Who Gets to Future?

Race, Representation, and Design Methods in Africatown

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DESIGN
USE
BUILD

Research Question

How do ***participatory design*** methods hold up against the effects of ***institutional racism***?

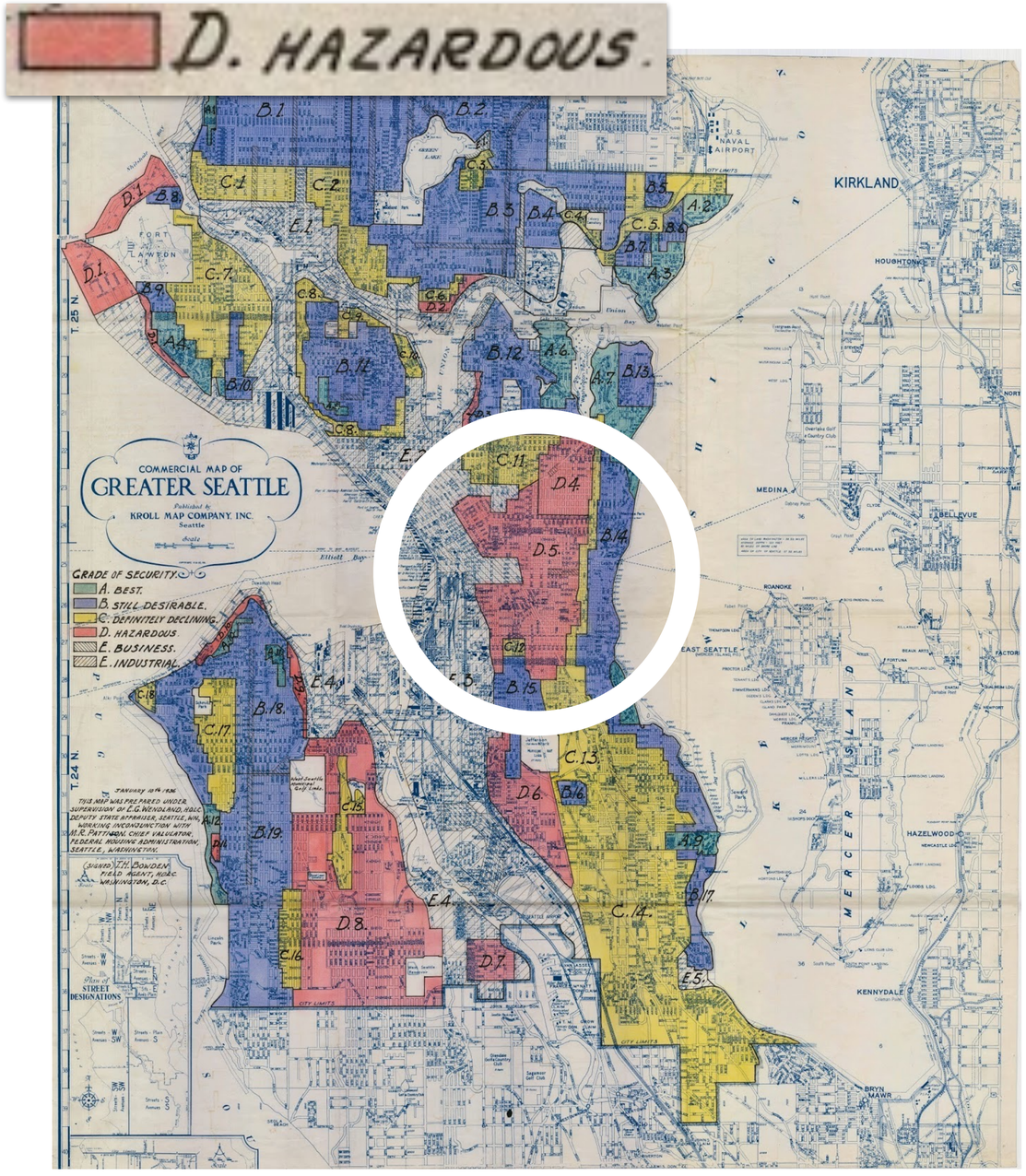
The Neighborhood Is Mostly Black. The Home Buyers Are Mostly White.

By EMILY BADGER, QUOCTRUNG BUI and ROBERT GEBELOFF APRIL 27, 2019

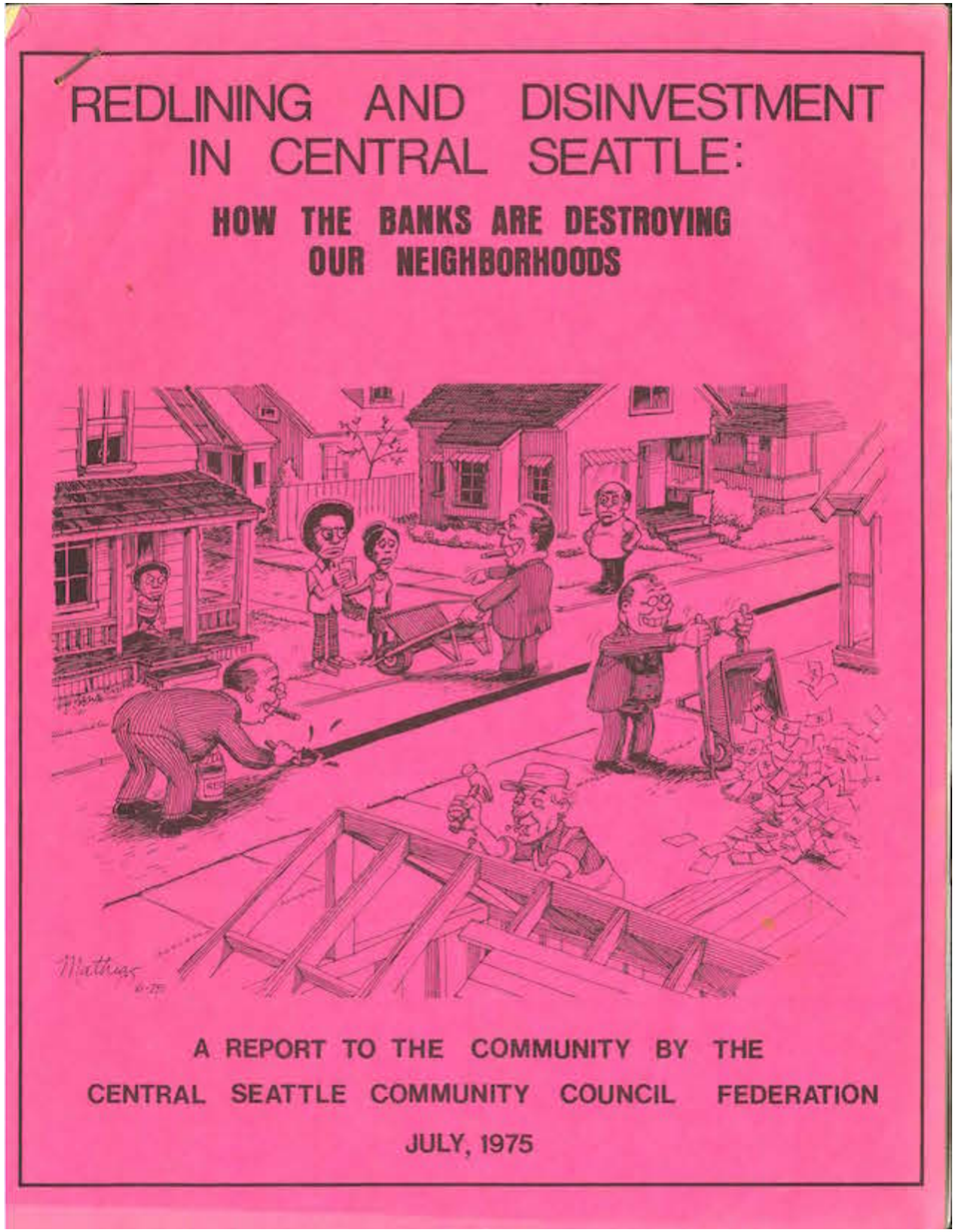
Nationwide, the arrival of white homeowners in places they've long avoided is jolting the economics of the land beneath everyone.

Newly built homes in the South Park neighborhood of Raleigh are now going for $460,000. As recently as three years ago, this land held a vacant house.
Logan R. Cyrus for The New York Times

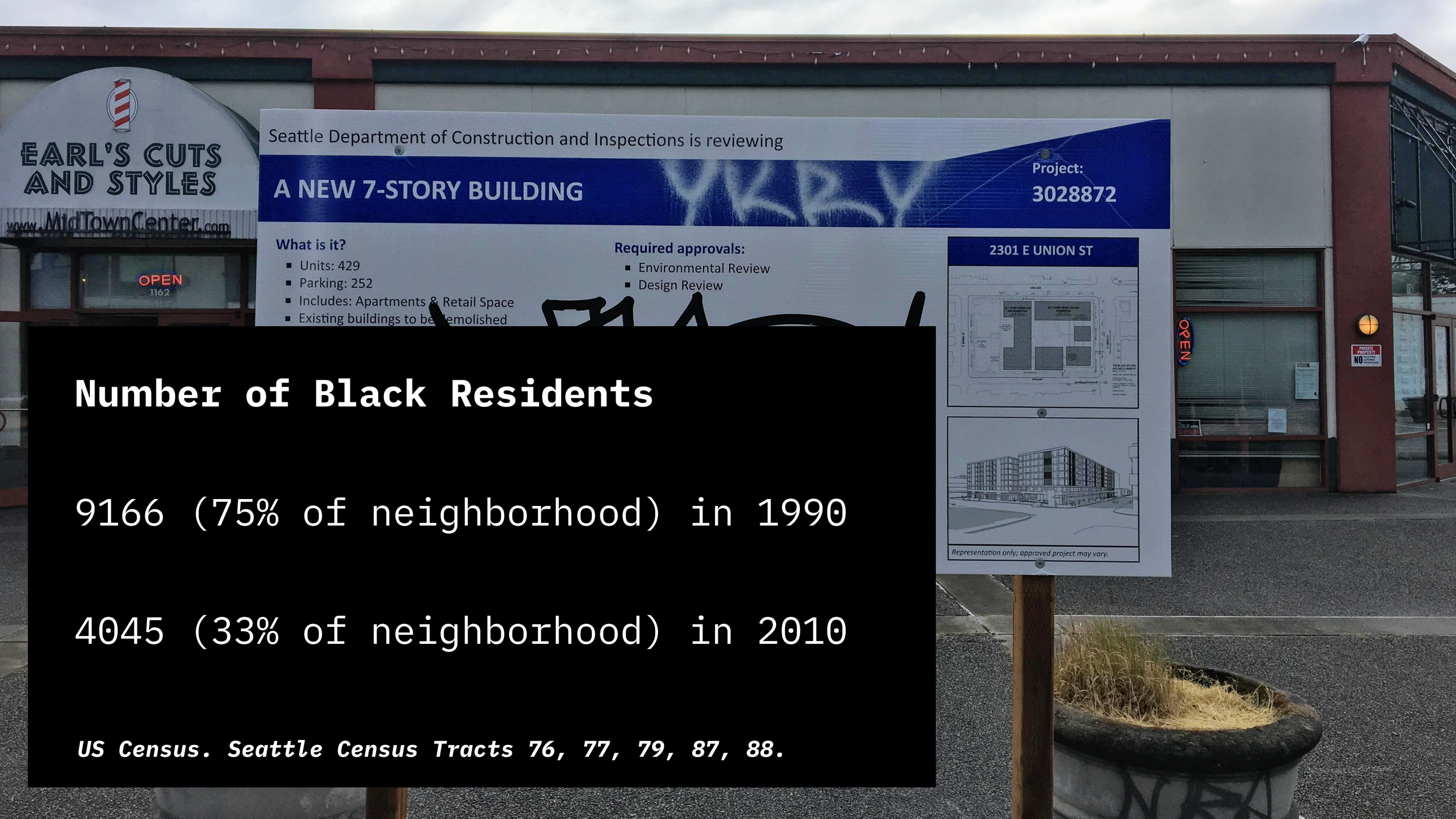
New York Times. April 27 2019.



Seattle Civil Rights Project, University of Washington.



Seattle Municipal Archive.



Number of Black Residents

9166 (75% of neighborhood) in 1990

4045 (33% of neighborhood) in 2010

US Census. Seattle Census Tracts 76, 77, 79, 87, 88.

Long Term Redevelopment

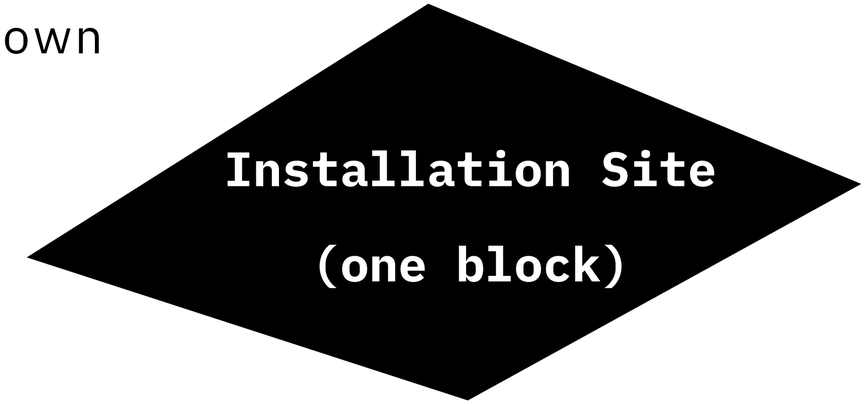
What: demolishing existing buildings on the installation site and building mixed-use retail and apartments.

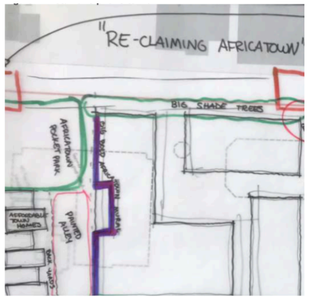
Who: the development firm, with input from Africatown

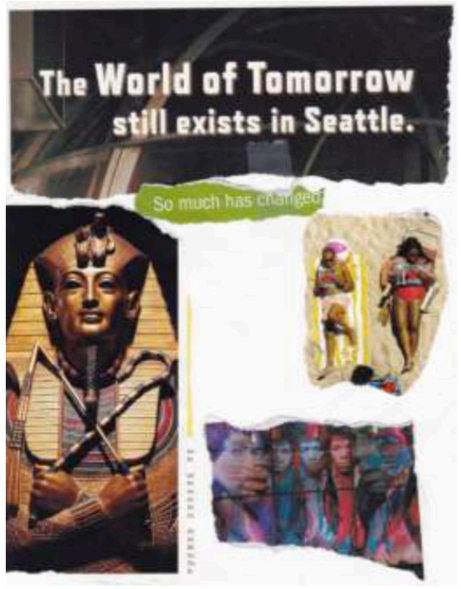
Short Term Installation

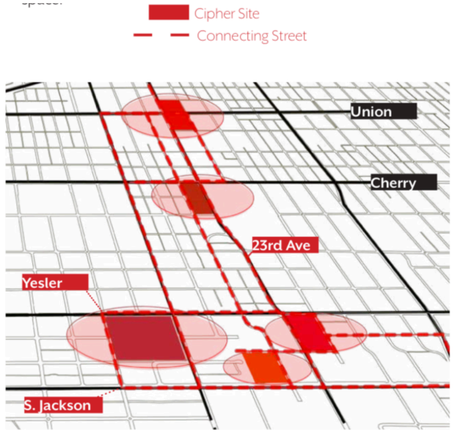
What: a public art installation focused on providing community space and bringing awareness of displacement to Black community

Who: Africatown: neighborhood members and grassroots organizations




"RE-CLAIMING AFRICATOWN"


The World of Tomorrow
still exists in Seattle.
So much has changed


Cipher Site
Connecting Street
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23rd Ave
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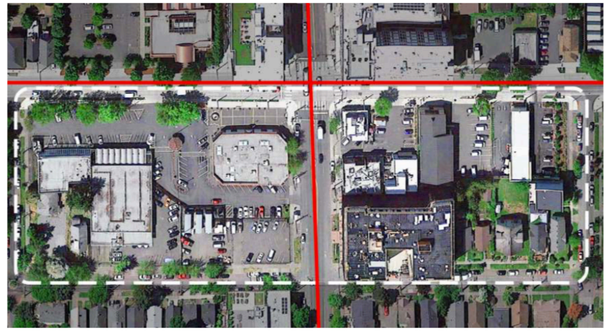
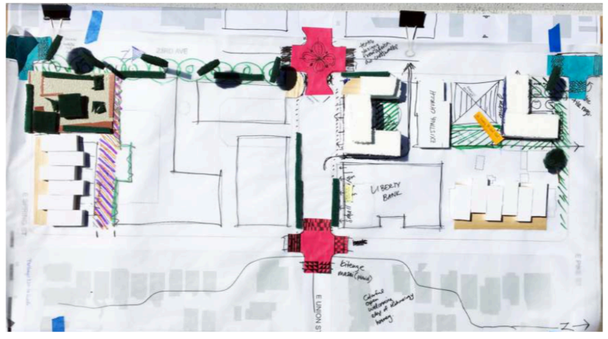
S. Jackson





Short Term Installation. July 2018 to January 2019.

Sara Zewde
ARCHITORTURE
Positionality: *this work is part of an ongoing effort to reimagine Black life in the Central Area.*

Africatown's Design Process is Participatory (PD)

Africatown used PD in a setting with *legacies of racism*, largely unexplored in PD literature.

Research Question (Again)

How do ***participatory design*** methods hold up against the effects of ***institutional racism***?

Methods

Qualitative fieldwork (main site: 3 months)

Reflexive participant observation

Thematic analysis

Critical Race Theory and Black Studies

Saidiya Hartmann — *Lose Your Mother. 2006.*

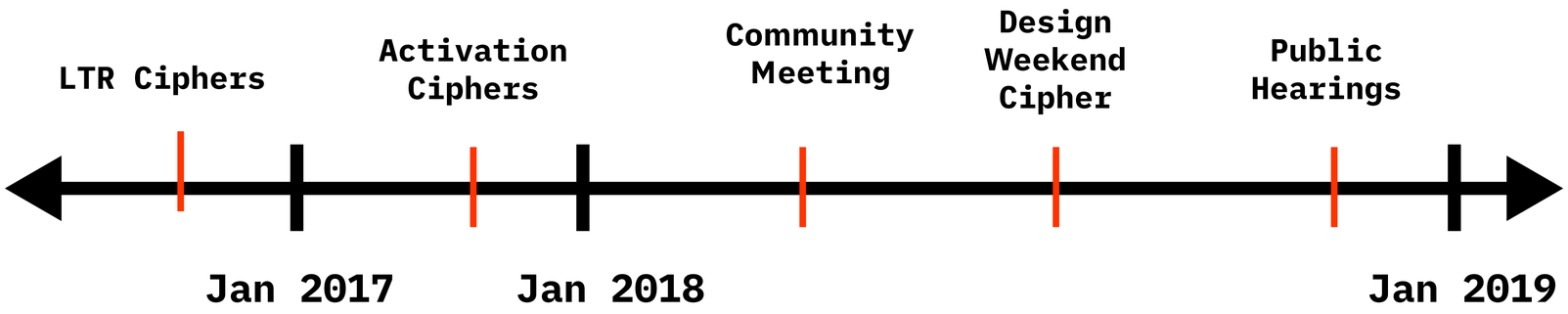
Lisa Nakamura — *Digitizing Race*. 2007.

Sara Ahmed — *On Being Included.* 2012.

Theoretical Lens

“Being included can be a lesson in ‘being not’ as much as ‘being in.’ … [Marginalized people] encounter the limits of this fantasy when we encounter the brick wall; we come up against the limits when we refuse to be grateful for what we receive” [p. 163].

***Sara Ahmed*. On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life. *2012*.**

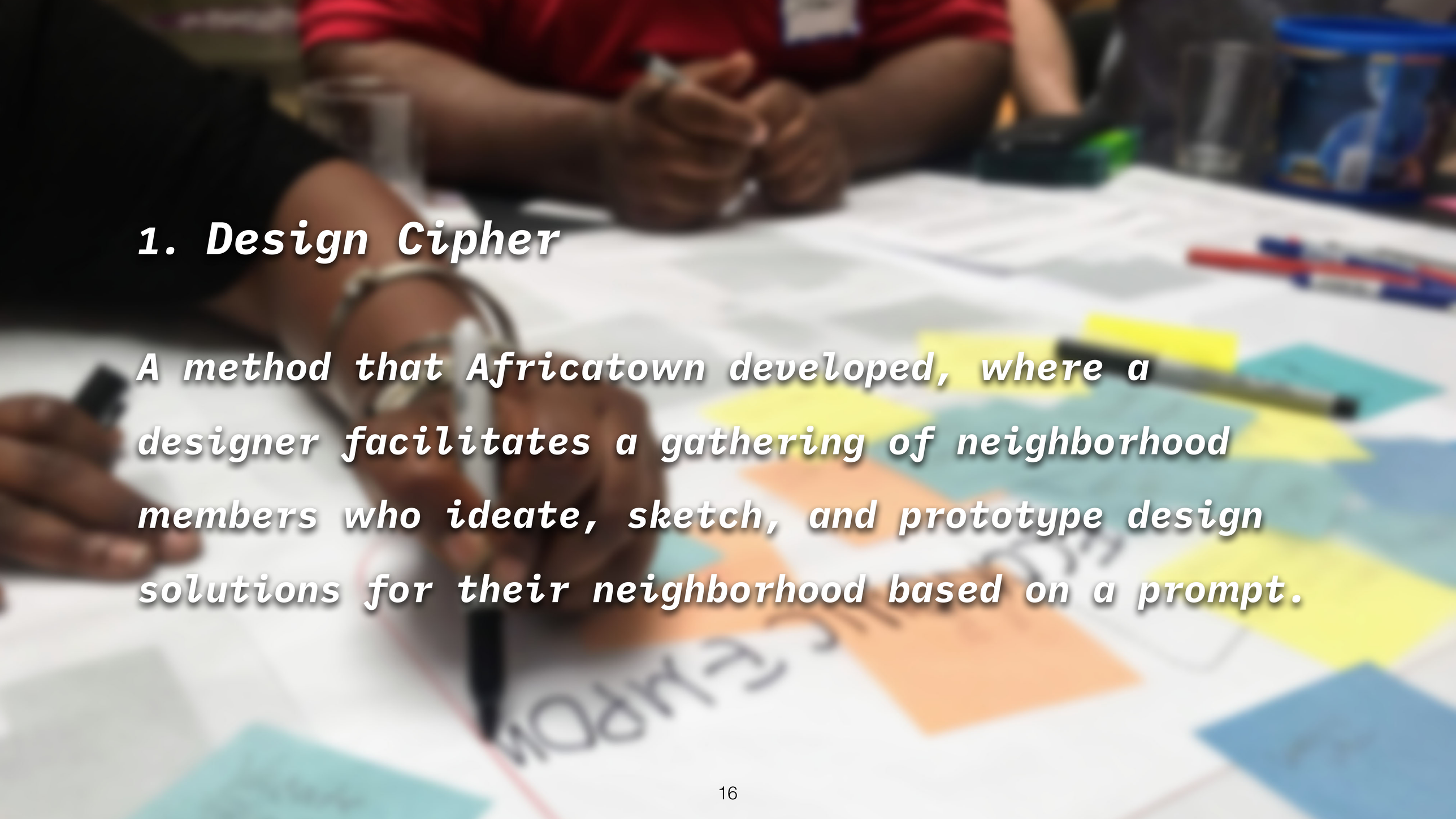


1. The design cipher.

2. The community meeting.

3. The public Design hearing.

Neighborhood members' names are pseudonymized.



1. Design Cipher

A method that Africatown developed, where a designer facilitates a gathering of neighborhood members who ideate, sketch, and prototype design solutions for their neighborhood based on a prompt.

E CHERRY ST
23RD AVE
CONNECTION

“I've lived in the community for over fifty years and didn’t hear anything about African American businesses. African Americans, they have businesses and churches. Our churches are leaving. I had a business for thirty years and I couldn't afford the rent. African Americans need money. The young lady [another participant] talking about space for artists on the first floor [in her model] gave me hope. All this other stuff with parks is okay, ***but African Americans need businesses.”*** *—Lanelle*

2. Community Meeting

*"The main goal of this meeting is to break down the **foreign language of design**, get it so it can be broken down for our community, because we as a community do design every day."*

Interaction between Two Community Members

Grace: *“Bartell’s!? Are y'all serious? You're gonna put a Bartell's in a Black spot? What did they ever do for us? I'll open up my own pharmacy there before I see Bartell's move in. Sir, is there really gonna be a Bartell’s?"*

Emily: *“If you're feeling mad about the economic reality, show up to community meetings where your comments are recorded, because that will hold the developers to it.”*

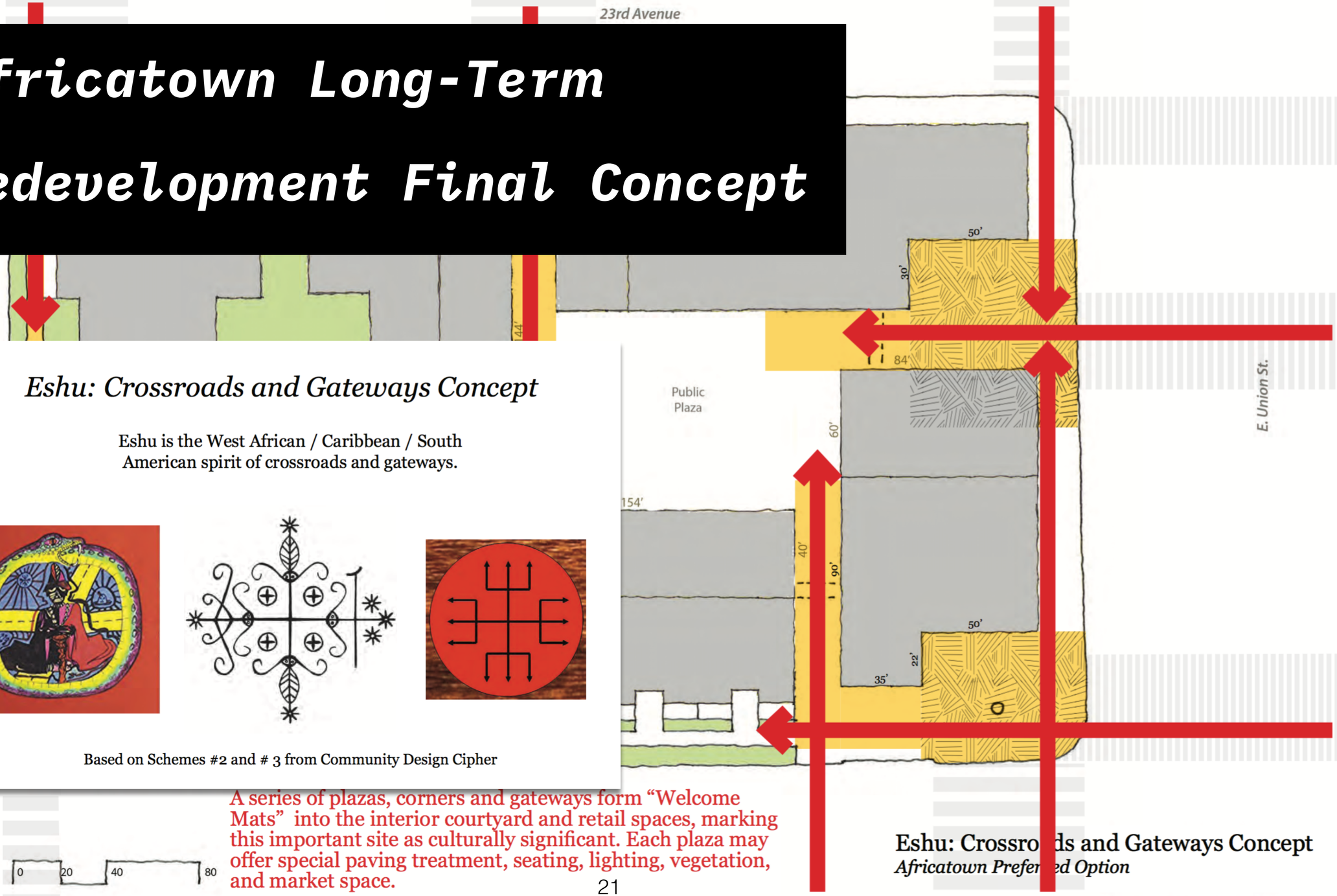
Africatown Long-Term Redevelopment Final Concept

Eshu: Crossroads and Gateways Concept

Eshu is the West African / Caribbean / South American spirit of crossroads and gateways.

Based on Schemes #2 and # 3 from Community Design Cipher

A series of plazas, corners and gateways form "Welcome Mats" into the interior courtyard and retail spaces, marking this important site as culturally significant. Each plaza may offer special paving treatment, seating, lighting, vegetation, and market space.



Eshu: Crossroads and Gateways Concept
Africatown Preferred Option

3. Public Design Hearing

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Midtown design looks too much like SoLU, not enough like the CD — Can new Central Area Design Review Board help?

Posted on Thursday, July 19, 2018 - 8:47 am by jseattle

Even with this powerful reframing of who gets to be the designer, design as a practice alone cannot account for the effects of racism.

President of Africatown: *“I might have thought about taking the word ‘design’ out of ‘Design Town Hall,’ ‘Design Weekend,’ and other things because it made people feel alienated.”*

Parting Thought

Professional designers appeared inclusive because they let Africatown build on the site. But, real inclusion happened when people could tell stories about their exclusion.

Acknowledgements

Africatown & Residents of the Central Area

Collaborators at the University of Washington

Installation Site, April 2019