neighborhoods, and make improvements.” (PHAR, 2016)

On the whole, the Positive Vision for Redevelop begins where the Residents Bill of Rights left off. It starts by reasserting the major points of the Bill of Rights. This includes a seat at the table for public housing residents in all decisions, one for one replacement, and broader consideration of the ways the redevelopment process can be used to achieve economic justice. And yet, it goes a bit further by defining the ways that unused, City owned properties can be used for affordable housing, how the process can set the housing authority on a stronger financial footing, and ensure that mixed-income development protects public housing neighborhoods instead of initiating displacement.

The rest of the vision continues to flesh out what these details mean and how residents wished to move forward. Vitally, it understands that no matter the process it is important to make sure stability is maintained which sets timelines for the amount of notice that is required and the impact relocation will have on children in schools. Residents wish to maintain the vital community connections to social, health, and

religious resources. Redevelopment should not result in greater rent burden, keeping that below 30% of their income. Construction of the new sites are seen as opportunities to provide jobs directly to public housing residents, allowing them to play a role in the creation of their homes. The vision set expectations for the balance between density and open space, highlighting the need for access to green space and play areas for children. The document addresses the parameters of affordability at 40% to 20% average median income, which in Charlottesville is between $32,520 and $16,260. Finally, it places material and physical standards for redevelopment by noting the need for high quality, long lasting materials, limiting building height to 3 stories, and inclusion of contemporary services (HVAC, internet, sound proofing).

There are several important aspects of this vision for redevelopment that both assert and strengthen the power of public housing residents. First, the voice of residents is at the forefront of the vision. The direct needs of residents are present and their desires for the future are clearly laid out. This serves as the foundation for the vision. Secondly, there are specific metrics and goals included in the vision. In the Bill of Rights, we see broader mutual agreements for how CRHA and the City should treat public housing residents. There were limited ways to account for how they are realized or interpreted. By defining standards (rent burden, AMI, building height, materiality), public housing residents are placing expectations, which they can then measure and hold the institutions accountable. There is also a realization of the complexity of the redevelopment process and in doing so the opportunity for learning. Much like the internship program, visits to sites, or the attendance at conferences, redevelopment is a consciousness raising initiative to understand how construction, land, and financing

functions in a city of Charlottesvilles scale. The process produces choices and relationships that challenge and manifest the values that residents have set. Lastly, we can see PHAR addressing the broader theories, ideas, and practices that have come to define redevelopment. While mixed income redevelopment has been used in relation to alleviating concentrated poverty and as a way to address the chronic underfunding of affordable housing, PHAR has set the terms for how that term is understood and realized. In doing so, they are making sure it aligns with their vision for the future.[1]

Conclusion

On multiple occasions, both Joy and Audrey have shared the perceptions that they encounter when attending meetings with government officials and developers. They are looked down upon and talked at like they do not know anything. When this came forward in the oral histories, they both shared the ways that society's perception of low income people are a manifestation of a complicated relationship with class and hierarchy. They shared about what it meant to not only be a Black woman, but a dark Black woman in these rooms. Of the way that they experience intersectionality and in-betweeness regularly. Though as Audrey said, “They thought they were coming to talk to a bunch of dumb people and they soon find out that we are smarter than they are (Oliver, 2021) .”

The power that public housing residents and PHAR have created and hold in Charlottesville is in many ways multimodal. It works in relationships to federal and local policies. HUD policy sets parameters for how engagement is defined, but then it is left to interpretation. This allows the public housing residents to exploit this opportunity and in

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doing so challenges how it is realized. They also hold local authorities accountable. When policies are not followed it gives residents an opportunity to make sure they are. Public housing residents contend with how they are made eligible and legible in the faces of the institutions that have control over them. In Charlottesville this has produced an ongoing space for contentions with these institutions. Power becomes prevalent in the efforts to rebuild after the destruction of neighborhoods by urban renewal. Social infrastructures are remade that allow power to be generated for the well-being of the community. Education plays a primarily role in consciousness raising and understanding the lineages of power. This then serves as a foundation for the practice of power, the courage to hold institutions accountable. Power is elicited by setting standards and making sure residents are at each and every decision making table. Finally, power is found in relationships that fill gaps in knowledge and develop solidarity.

We can see PHAR as residing in a long tradition of dual power, which not only seeks to realize alternate means of power, but challenges how power is used to dominate and control. In doing so they are a part of a long history of Black struggle, a form of infrastructure that seeks agency and autonomy. This primarily takes place out of sight of the status quo, in the shadows, but then comes into the public to demand a new vision, a new way forward. In PHAR, we can see an ongoing entanglement with these forms of power. One which is leaving a significant imprint on the future of the City.

Chapter 6 - Infrastructures of Care - Laughter, Love and Joy

In the previous chapters, I have tried to disentangle the overlapping tensions and pressures that public housing residents encounter via the various institutions that impact their lives. This was an opportunity for sharing the beauty and multiplicity of answers they have developed in response. Yet, this does not take into account a much deeper level of commitment and connection that drives their work and its outcomes. There are the invisible, less tangible aspects of PHAR work that cannot be surmised in a relationship to federal policy, narratives of poverty, and the decay of buildings not meant to be homes. Yet, it is something that Joy, Audrey, Sonia, Alice, and Mary exude. It is their everyday being.

I would describe these as infrastructures of care. They are the glue that holds the community together. They can be seen in the minute interactions that sustain life when it can feel so treacherous. This can be a wave from a porch and the required response. “Hey Ms. Mary.” A kind of call and response that acknowledges each other's presence. This can be someone stopping in at the Westhaven Recreation Center office to ask Joy a question or request help with a problem they are having. Instead of having a specifically political outcome or driven by an expressed problem, they are interactions of connection. If we return to my original framing of social infrastructure, they are the everyday encounters that provide meaning to what can be random events, a foundation of relationship that can either remain impersonal or lead to a higher level of solidarity.

It is important to push this conception a bit further. There is more to an infrastructure of care beyond just the social connections that define community. This resides in the affective, emotional ethos of the work of public housing activists and

advocates. It is in the way that public housing residents laugh together. The way that Joy and Audrey tease each other, which is always a sign of their admiration for each other, but also a playful way of challenging each other when there are disagreements. It is the way that the community keeps an eye open for its children by teaching them values that the community holds and begin the first line of safety. These are moments of feeling and long held commitment that remain below the surface. As someone who is not a public housing resident, I find it hard to describe, but I know they are there.

Over the next few pages, I want to explore how infrastructures of care have come forward in the voices of residents. How threads like love, joy, laughter have played a role in allowing public housing residents to achieve what they have in light of all that is set against them. I want to place these in relation to broader conversations about the role that affective and emotion have been used and understood in Black organizing.

This is also an ode to the leadership of Black women and their commitment to sustain and fight for their communities. There is a tradition, a lineage in each community. In the Charlottesville public housing community presently, this is presently held by Joy and Audrey. Others have come before and others will take up the mantle in the future. Some play more public roles. While others work behind the scenes. All are vital to hold the community together and allow it to thrive.

Care as an infrastructure

Care is bountiful in public housing. It resides in the gaps of access to services and resources when residents turn to each other. It is present in an elder sitting on a stoop watching as children run by. This happens at varying moments, from the smallest private interaction to the biggest public display. It is both an action, something one does,

and a presence, an overarching concern that is realized through a watchful eye. Care displays and supports a range of relationship development that underlines the deepest of commitment to community.

In the fall of 2015, Holly Edwards invited several people, a mix of public housing supporters, PHAR staff, and elected officials, including me, to participate in a regular event that she organized at several of the public housing sites in Charlottesville. Over the course of several weeks, rotating from one site to the next, a group would show up early in the morning to send the kids off to school. This included a donut and juice that would give them a little sustenance and some sweetness to begin the day. The group would arrive early at 6:30am, get the supplies ready, and prepare for the kids to emerge from their apartments to walk to the bus stop for a 7am pick up. For those that knew people at the site, we would lightly knock on the door of an apartment to let them know. Joy and others would go to the houses of friends to check in. Most parents would come to the door in their pajamas, not totally ready for the start of the day, some a bit groggy from working a late shift. Children would be putting on clothes and getting their backpacks ready. Slowly the kids would emerge. Once they knew a treat was outside, several of the kids came out quickly. Others came out the door late. With the bus about to depart, we would run with them, placing a snack in hand, to get off to school. A few of the mothers would eventually come out, wrapped in robes, maybe a coffee in hand, to wave the kids off and talk.

This is an example of care that functions on multiple levels. One, it is a surprise, a gift that was not necessarily expected. Care is not always tangibly present, but manifests itself in moments of gratitude and appreciation, showing that it is there, even

when it feels it may not be. In this case, children are the main receiver of the gift, but the parents also witness the gesture of kindness to their kids. So, there is the act and then what it produces beyond that act. Care ripples out amongst people. It is a moment of sweetness that works both at the level of the body and the mind.

Care also supports connection. For the children, it is a brief encounter with a group of public housing members, community organizers, and elected officials. Over the exchange of a donut and a juice, there is an opportunity to see and recognize each other that then can be built upon. You get to know each other's names and have some small talk. Ask how school is going. What is their favorite subject? That would later be reinforced at a meeting, seeing each other at an after school program, or just crossing paths on the sidewalk. The same takes place with the parents. An introduction can be made. You learn a bit about each other's lives. Parents can ask a city council member about an issue they are encountering, check in with other public housing residents, share some tidbit of information about something that has been going on, and laugh about how early it is. All of which ends with a thanks and a goal to reconnect soon.

Westhaven Day has similar care effects. Held the first Saturday in August, the event is a block party that celebrates the public housing community, places attention on public housing in Charlottesville, and builds connections with various groups in Charlottesville. Over the day, tents line Hardy Drive with various non profits handing out trinkets, rides and competitions for the children, people eat together, and residents dance and play music. This is care at the level of the community, functioning similarly to the morning school send off, but also providing care in other ways. One way the event provides care is to create a connection to the history of block parties in the 10th and

Page neighborhood. Throughout, the oral histories we heard from Alice, Audrey, and Sonia about the way that the Black community would come together at neighborhood parties. Multiple homes would open up for parents to meet and talk. While kids would play in the front yards. They would then travel from block to block, house to house eating food and being together. With displacement and sale of homes, the social infrastructure that made this possible has shifted. Westhaven Day being one of a few public examples of communities coming together that connect back to this history.

Westhaven Day also works to overcome distances that separate and segregate. Care is realized by challenging narratives of poverty by inviting the broader community to the neighborhood. Instead of public housing being “over there”, hidden, it becomes accessible and present as a thriving community. In doing so, it dispels the myths that are so pervasive nationally about decay and crime. PHAR also uses the event as a platform for building relationships between residents and community non-profits that might serve their needs. When much of the interactions that take place between organizations and residents happen in crisis or from a distance, the event provides a way to get to know who is behind these services and allow residents to better understand what they do, and how they might access them.

Finally, a vital aspect of Westhaven Community Day is how it creates ways for people to celebrate and come together. This is most prevalent by eating and celebrating together. Public Housing residents take control of the mic to share a story, sing, or DJ, bringing their culture to the forefront of the festivities. Care is emergent in their creativity and cultural vibrancy. A collective lunch is provided by local Black owned caterers that have been serving the community for years. People line up, serve food,

and stack their plates up to eat together. It is present in the exchange of greetings while you wait in line, a thanks for scooping some greens onto a plate, or holding a plate for a child, the act of coming together around food creates opportunities for treating each other as community.

Care also works on the individual level. Joy Johnson is a vital resource for the community as a whole. While having played multiple roles from public housing resident to mother, PHAR organizer to CRHA administrator, she is as a trusted confidant that many people turn to for advice negotiating the litany of issues and needs that arise for public housing residents. Over the short time that we spent at the Westhaven Recreation Center, there was an ongoing stream of people stopping in and phone calls that ranged from minor housing fixes to important legal matters, health care needs to just needing someone to talk to. Joy is an important example of the unpaid work Black women provide to produce and reproduce life. While it is hard to even comprehend the level of support that she, and others provide, care at this level is about being an advocate and a resource. Joy is a resource based on her knowledge of the various institutions that she has come into contact with and the wealth of relationships that she can call upon for residents. She has spoken extensively about helping residents negotiate their rental agreements or other administrative systems with CRHA. Based on her knowledge of federal policy, the way rent is administered, and direct experience with the housing authority, she brings an understanding of the standards and rights that residents have when it comes to their rent payments. She can both empathize with those that are trying to understand what can be an arcane process and share the logic

that underscores how the rent came to be what it is. She then puts residents in contact with those that will support them in getting the issue corrected.

She also is extremely adept at providing care in the form of advocacy. Based on her long engagement with affordable housing at local, state, and federal levels, she understands the language and rhythms of policy. In doing so, Joy can be present at the plethora of meetings where decisions are being made that impact the lives of residents. As I noted in a previous chapter, this is not just a role for her alone. Joy is continually providing opportunities for residents to voice their concerns directly, but including them in public meetings. Care as advocacy is not only her speaking, but providing pathways for others to speak and recognize the power of their voice.

In theorizing about the economic role of Black women, Nina Banks has argued for a greater need to understand how the unpaid, collective work of racialized women supports public goods and services. While much of this work is seen as political, she argues that we must acknowledge it as economic, filling needs that are externalized by the state and the firm (Banks, 2020). She continues by positioning the community as the site of this labor. A site that for the most part also hasn't been considered academically as a space of production/reproduction. In academic dialogue, Banks argues that Black women are doubly overlooked. In the case of public housing organizing in Charlottesville, we can see the agency and action of Black women as they work at individual and collective levels to provide for their community. Care grounds this work as a commitment to community, functioning to build relationships, access resources, replicate historical traditions, and provide information to realize collective well-being.

Laughter as an Infrastructure

Much of the everyday work of public housing organizing and PHAR falls into the categories of community building, mobilization, and responding to direct needs. But there is a part of their work that is contagious, that draws you in, and is easily shared. That is their laughter. Whether the resonance that comes from within Joy, the way that you see it in Audrey's face before you hear it, or the bodily response of Alice as she leans back to project into space, laughter is never very far away. It permeates the seriousness of the moment. Interjects into important conversations. In doing so, it brings people together, creates a moment of connection that is beyond the logic of the mind, more bodily and acoustic. Individual and collective at the same time.

Laughter provides a potent commentary on the relationship that public housing residents have with institutions of power in Charlottesville. There are countless times where a quick aside about a city council member, a developer, or an experience with CRHA produces a collective response. There are the minor quips that pop up into conversations about the continued difficulties that residents experience. "Some things will never change." Followed quickly by the sarcastic response, "You mean that is still happening." Heads begin to shake and laughter wells up from everyone. References are made about a city council member who thinks a little too highly of themselves or acts like they know everything. Then there is always a belief that public housing residents could do a better job at being the city manager. These comparisons, mixed with humor, rework the hierarchies that residents experience, imagining themselves as alternatives. Beyond these examples, public housing residents tell rich, humorful stories

about the ways they experience and undermine the absurdities they encounter. Mary talked about a nursing attendant job where she could not talk to the patients. Believing that this dehumanized those in need of care, she shared how she playfully and skillfully challenged her supervisor. These tongue in cheek recountings are purposefully told to both elicit laughter and undermine power of authority.

Writing in 1978, Levine understood humor as a mechanism for not only understanding the situations but muting the effect it had on Black communities (Levine, 1978). Laughter provided a means to release feelings. While humor "asserted invincibility" when one had little to no control. This he saw as a means for exerting a degree of control over their environment. Laughter was a bodily response to the absurdity of that control, both an outward expression and an inward attendance to daily experiences. Writing about poverty in Brazil, Goldstein describes how laughter provides ways of seeing cracks in systems of domination. Doing so through more subtle means, laughter situates and contests one position in the world. Or as Scott describes, they are hidden transcripts, modes of diversion that reside outside of the eye of the powerful, but challenge hegemonic power dynamics.

Laughter is also a means for connection. Writing in the early 1900's, Bergson described laughter as "standing in the need of an echo to perpetuate it" (Bergson, 1914). In the case of public housing residents this is both a function of shared histories and embodied experiences. The telling of community history creates the opportunity to find shared experiences, expose moments of collective remembering which produces laughter. An example of how shared histories produced laughter emerged when both Alice and Sonia, separately, but collectively remembered Ms. Hattie Hearst. Ms. Hattie

lived on South Page Street and happened to own an old blue car. The car was big with fins. Ms Hattie loved to drive this car all around. As both Alice and Sonia shared, she drove at astonishing speeds. So much so that the community began to call her ‘bat woman’ for the car and velocity of her driving reminded them of the old Batman televisions shows. For Sonia, Ms Hattie was a regular presence as she took care of her when her grandparents went out. They once drove to Waynesboro, slowly creeping up Afton Mountain, but once over the ridge, it was full speed. So much so that Sonia warned, “You better not step off the sidewalk.” Both these tellings brought forward laughter. Ms. Hattie was something special, something that everyone knew about and can find humor in.

Sonia also told a story of once becoming the laughing stock of the neighborhood at Riverside. Early one morning, she sleepily walked the trash out to the dumpster. Wrapped in a robe, not paying much mind to what was going on around her. When she heard a little boy scream. She looked up to see two bucks coming toward her from the woods. “The trash can fell. I rolled over the trash can and went into the house, making sure I was alright (Bell, 2021).” A few minutes later she took her son out to put him on the bus. “All the kids were looking at me. Laughing.” The little boy had recorded it. “So for a while, I was the joke of Riverside.”

Both of these tellings and the immediate response of laughter produces a communal consciousness and a collective solidarity. These and others extend the shared experience of public housing beyond just stories of struggle, to include the everyday humor of life. In doing so they are transformative. They create new pathways of what is normal that allow public housing residents to laugh about others and

themselves. Levine describes how humor is an interactive process that builds a sense of commonality of experience and situation (Levine, 1978). Remembering Ms. Hattie or the trip to the trash is a platform for building these connections. Small moments that link people together and humanize them. As Butler notes, laughter provides ways to share values or establish patterns of conduct that move beyond the struggles that public housing residents face (Butler, 2015). What Imani Perry calls a testimony that refused the terms of our degradation (Perry, 2020).

It is important to not just conceptually theorize the impact that laughter has on the lives of public housing residents. We have to also recognize it as an embodied experience. It is felt and experienced internally. It is a change of breathing. A heaving of the chest. A shift in our facial expressions. Activating neural networks that magnify positive emotional expressions (Scott et al, 2014). When done collectively it is a syncing of individual rhythms of hearts and minds. What Kohler describes as a shared form of breathing (Kohler, 2008). Laugher then becomes a social act that links these emotional and physical moments between each other. In doing so becoming an affective and social infrastructure that public housing residents enact to be marvelous.

Love

Love is also another important affective infrastructure that guides the work of PHAR and public housing organizing in Charlottesville. When using the term “love” in this case, I am focusing on the commitment that organizers have to their community. It is that intense feeling of affection that then manifests in the multitude of ways one can express love. These reinforce connections, promote positive emotional and mental

states. Love can be described as a form of gifting. A form of enjoyment that both given and received cultivates positive externalities. In discussing ways of moving beyond domination, Oliver describes love as a way of movement toward each other. “I love to you (Oliver, 2001).” This does not replicate the hierarchies of society, becoming an economy of exchange that flattens the “psychic depth” of the meaning we have for each other. Instead is an affirmation of our relationship to the world and other people. It is about the fullness of being for both the lover and the loved. Love is a way of stepping into the voids that others encounter and filling them with support. It results in validating the meaning that we have for each other.

These moments, though ephemeral and fleeting, abound in the stories and interactions that came forward in talking with public housing residents through the research. There is never a specific statement of “I love you.” More, it is what is not spoken, coming forward in actions that reinforce the commitments they have to each other. In some cases, love is manifested by teasing or calling each other out, holding each other accountable to the community and one another.

The first interview that the oral history team did together brought love to the forefront of our work. At the time, the group was still getting acquainted with what it meant to listen and ask questions in ways that brought out the fullness of public housing residents’ lives. At the time we had a script and questions that felt robotic. Though when Audrey kicked off our interview with Joy, she immediately created a space of love that grounded the depth of our commitments to each other and the project as a whole.

> “We are interviewing Ms. Joy Johnson, and I first want to just say before we talk about the conversations, I just want to say I want to thank you for allowing me to do this project. It means a lot. And then I thought about the oral history and it just

took me back to our day when we met and how long we've been friends. And do you know how many years it's been?”

“I don't know.”

“It's been a good 50 years, it's been a good 50 years. Yeah, we met in junior high school, yeah, we were about 15 years old and I am now 66 and you're 64.”

“65. I'm one year behind.”

“You, behind me. But I couldn't remember exactly when your birthday is. But yeah, it made me think about that and then I thought about the power of these conversations. I love this. I love this, you know, I love it.”

Audrey is doing several key things in these few words. First, she is grounding herself in the meaning and commitment she has for the oral histories as an extension of her work with PHAR. For her, this is more than simply collecting and listening to the knowledge of public housing residents, but a piece of a much longer support for the lives of public housing residents. It is an expression of her love for the community and creating a platform where these voices can be heard. Secondly, she is solidifying her relationships with Joy. In acknowledging that they have known each other for over 50 years, she is reinforcing the meaning and depth of that relationship. The conversation that follows is something resting on that friendship and the vast amount of experiences they have shared together. Lastly, I would also note that her expression of love is shared with the room. By stating her commitment to both Joy and this project, she is creating an opportunity for others to share. It is an invitation to be a part of the connections that have led her to this moment.

We also have to recognize the way that love is expressed in the support of the community. Throughout the many stories and documents, there are ongoing efforts that

illustrate love in either immediate or long term needs, even just moments of care. An ongoing thread throughout this all is the love expressed toward the children that live in public housing. By extension this included their parents. Documents in the archive show continued work to provide, augment and advocate for children.

In surveys of residents participating in the Westhaven Tenants Association, collected in the early 1990's about community needs, all responses see the need for greater support of youth programs, childcare, and educational support. (PHAR Archive) In response, the WTA organizes a variety of programs and events for children at the Westhaven Rec Center including parties, puppet shows, youth nights and trips to UVA Women's basketball games. An annual back to school jubilee started in the early 1990's and that continued as a Youth school night. In 1997, a day care committee was formed to begin the process of studying and planning for the day care at Westhaven. In parallel, a Parent Help committee is formed to provide parents with greater information about their schools, but also improve their engagement with teachers and staff. Communication between the school superintendent and public housing organizers, present an ongoing dialogue. All of this is being informed by reports about the ways that the educational system is failing Black children. Parents are reviewing research from the Brookings Institute, the Department of Education's Bureau on Education Research, and Just Children Program to better understand how they can advocate and support their children. Dating back to 1976, grants are being pursued from HUD and the Department of Education to provide greater resources to children and parents. All of this can be seen as a level of concern and commitment that public housing children have every resource they need. Mary and Audrey shared in their interviews of the importance of

training the younger generation. “We have really, really, really smart children these days, especially in public housing. The kids are so knowledgeable about everything. I think that we have to start teaching them at a very young age because they're very smart, they're ready for it (Oliver, 2021).”

While there are these more official, organizationally driven examples of the love and care that public housing residents have for their children, there are the less visible interactions. This included the many conversations that happen between adults and kids in the neighborhood. Joy is a master of these. From a simple, “Where you heading” to a “What you up to” or a “How’s your mama doing.” These are the temperature checks of the community, mostly amounting to a shrug of the shoulder or a simple “I’m good.” But, they continue to reinforce that people are looking out for each other, keeping an eye open. It is these exact interactions that many of the people spoke have concerns about. With the constant change and upheaval in public housing, the ability to make these connections has become harder and harder. Elders spoke of how as a child if they were seen doing something wrong it was quickly communicated to their parents. The network of community was strong then. This is something they worry about now. Eyes on the streets imbued with love are being replaced by cameras of policing or nothing at all.

Love has also been realized via informal community childcare. A 2021 survey by the Bipartisan Policy Center on Childcare and Black Working Family showed a greater need for childcare options, that parents rely on family for childcare, and the need for greater federal support (Gonzalez and Smith, 2021). This is all the more serious for public housing mothers that are required to hold employment to receive both housing and other benefits. Black women have difficulties balancing the needs of their children

and working jobs that require them to be away from home. Many are only able to access work that takes place over night. They have to find ways either through family or friends to watch their child. Audrey shared how over two years, she provided childcare for a group of mothers in public housing under these circumstances. They all had to maintain employment, but were only able to get hours during the evening. They would drop their children off in the evening and then pick them up in the morning. Instead of getting their children at 2 or 3am in the morning, Audrey would let them stay until 7 or 8am, allowing the children to get a full night's rest. While the mothers could get a few hours of sleep before picking up the children.

Writing in 2006, bell hooks described love as a practice of freedom. Without love, she argued that our ability to liberate ourselves from oppression and domination was doomed. It was only through an ethic of love that we can find collective transformation that values our full selves. "I share the belief and the conviction that is in choosing love, and beginning with love as the ethical foundation for politics, that we are best positioned to transform society in ways that enhance the collective good (hooks, 2006)." Public housing residents know this practice well. The connections they hold, the support they have for each other is based on a foundation of love. This is realized in both the smallness of exchange and broadest visions. Love serves to both hold up and enable, residing below the surface, binding people together, humanizing our struggles. In doing so it serves as an infrastructure of hope and healing.

Joy as an Infrastructure

At one of the ongoing meetings she attends, a more than daily occurrence, Joy Johnson was asked to introduce herself and tell a little bit about herself. When one

would have typically just stated their name and the organization they were representing, in this case, she went a bit further. “Hello, my name is Joy Johnson. I am with PHAR and CRHA. Though, while my name is Joy, I also would say that joy is a big part of what I want to bring to my community and the world. It is more than just a name, it is who I am and what I do.” Following Joy’s lead, it is important to consider joy as a vital infrastructure that has supported public housing organizing, but also a broader response to Black struggle. So where is joy found and how is it enacted?

When life is so deeply intertwined with the struggles of poverty and systems that dehumanize, joy as an identity is a radical act. This reinforces Crenshaw’s description of the multiplying effects of intersectionality. Harm is compounded by harm. So to live with joy, to internalize one’s humanity, to move beyond these multiplying effects is to assert your agency. Joy is then a desire to live life outside of the constraints placed upon you. It removes the power of the oppressor.

Black feminist authors have engaged with joy on multiple levels. Zadie Smith compares joy to pleasure. In doing so she teases out a difficult personal relationship with joy. Seeing it as something difficult to manage, she locates joy in the sublime, the transcendent. Joy is not something that simply happens but you become joy, entering into it and then disappearing. Joy is not just something that happens. Moreover, it is something that must be sought out and found. Joy is an emotion that is built up to. But when it is found, it is all consuming. Imani Perry considers joy in a less linear path. Joy is not the culmination of pleasure or the transcendence of an experience, but is an emotion that exists through pain. And yet, not reducible to it. “Blackness is an immense and defiant joy (Perry, 2020).” Joy is found in living as a form of protest.

In the stories of public housing elders, joy was described in both personal and public ways. As an avid roller skater in her youth, Audrey talked about the exhilaration of gliding down the streets. Then later joining up with friends to skate at Carver Recreation Center in Charlottesville. Similarly, she shared about heading downtown to get ice cream. “We used to go to Timberlake’s all the time.” Even though Timberlake’s was an all white store, she remembered how her mother and her aunt would take the bus downtown to get ice cream. “They would go to town and they got to Timberlakes, because Timberlake's used to make really good homemade ice cream. We loved that ice cream and we always went in there and got it (Oliver, 2021).”

This extended to a story that Audrey tells often of going to the Paramount Theatre to see the movies. “We used to go to the Paramount Theatre on the weekends. If you had six RC bottle tops you could go to the movie. But back then, the white people were downstairs and the black people had to go upstairs.” She shared how her parents downplayed these differences, wanting to “move through the community just like normal people.” She remembered seeing these differences, but not giving them the power to control them. But as the movie started they would assert their joy by pouring soda and throwing popcorn down on the white audience below. “You know, we had a good time.”

Another act of living joy is a ritual that takes place every Thanksgiving. After the festivities of eating and being together with family, the community comes together behind Venable School for the Turkey Bowl. Everyone from the community gathers for a game of football. It is a convening of community connections. Sonia and Audrey talked about how this event brought people that had not seen each other in 10, 15 or even 20 years. “You are going to see people that you haven’t seen and were going to have a

good time." Joy is manifested through connection, reasserting what makes a community whole.

Joy also has a geography in Charlottesville. Many of the memories of Vinegar Hill refer back to the neighborhood as a site of joy. Multiple tellers remembered going to the Greek restaurant on Main St. for the most delicious hot dogs. You could play pool, buy a pair of new shoes, or go to the barbershop. "The colored people had their juke joints and the music was jumping and children sitting out there listening to music, even creating their own music (Maybelle, 2022)." Then there were the social clubs along Market street, some of which are still there. Mary talked about dancing as a part of a local television show. "Everything from there down was all Black owned and if you want to party that was where you went (Washington, 2022)." While much attention is given to the social and economic destruction that took place with the removal of Vinegar Hill via urban renewal, I would argue that the space was just as important as a site of joy for the Black community. Once it was removed, other sites began to spring up to gather and seek joy. The Brinwanna Club on 29, the Pink Panther Club and the Ebony Social Club became new sites of joy.

Public housing residents create geographies of joy both within and outside public housing. With many of the residents experiencing the tragedy of facing homelessness, public housing itself can be a site of joy. We heard stories of crisis, because of abuse or losing an apartment, and how housing provided a platform for rebuilding their lives. 'The first emotion that I had when moving into public housing at South First was elation. You know, I was delighted to have a place to call my own, to have shelter for my children.

Somewhere where I could build a life (Emily, 2022).” Joy comes in response to finding stability.

Then there are the ways that joy is realized in both events and smaller interactions. Pete Carey told of the regular block parties that took place on Hardy drive that blocked off the street or took place in the Westhaven Recreation Center. Along with his Uncle, they would organize regular events for kids and parents to celebrate. This built on the historic block parties that took place in the 10th and Page, Venable, and Grady neighborhoods, which is now taken up by the Westhaven Community Day. These similar geographies are seen along the front porches of residents. Whether the banana trees that grow outside Joy’s apartment, the decorations that Audrey has outside her door, Ms. Betty’s plants, or the Black Lives Matter signs that Ms. Rosia has on her porch, these are all expressions of joy that permeate the social infrastructures of the community.

Focusing on the politics of Black joy, Stewart contextualizes joy in the south, describing how Black joy has been used to reinforce racial hierarchies and manifest agency. She argues that joy is not simply an emotional experience, but has been packaged for oppression. In line with Cedric Robinson, she discusses how it has been used to flattening societies' understanding of how joy is seen and understood in Black communities. This is realized in narratives of nostalgia that surround slavery tourism and were used to undermine the politics of the civil right movement. Placing the writing of Zora Neal Hurston within a Neo-Abolitionist framework, she argues for a politics of Black joy that functions politically, analytically, and aesthetically to support

self-determination, intragroup collectivity, and broaden the scope of cultural experiences (Stewart, 2021).

In Charlottesville, where we continued to see a whittling down of spaces for Black joy, public housing residents are continually asserting their agency to create joy both within the places they live and their own lives. Where once neighborhoods and parks served to support and manifest Black joy, now defined more by their exchange value, public housing residents make themselves present in ways that seek joy. In the connections that are developed when they meet, they share joy. In their own personal lives, they set aside time for joy to be present.

In considering the erotic, Audrey Lorde talks about the capacity of joy. Joy is something that stretches the body. It is a reminder of the capability of feeling beyond the boundaries that seek to define us. In doing so it produces a demand for our experiences and ourselves that moves beyond suffering and self-negation. Joy allows us to conceive and feel what is not possible. In doing so it is a vital source of our creativity. This is at the core of what Joy means when she says that she is both joy and seeks joy. She is vocalizing and manifesting the importance of joy for both herself and her community. This defines a space for joy to be present, to be forefronted. In doing so, it denies the hold the poverty and policy have over public housing residents, which then provides a means to realize the change they want to see in the world.

Conclusion

When we spoke with Pete Carey, he painted a picture of the many places and events that sought out joy, laughter, and love. As a musician, he played a role in setting the stage for this to happen. His band would play all over town, from Washington Park

to Brinwana, the Cavalier to Westhaven, these were moments and spaces that brought people together to live beyond the daily struggles of life. As he shared, the group eventually began to lament about how those opportunities are not as prevalent any more. If they are, they are hidden. Sonia noted that the only time they get together now is when there is a big problem. In these instances, the community is forced to rally around each other to challenge a wrong decision or respond to a crisis. She shared how this was the case when the City closed the parks during the covid-19 pandemic. Even so, community members came out to be together, to have some fun, to connect. Public displays of care are so vital as they are magnifiers of love and joy.

Yet, when thinking about a city and a society that constrains or commodifies care, it is the private, intimate expressions of care that become important. These are the moments of Joy and Audrey teasing each other. They are an adult keeping an eye open for children as they move through the city or the sharing of childcare so that a mother can get to work. It is Joy's regular question of "How you doing, baby?" All of these are examples of how social and affective infrastructures come together to sustain community. When these communities are continually in cycles of uprooting and rerooting, it is the personal and private encounters that hold them together. In doing so the personal becomes a platform for the political (Cohambee, 1977). Care becomes an infrastructure of one humanity and presence.

The literature around infrastructure describes the way infrastructures perpetuate certain relationships between place, people, and feels. Infrastructure is a given in these instances. It is already in place, perpetuates a specific type of social encounters, and elicits a certain type of emotion. When considering love, laughter, and joy, I would argue

that we can see infrastructures as prefigurative. These are embodied expressions of values and practices that then provide the platform through which change can occur (Lightsey, 2017). These are everyday actions that cement a certain type of relationship, reinforce a solidarity between people, and develop a specific type of consciousness that resides outside of the narratives of poverty and logics of hierarchy. They are the foundation for a specific kind of power and politics to be realized. In the case of public housing organizing love, laughter, and joy are an infrastructure of the marvelous in that they move beyond the flattening of Black lives. They allow residents to live their truest selves both individually and collectively. This then builds culture, a way of being and connection, which has made a fertile space for challenging power relationships, but also inviting people into a broader movement that is contesting what both a city and a nation value.

Lastly, I want to lift up the role that Black women have played in these infrastructures. They are the advocates and truth speakers, the huggers and the consolers, the network and power that helps to sustain their community. Banks eloquently argue for acknowledging the unpaid labor that goes into playing these roles. What must be remembered is that Joy, Audrey, Sonia, Mary and Alice are the manifestation of care, of love, of laughter. In being so, they are the infrastructure. Though not just a vague, distanced description of people as infrastructure, but as real people. Black women are and have long been a vital infrastructure. I want to repeat their names to reinforce the point - Joy, Audrey, Sonia and Alice. They are part of a long tradition of holding each other close, bringing joy, and fighting for what their communities deserve.

Chapter 7 - Final Thoughts - A Conclusion

At the moment, infrastructure has come to the forefront of our consciousness in the United States in two ways. Much of this has focused on core infrastructural systems (transportation, water, and energy), built and expanded upon since the 1950's, that have started to crumble. Most of this infrastructure was developed for a different generation that had a different relationship with the environment and each other. In 2021 the federal government passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act which pledged $1.2 trillion dollars to not only revitalize these systems but to respond to ongoing concerns over access to clean water, electrical efficiency, and lowering greenhouse gas emissions. They were also focused on undoing the harms that many infrastructure projects had perpetuated. The language of environmental, racial, and economic justice framed these conversations.

In parallel, we can point to the crisis of infrastructure that took place during the initial stages (recognizing that for many this is still a reality) of the global covid-19 pandemic. The shutdown of the economic system would place people into even deeper precarity. A lack of income meant that many faced eviction. Concerns of interacting with people forced people to stay home and find alternatives to accessing food. The habits that our present social and physical infrastructure had to be reworked. Yet, communities filled these voids. Many started mutual aid initiatives that provided access to free food and supplies. Community production of resources revved up to make masks and other products that were needed. Funds were raised by communities to support the care of those that lived around them. Eventually governments and institutions, slow at first to

respond, would step back in. This I would argue has brought forward questions about the ultimate purpose and values that these systems and infrastructures provide.

As I described in my theoretical chapter, infrastructure has many roles. Physically it makes actions more efficient, allowing for resources, people and information to move quickly and succinctly. While at the same time reinforcing specific economic processes and social relations. Socially infrastructure parallels the physical, allowing connections that give life meaning and support community resilience. Affective infrastructure centers on the way that these systems make us feel, and in turn, how we feel is a foundation for how we engage and react to infrastructures. All of these tend to be normative, setting a process in place that then becomes the status quo physically, socially, and emotionally. In a world that is based in hierarchy, extraction, and domination, the question then becomes what future are we creating?

Acknowledging these ideas, I argue for an infrastructure of the marvelous, rooted in the lineage of the Black Radical tradition, specifically imbued with ideas emerging from AfroSurrealism and Afrofuturism movements. It has a temporal focus that links past and future to the present. It asks what is to become or what is possible but begins by recognizing what has been, which then perpetuates a clearer vision for what is now. It is also an infrastructure that is about re-engaging relationships. It forces the individual to contend with the way that economic and racial logics essentialize and determine. This raises a new consciousness of our thoughts and feelings that led to new ways of seeing ourselves in the world. By humanizing themselves, it allows them to humanize others, creating circuits of care and compassion. Finally, it allows us to have a different relationship with the world around us. Our perception of land and the environment

change. Instead of solely being commoditized, we find ourselves as stewards of the spaces we live in, creating geographies of joy and sustenance.

Public housing residents in Charlottesville, based in these traditions, are continually enacting infrastructures of the marvelous. They do this as a part of their everyday struggle contending multivalent forces of domination. Surrounded by narratives of poverty and policies that disinvestment, they take on agentic positions. They continually challenge and rewrite these narratives through their presence at public meetings and their advocacy of their needs, showing the vibrancy and dynamism of their communities. Policy, understood as definitive, opens opportunities for contestation. Small moments, a rent bill or how they are treated by a housing manager, become moments for residents to enact their own power. They then magnify these moments to hold federal, state, and local institutions accountable. Over time this has allowed them to set standards and expectations of how they are to be treated and included in the decisions that impact their lives. The Resident Bill of Rights and the Positive Vision for Redevelopment are proactive positions which have rippled throughout development discourse. Lastly, their laughter, realization of joy, and expression of love has developed infrastructures of care. These are articulations of their collective humanity, but also a deep commitment to their communities longevity.

The methodological approach to this research has also sought to build infrastructures of the marvelous. Instead of the extractive relation that institutions of higher education typically have with research subjects, this project sought to create a platform of solidarity that placed the research in the service of the community. Using the foundations of participatory action research, the project focused on creating horizontal

relationships across researchers and participants. In this case public housing residents helped to shape and guide the research process placing specific demands that came into conflict with traditional standards of research. We sought to overcome the subject/object power dynamic, valuing the subjectivity of all involved and creating an awareness of the flow of power through the research process. Oral histories provide not only a means of gathering information, by centering on the knowledge of public housing residents, but also then layer meaning through collaborative analysis and the interpretation of historical documents. Inclusive cycles of plan, act, observe, and reflect have deepened the data and opened new lines of inquiry, which has created momentum for ongoing, community driven research.

In one of the many conversations that I had with Joy about the meaning of public housing and the ongoing fight for affordable housing in Charlottesville, she discussed the stakes of PHAR's ongoing work. In the many battles, the need to be present at every meeting, she described the fight over public housing as a part of the broader reparations movement. While many consider reparations as a monetary demand for centuries of racial domination, colonization, and the free labor that built white wealth, Joy described it more in terms of having a home and place in Charlottesville which public housing provided. This is what most of her life has focused on, making sure that not only her and her family, but the many other Black families saw Charlottesville as a place they could build a home and a life. That there is a place here for low income people that values who they are and what they bring to the city. This is a form of Black placemaking. What Hunter, Pattillo, Robinson, and Taylor see as the way urban Black Americans create sites of endurance, belonging, and resistance (Hunter et Al, 2016). As

I have shown throughout this research, it is not about simply reifying the positionality that racial capitalism situated public housing residents, but show the way that they bring meaning, celebrate, and place demands on systems that have for so long inflicted pain and suffering. It is another opportunity to show how the daily actions not only manifest individual public housing residents' humanity, but how that has had an influence on Charlottesville as a city and beyond.

What is Missing/What is ahead

Briefly, I want to share a few thoughts on what I see as missing and where this research might lead in the future.

One of my core hopes for this research was to explore the boundaries of theory and practice, and in doing so explore modes of praxis that can help to inform the work that PHAR is doing. The PhD process as a whole fore-fronts theory, with 2 years of course work and the completion of exams meant to test your knowledge in certain areas. This provides a foundation upon which to interpret what we see in the research, grounding it. As I did not want to prefigure the knowledge that I was hearing in the community, my goal was to create a process where practice was a space of theoretical development. This was a significant reason for my commitment to using participatory action research as it collectively worked from practice to theory. A significant amount of emerging ideas came from cycles of plan, act, and reflect that are rooted in deep relationships. Participatory Action Research is a platform for ongoing dialogue and connection, which has significant implications for understanding public housing, the history of Black organizing in the south, and how social transformation is realized in the grassroots.

There are three areas that I feel need further research development. The first is an expansion of the chapter on infrastructures of care. As I am not a public housing resident nor am I Black, I found it extremely difficult to write and engage the ideas of joy, love, and laughter. Yet, from my experience working with my partners, I knew this was vital to the work they are doing. It was present every time we were together. I see it as even more vital than the ways in which public housing residents built power. It needs further consideration and conversation to tease out its meaning and importance in the work of PHAR.

Secondly, you cannot separate the relationship that people have to place. Over and over again, those we interviewed talked about the experience and meaning of neighborhoods that are rapidly changing in Charlottesville. Alice and Audrey can not only name the families in individual houses in neighborhoods but remember connections that these communities had together. They hold a rich understanding of the socio-cultural geography of the city that for the most part has been erased. An entire chapter on geography as social infrastructure will be saved for later development and publication.

Finally, I can see a greater need to place this work in relation to the significance of the broader social movement literature that has been developed. Whether the organizational concepts of Alinsky, the movement based ideas of non-violence and Black power, the contentious politics defined by Tilly, or the decentralized nature of contemporary organizing, I see opportunities for considering how PHAR's work relates to these histories and theories. In doing so, there is an opportunity to further strengthen their organizational infrastructure to continue their work.

A lifetime of research and collaboration has come out of this research. Efforts are already underway to move that forward in ways that keep the knowledge rooted in the community, but also create opportunities for public housing residents to lead that work. The first is a continued commitment to listening and sharing the knowledge of public housing residents through oral histories. This I see as a site for intergenerational exchange between public housing elders and a new generation of organizers. It is also an opportunity for community building and continuing the work to organize public housing residents. Further resources are needed to support training in technical and research skills, which can lead to longer term job opportunities and new pathways for community centered research. Partnerships are also being deepened and established with local and national institutions to provide resources and opportunities to be in dialogue with others around the US.

As much of this dissertation was focused on the infrastructures of public housing organizing in Charlottesville since the destruction of Vinegar Hill, the next chapter will tell the story of redevelopment. In the coming year we will be listening to the experience of residents as sites have been redeveloped, further delve into the work that made that possible, and acknowledge the challenges that have come forward. Being one of the few examples of public housing residents centered redevelopment in the US, it is vital to document and share how this has happened, especially with Westhaven being slated for redevelopment in the next five years. We will be creating both a book and podcast to share these experiences.

In parallel, we are beginning to develop a community archive that will not only preserve the many documents we have found, but a space for public housing residents

to explore their history and continue studying the legacies of public housing organizing. Initial efforts will center on gathering, preserving, and then digitizing the over 1700 documents that are presently held in the PHAR archive. We will then create both opportunities for residents to access these materials via events, exhibitions, and storytelling, but also add their own information to the archived. A dedicated space needs to be built to house the collection in public housing so that the knowledge remains in the community.

In terms of the dissertation there are two specific steps that I hope to take in the near future. The first focuses on reworking the individual chapters with the Oral History Team and then co-publish the articles in either academic or trade journals. Noting that much of what has been written is my own interpretation of how public housing residents organize, it is vital that we work to further align the ideas that I am putting forward with the experience of residents. Secondly, I see the framework and concepts that I have developed as a platform for a broader line of inquiry of the infrastructures being used by global movements to imagine, design, and realize alternative economic and political systems. As a participant and organizer in these movements, I want to expand on the conversations that I see taking place in Charlottesville and do broader comparative studies of how solidarity economies practices and ideas are being translated and developed around the world.

Crying and Laughing at the same time - A letter to Sonia

Dear Sonia

I recently listened back to an early recording we did together as a part of the oral history project. It was a part of one of the first “homework” projects we did together. Just a quick moment to share a memory, feel what it was like to record, and listen to our voices. I remember you coming into the Rec Center at Westhaven. A quick stop to say hi to Joy and then to sit down with me to get some help.

You were funny. You said, “Matt, let’s do this.” Though, I could tell you were a bit nervous. A bit uncertain. Though you were all in. Being in front of a microphone was something new. But, once we started you were as smooth as butter. Memories flowed so easily. Stored up from years of all that walking you did around town.

What I treasure about this moment is that I get to relive it. I get to hear your voice and hold it for a second. I get to listen to the amazing graveliness that you have. That rumble that came deep from within your body. Then I get to listen to the other interviews we did together, and hear you again and again. It’s like sitting with an old friend.

When you come to mind, I always remember your strength. I can’t even think about all that you were going through as you fought this disease. This evil that was taking you from us.
Even when you were coming from a doctor's appt, having just been through chemo, you would show up. Sapped of energy, you would always bring power, weight, and curiosity to what we were doing together. As someone that is always second guessing myself, it was your commitment to what we were doing together that helped drive us forward.

After you passed, I was dreading the next meeting with Gillet and Audrey. I knew that I would have to contend with the sorrow and grief that I was holding. That we all were holding. I remember sitting down, each of us stone faced. Holding back tears, which quickly flowed. Yet, the sadness quickly turned to laughter. In that moment we all found joy. The joy that you created in our lives.

Thank you for teaching me strength.
Thank you for sharing your commitment.
Thank you for bringing joy to me and us all.
You will always be missed.

Matthew

Sonia Bell, also known as Tweety, was a long time public housing resident, committed to her community on Riverside Drive. She was a leader on the PHAR board and a key figure in guiding the PHAR Oral History project forward. She passed on in early 2022 after a courageous fight with cancer.

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Chapter 7 - Final Thoughts - A Conclusion

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