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Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History

By

Amani Chanel Morrison

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

African American Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Brandi Wilkins Catanese, Chair

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Professor Bryan Wagner

Summer 2018

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ABSTRACT

Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in African American Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Dr. Brandi Wilkins Catanese, Chair

Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History is an interdisciplinary investigation of kitchenette buildings on the South Side of Chicago during the 1940s and '50s. Kitchenette buildings were the primary habitation for black southern migrants establishing themselves in the densely populated Black Belt. In the project, I contend that the kitchenette building of mid-twentieth-century black Chicago is the material, discursive, and symbolic representation of black exclusion from the modern nation manifested in a local urban setting. I examine literary, archival, and visual texts of the era using performance and design theories, and I offer a theoretical framework of *black spatial affordance* for the interrogation of these domestic spaces. This project, driven by the unique demands of analyzing the site and symbol of the Black Belt kitchenette, engages the Great Migration, the Chicago Black Renaissance, the Chicago School of Sociology, urban design, and local and federal policy.

While countless scholars have dedicated attention to Chicago's housing projects, few have investigated the domestic spaces that preceded them and that in many ways precipitated the city's mid-century housing policy. Until now, the nuances of kitchenette living have been underexplored, although the vast majority of black residents in Chicago's Black Belt in the mid-twentieth century had connection to kitchenette buildings: through residence, proximity, enterprise, or advocacy. *Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History* addresses this lacuna in scholarship on Chicago's history of housing, urban race and space relations, and black domesticity. Furthermore, it revisits the centrality of representation in the making and documentation of black life in Chicago.

Moreover, I argue that the ongoing desires, struggles, and strivings for homemaking that took place in or in association with Black Belt kitchenette buildings belie the struggle for inclusion in the modern nation black Americans aspired to during the mid-twentieth century. I suggest that the kitchenette offers entree into the geographical, social, economic, and political landscapes of Chicago in general, and of black Chicago in particular. The kitchenette exposes the contours of black domesticity and spatiality as they intersect with American urban modernity.

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, the late Edward Morrison, who first introduced me to a critical engagement with race through a gift of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* when

I was a young girl. This is also dedicated to the loved ones I have lost along this academic journey whose spirits have carried me forward: Ava Paxton, Beatrice Thomas, and Malinda Brown. To the life gained along the way, my nephew Jeremiah: this dissertation is for you, too.

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Timeline of Relevant Events

- 1914 Grace Garnett devises kitchenette concept in Chicago
- 1917 U.S. enters World War I
- 1917 *Chicago Defender* advertises “Great Northern Drive” on May 15 to spur Great Migration
- 1917 Gwendolyn Brooks is born in Topeka, Kansas and at 2 months old moves to Chicago
- 1917 *Buchanan v. Warley* Supreme Court case overturns racial zoning ordinances; restrictive covenants born as new segregation device
- 1918 World War I ends
- 1919 Eugene Williams stoned and drowned in Lake Michigan for drifting into "white section" of the lake, people riot; Red Summer begins
- 1922 Chicago Commission on Race Relations publishes *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot*
- 1927 Richard Wright moves to Chicago
- 1929 Carl Hansberry founds C.A. Hansberry Enterprises, a kitchenette management and real estate business
- 1929 Stock market crashes; Great Depression begins
- 1930 Lorraine Hansberry is born in Chicago
- 1932 E. Franklin Frazier's *Negro Family in Chicago* published
- 1932 President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership held in Washington, D.C.
- 1933 Home Owners' Loan Corporation created
- 1934 Federal Housing Administration created
- 1934 Metropolitan Housing Council formed (later known as MHPC and MPC) in Chicago
- 1934 *Burke v. Kleiman* Supreme Court case
- 1937 Hansberry family moves into Washington Park
- 1938-39 *Lee v. Hansberry* lower court cases
- 1940 Richard Wright publishes *Native Son*
- 1940 *Hansberry v. Lee* Supreme Court case
- 1941 Richard Wright and Edwin Rosskam publish *12 Million Black Voices*
- 1941 U.S. joins World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor
- 1941 Grace Garnett interviews with the Works Progress Administration about kitchenettes
- 1942 Langston Hughes pens “Visitors to the Black Belt”
- 1945 St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton publish *Black Metropolis*
- 1945 Gwendolyn Brooks publishes *A Street in Bronzeville*, her first poetry collection
- 1945 World War II ends
- 1946 Carl Hansberry, Sr. dies in Mexico of a cerebral hemorrhage
- 1948 *Shelley v. Kraemer* Supreme Court case rules restrictive covenants unenforceable by state
- 1948 MHC changes to Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council to encompass investment in regional planning
- 1948-62 Mildred Mead photographs Chicago’s South and West Sides
- 1949 Federal Housing Act passed
- 1949 Chicago Building Code passed
- 1950 Gwendolyn Brooks becomes first African American Pulitzer Prize winner for *Annie Allen*
- 1953 Richard Wright publishes *The Outsider*

- 1953 Gwendolyn Brooks publishes her first and only novel, *Maud Martha*
- 1953 Trumbull Park Homes public housing project opens to black families
- 1954 Federal Housing Act passed
- 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* Supreme Court case overturns “separate but equal”
- 1955 Emmett Till, a 15-year-old Chicago native, is lynched in Mississippi
- 1956 Chicago Housing Code passed (drafted by MHPC)
- 1959 Frank London Brown publishes *Trumbull Park*
- 1959 Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* debuts on Broadway
- 1960 Richard Wright dies of a heart attack
- 1965 Lorraine Hansberry dies of pancreatic cancer

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INTRODUCTION

Race, Space, and Black Domesticities in Great Migration Chicago

Thirty-eight people were killed and 537 injured in a race riot in the summer of 1919; after these events, the city of Chicago resolved to take a much-needed look at itself and its contentious race relations. The events on July 27 erupted after a teen, Eugene Williams, was stoned and drowned to death for inadvertently crossing an invisible color line into what was understood to be an exclusively white zone of Lake Michigan at the Twenty-ninth Street beach. When police failed to make an arrest on site for the boy's murder at the behest of righteously indignant black witnesses, a riot broke out. Spilling into the streets and nearby residential areas and moving southward and westward, the violence ended only after twenty-three black and fifteen white lives were claimed; 342 black, 178 white, and seventeen racially unidentified people were wounded; and widespread structural damage left one thousand people homeless. The rioting did not subside until August 2 after a heavy rain and with the assistance of the police, state militia, deputy sheriffs, and volunteer ex-veterans.¹ A few more incidents occurred sporadically before the militia ultimately withdrew on August 8, 1919.

The Chicago Commission on Race Relations was formed to investigate underlying causes of heightened racial tensions in the city and to recommend solutions to mitigate them. Its 1922 report, *The Negro in Chicago; a study of race relations and a race riot*, was generated to establish steps toward repairing the previously already-tenuous ties between black and white citizens. Besides outlining the details of developments leading up to, during, and after the riot, the Commission's report identified disparities in employment, police treatment, education, recreation opportunities, and, perhaps most substantially, housing, as factors contributing to the city's charged race relations. In innumerable studies that would follow over the course of forty-plus years, similar attention was given to these issues affecting large sections of the Chicago community. Housing, home life, and black domesticities became recurrent themes reflecting or belying the problems facing the Chicago Negro.

Spectacular displays of anti-black violence, such as that which occurred in Chicago and elsewhere during what is known as the Red Summer of 1919, were and are clear indicators of deeply entrenched racist racial ideologies and the ways they play out in space and place. However, racial violence also occurs with subtlety. Analysis of housing and quotidian practice in domestic spaces sheds light on some of the more subtle (and yet, also pronounced at times) machinations of racial violence. Understanding *home* is integral to understanding the lives and experiences of black migrants to, and settlers in, Chicago during this period. Focusing on home brings to the fore the homelessness and outsider status imposed upon or ascribed to black diasporan subjects. It also opens up space to contend with the interiority of these subjects, represented through their aspirations, conflicts, and personal practices. The study of home is necessarily a study of nation, of family and affective ties, of gender, and of built space. A study of home with a focus on black people in the U.S. is necessarily a project engaging white

¹ A handful of deaths occurred at the hands of this group. It is unclear how many injuries were inflicted by those enacting "law and order." See Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago; a study of race relations and a race riot*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 1, 48.

INTRODUCTION: RACE, SPACE, AND BLACK DOMESTICITIES

supremacy, the politics of exclusion, and economic oppression while also engaging hope, aspiration, pride, survival, and love, among other things. Rather than two opposing camps, these aspects are part and parcel to understanding home—at times dialectical, at times dialogical, but always intricately interwoven.

Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History seeks to reestablish the centrality of a particular home space—kitchenettes—to understandings of black life in mid-twentieth-century Chicago. Chicago’s fraught housing history has been the subject of an ever-growing body of research; however, one of its housing forms—the kitchenette—has been grossly understudied. Kitchenettes, the primary habitation for black southern migrants during mid-century, were small apartments produced by the profit-driven subdivision of a larger apartment flat: what may have been a multi-room apartment would be subdivided into multiple one- or two-room apartments separated by beaverboard walls, each housing a family of four or five. The Black Belt, a densely populated eight-mile strip on Chicago’s South Side, burst at its seams with new and established inhabitants who were crowded into this limited area due to redlining and racially restrictive covenants that prevented black Chicagoans from living elsewhere. Kitchenette buildings cropped up throughout this area especially to house the thousands of southern migrants of the Great Migration for whom new housing was not built due to scale-backs of the Great Depression and Second World War.

As a residential site, the South Side kitchenette building is captured in sociological and journalistic accounts as all that was wrong with the city’s modes of handling population growth and limited housing stock. Fire provocation. Tuberculosis incubator. Rat and roach territory. Public health nuisance. Harbinger of congregated social ills. Houser of the least of these. Its inhabitants were to be pitied or reviled. With this, the remnants of the kitchenette—in photographs, newspaper articles, sociological studies, and the like—paint a reductive picture of the habitation, and usually its residents, as well. Scholars taking up this vein also focus on the strictures of the kitchenette and its inability to exist in a state of complexity. Unfortunately this flattens the site—and the lives lived within it—as devoid of vigor, integrity, health, and attainable aspiration.² A slightly different depiction is offered in some of the artistic and cultural production.

In addition to being given substantial attention in large-scale studies such as in the final federal report of the Negro Housing Committee for the President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership in 1932 and in St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton’s expansive 1945 sociological study, *Black Metropolis*, Chicago’s Black Belt kitchenettes were taken up in notable works of African American fiction of the era.³ Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, and Frank London Brown all feature the kitchenette

² Notably, this bent in scholarship also does not deeply engage with Gwendolyn Brooks’ kitchenette depictions, which were nuanced and interested in imbuing kitchenette life (and life on the South Side more broadly) with a careful but necessary optimism.

³ See Appendix II, “Social and Economic Factors in Negro Housing— Housing Conditions Among Negroes in Chicago,” and Appendix VII, “The Kitchenette Apartment— A Comparative Study of Apartments Occupied by Whites and Negroes in Parallel Areas” in President’s Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, *Negro Housing: A Report of the Committee on Negro Housing* (Washington, D.C.: National Capital Press, 1932); St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harper and Row, [1962] 1945).

centrally in their works, employing the domestic space to represent the mundane manifestations of an at best, disappointing, and at worst, lethal, racial capitalism operating on Chicago's South Side.⁴ Moreover, much of Chicago's mid-century housing policy, taken as a model for policy across the nation, evolved out of discourses of slums and blight that disproportionately characterized poor and black areas, for which kitchenettes were a prevalent shorthand.

While the nature of housing policy and the realities it produced have been well-documented, especially by scholars of Chicago's public housing history, the kitchenette has largely been given short shrift. While a handful of scholars have more recently turned attention to the kitchenette in cultural history and literary criticism, much more can—and should—be said of the housing form that historians, sociologists, writers, artists, politicians, universities, and community members (to say nothing of health professionals, educators, and other city institutions) all agree was a prominent residential geography in Chicago's mid-twentieth-century history.⁵ Upon researching, I encountered the spaces of possibility within constriction, the paradoxes of family and social interaction and values, the strivings for more, the making do, within a space that was never supposed to allow that. And until now, few have investigated these nuances of kitchenette living, although the vast majority of black residents on Chicago's South Side in the mid-twentieth century had connection to kitchenette buildings: through residence, proximity, enterprise, or advocacy. *Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History* addresses this lacuna in scholarship on Chicago's history of housing, urban race and space relations, and black domesticity. Furthermore, it revisits the centrality of representation in the making and documentation of black life in Chicago. My project, the first cultural history of kitchenettes, interrogates the built environment, actors, and associated discourses of this unique habitation.

I contend that the kitchenette building of black Chicago is the material, discursive, and symbolic representation of black exclusion from the modern nation manifested in a local urban setting during the mid-twentieth century. Moreover, I argue that the ongoing desires, struggles, and strivings for homemaking that took place in or in association with Black Belt kitchenette buildings belie the struggle for inclusion in the modern nation black Americans aspired to during the mid-twentieth century. I suggest that the kitchenette offers entree into the geographical, social, economic, and political landscapes of Chicago in general, and of black Chicago in

⁴ See Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: HarperCollins, [2005] 1940); Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Basic Books, [2008] 1941); Gwendolyn Brooks, "kitchenette building," *A Street in Bronzeville* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945); Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (Chicago: Third World Press, [1992], 1953); Langston Hughes, "Visitors to the Black Belt," *One Way Ticket* (New York: Knopf, 1949); Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (New York: Vintage Books, [1994] 1958); Frank London Brown, *Trumbull Park* (Chicago: Regener, 1959). Ann Petry's *The Street* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946) comparably features the kitchenette as a key aspect of black life in New York during this era. For more on racial capitalism, see Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, [2000] 1983); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Laura Pulido, "Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 27, no. 3 (2016): 1-16.

⁵ Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Elizabeth Schlabach, *Along the Streets of Bronzeville: Black Chicago's Literary Landscape* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013); GerShun Alvilez, "Housing the Black Body: Value, Domestic Space, and Segregation Narratives," *African American Review* 42, no. 1 (2008): 135-147; James Smethurst, "Kitchenette Correlatives: African American Neo-modernism, the Popular Front, and the Emergence of a Black Literary Avant-Garde in the 1940s and 1950s," *Foreign Literature Studies* 29.4 (2007).

particular. The kitchenette exposes the contours of black domesticity and spatiality as they intersect with American urban modernity.

A Note on Method

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor posits two counterpoised modes of recording or retaining history: the archive and the repertoire. The archive is that which is recorded and is “enduring,” whereas the repertoire is embodied and ephemeral.⁶ The contents of the archive are stored in place as official record of the past, while the repertoire is historical memory “stored in the body.”⁷ While the archive sites (and cites) power, the repertoire is accorded to the marginalized, subaltern, and oppressed, although Taylor notes that these attributions are not mutually exclusive.⁸ With the durability of its contents, “the archive exceeds the live”; however, “[e]mbodied memory, because it is live, exceeds the archive’s ability to capture it.”⁹ Taylor offers that by taking both archive and repertoire into account, a fuller process of cultural knowledge transmission can be ascertained. If the repertoire, as Diana Taylor has submitted, consists of traditions harbored in bodily memory, what might we make of the repertoire that arises from residing in the kitchenette building?¹⁰ If “[e]mbodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge,” what knowledges are produced through kitchenette dwelling?¹¹ Also, how can records of enacted domestic practices be accessed by way of non-corporeal sources? I engage both archive and repertoire as necessary sites of analytical and interpretive excavation for ascertaining kitchenette inhabitation. My project sets forth and applies a methodology that leverages the archive to access and imagine the repertoire of the kitchenette building, and employs the repertoire to fill in gaps in the archive.

I critically approach the archive throughout *Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History* to ascertain elements of life which the very form of the archive resists. On the one hand, I leverage the archive to access the lives of a people marginalized geographically, economically, and socially. Michel Rolph-Trouillot defines history as dually the “sociohistorical process” and the story that is told about that process, or “‘what happened’ and ‘that which is said to have happened.’”¹² In the (re)construction or expansion of historical narratives, one must attend to the remnants of the sociohistorical process, or those things documenting it for evidentiary and indexical purposes, and the explorations of those very artifacts, or the extant narratives surrounding those sources of history. Critical historical narratives, then, are the representations of sociohistorical processes and the stories about them that analyze the interplay of power and history-making. Michel-Rolph Trouillot examines the interplay of power and historical production, arguing that history is not only told by those who won, but the means by which historians access the past—the archive—is in itself structured by power. He details four points at

⁶ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xvii-xix, 19, 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19, 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 2.

which power dynamics are evident in the production of history: the moment of fact creation, fact assembly, fact retrieval, and retrospective significance.¹³ These are moments where silences—omissions, distortions, destructions, absences—enter the archive.¹⁴ In essence, the archive is incomplete, especially in regard to those oppressed, so looking for a full story (or sometimes any credible details at all) is a challenge and a risk. I acknowledge the limits of the archive but choose not to abandon it; instead, I aim to make meaningful contribution to the narrative of the kitchenette through my fact retrieval and interpretation of retrospective significance.

On the other hand, I call upon the archive to yield not only evidence of black life in kitchenettes but also the paths and performances of that life. In order to extrapolate vitality and movement from the unliving, inert archive of the kitchenette, I read fragments of documented domesticity against others, sometimes reading in between the lines.¹⁵ I also engage in a form of what historian Saidiya Hartman calls critical fabulation, or “playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story . . . to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done.”¹⁶ My use of critical fabulation differs in historical and scholarly context than Hartman’s: she derives and applies critical fabulation to the unrecoverable lives of the enslaved in approaching the archive of slavery. Due to the dehumanization, commodification, and disposability of black subjects by captors and traders, the condition of life of the enslaved was one predicated on social and physical death. Hartman makes room to mourn all of the black enslaved girls and women who lived “an untimely story told by a failed witness” and the scholars confronted with the impossibility of recuperating and redressing the “founding violence” of the archive of slavery.¹⁷ While the archive of the Black Belt kitchenette is structured by violence and can be read as what Hartman calls a part of the “afterlife of slavery,” the kitchenette archive exists under different conditions of nationally-recognized (if not still undermined) personhood; legal claims to self, kin, labor, and property; and ability to move (if not still constrained).¹⁸ Indeed, there remain living witnesses of kitchenette domesticities, which is a fundamental difference in my archive and Hartman’s. Nevertheless, my aim is not to insert my voice where the voice of the surviving kitchenette dwellers, landlords, and families might be. It is rather to engage the realm of representation, to excavate what the kitchenette was archived to be and what might be ascertained from those renderings. If the work of representation, as Stuart Hall holds, is

¹³ Ibid., 26.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Robin Bernstein’s engagement with bodily practice through archival material through her conception of “scriptive things” has served as an extraordinarily generative model for rethinking archival use. She describes a scriptive thing as “an item of material culture that prompts meaningful bodily behaviors. . . . [T]he set of prompts does not reveal a performance, but it does reveal a script for a performance.” Bernstein extends thing theory in the reading of archival artifacts, in that these things not only “promp[t] meaningful bodily behaviors,” but also they expose common or socialized forms of interacting with the thing that ultimately guide the interaction. Her theory works also as method, as she approaches historical artifacts as scriptive things, researching, analyzing, and interpreting how a contemporary researcher encounters and engages the item, as well as how an historical subject might (or definitely) have interacted with it. Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 71-72.

¹⁶ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26, no. 12-2 (2008): 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2, 10.

¹⁸ Hartman writes, “This is the afterlife of slavery--skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.” Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 6.

the act of constructing an interpreted reality, I mine the indexed contexts/contents of kitchenette life as telling some part of the story and use the archive's holdings as clues to the corporeal repertoire developed in kitchenette residence. Corporeal, mental, and social orientations distinguish the kitchenette as a modern domestic environment.¹⁹

Black Spatial Affordance

Throughout my project, I analyze from the framework of what I have termed black spatial affordance. Ecological psychologist James Gibson first theorized affordance in the following manner: “The *affordances* of the environment are what it *offers* . . . what it *provides* or *furnishes*, either for good or ill.”²⁰ In other words, one’s environment *affords* possibilities for action and interaction. Auke Pols in design summarizes affordances as “opportunities for behaviour, or more specifically, opportunities for action,” while Rob Withagen et al. in psychology succinctly refer to them as “action possibilities.”²¹ While the theory of affordances derives from ecological psychology, design theorists and practitioners have used it to think through and improve product and spatial design for consumers/users.²² The essence of affordances lies in object or spatial utility and possibility.

I extend the theory of affordances to the specific experiences of black subjects in racialized space. Black spatial affordance refers to the coexistence of limited and expansive opportunities for actions and behaviors within racially circumscribed space. Black spatial affordance accepts the foundational premises of affordance and takes the theory a step further, grounding it critically in the experiences of black people and marrying it to the social, cultural, and historical situatedness offered by Pierre Bourdieu’s habitus. In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu presents habitus as an analytic to engage social, embodied history. An interplay between past and present conditions and the practices produced therefrom, habitus locates embodied behavior in the historical conditions structuring it.²³ The “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” that make up habitus operate such that the past exists within the present context of behaviors and decision-making, making historical precedent and social custom large influencers of present and future action of an individual or institution.²⁴ Described as systems that organize practices, habitus is locatable structurally (in institutions) and discursively. Black spatial affordance, then, engages the affordance of space with a critical eye toward the histories and realities of hegemonic social practice and coercive institutional practice

¹⁹ See Chapter 1 for a detailed analysis of the kitchenette and its relationship to the modern.

²⁰ James J. Gibson, “A Theory of Affordances,” *The People, Place, and Space Reader* (2014), 56, original emphasis.

²¹ Auke Pols, “Characterising Affordance: The Descriptions-of-Affordances-Model,” *Design Studies* 33 (2012), 113; Rob Withagen et al., “Affordances Can Invite Behavior: Reconsidering the Relationship between Affordances and Agency,” *Psychology* 30 (2012), 250.

²² Hsiao-Chen You and Kuohsiang Chen, “Application of Affordance and Semantics in Product Design,” *Design Studies* 28 (2007); Jonathan Maier et al., “An Affordance-Based Approach to Architectural Theory, Design, and Practice,” *Design Studies* 30 (2009); Auke Pols, “Characterising Affordance: The Descriptions-of-Affordances-Model,” *Design Studies* 33 (2012); Sara Hadavi et al., “Environmental Affordances: A Practical Approach for Design of Nearby Outdoor Settings in Urban Residential Areas,” *Landscape and Urban Planning* 134 (2015).

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, “Structures, *Habitus*, Practices,” *The Logic of Practice*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

that creates and circumscribes the space. In this way, black spatial affordance enables critical inquiry into the spatial navigation of subjects who occupy marginal positions in society—in this case, black Chicagoans in the mid-twentieth century.

Scholarly explorations of race and space have aided in the development of my approach. George Lipsitz's 2011 *How Racism Takes Place* presents racialized spatial imaginaries as a paradigm for understanding the way racism operates in U.S. society. For Lipsitz, analyzing space and place is key to locating racism, and he centers his analysis on housing discrimination. The white spatial imaginary, he offers, is constructed on a basis of exclusion and is the result of *de jure* and *de facto* racial discrimination.²⁵ By contrast, the Black spatial imaginary is a space constructed by black people as a result of their exclusion from the white spatial imaginary. While the white spatial imaginary often takes physical places, the Black spatial imaginary is largely intangible, or at least impermanent, often existing as discursive space or physical territory that is negotiated.²⁶ In the author's words, the Black spatial imaginary "privilege[s] use value over exchange value, sociality over selfishness, and inclusion over exclusion."²⁷ Lipsitz's conceptual framework provides a useful departure point for my project, as the segregated spaces of midcentury Chicago and the construction of Bronzeville by black migrants fall under the umbrella of these racialized spatial imaginaries.²⁸ My concept of black spatial affordances differs from Lipsitz's concept in that while the Black spatial imaginary refers to space that is largely conceptual or immaterial, black spatial affordances refers to actions and is rooted in physical structures and geographies.

Borrowing from cultural geography, I analyze the kitchenette at various interacting scales. At the scale of the city, in residential urban spaces like Chicago's Black Belt, racism operated to limit black citizens' housing supply and force overcrowded living conditions, resulting in the rapid decline of often already-declining property. The residential environment afforded close quarters, intimate knowledge of others' doings, and pent-up desire to expand to larger spaces and quality of life. It also birthed, from necessity, an array of creative ways to make do within these constricted arrangements at the scale of the building and the apartment. At the scale of the body, kitchenette dwelling afforded both a discipline of the body and a flexibility of corporeal and social practice.²⁹

While the affordances of the kitchenette's material qualities are salient (as analyzed in depth in Chapter 2), the kitchenette building also produced other types of affordances. In the realm of enterprise, the kitchenette afforded black middle-class Chicagoans opportunities to generate wealth and have a foothold in the real estate and management industries; the housing

²⁵ George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁸ For analysis of another mode of Black collective conceptualization of space, see John Jackson's *Harlemworld: Doing Race and Class in Contemporary Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

²⁹ For instance, if the bathroom was occupied or a toilet suddenly went out of service, tenants would need to expand their capacity for waiting for restroom use, seek out alternative relief accommodations (on another floor or perhaps at a next-door location), or devise a means to make the bathroom available again (by ousting the occupant or fixing the bathroom fixture), all of which would require quick adjustments and intentional decisions. In the probable chance of fire, as the old wooden frame buildings were known as tinderboxes, kitchenette residents would need agility and speed to either hurry from their homes down a fire escape ladder or improvise another means of egress in the likely case that the escape route was inaccessible or unsafe.

form also afforded intra-racial socioeconomic tensions, some of which I parse out in Chapters 1 and 4. In the realm of cultural production, the kitchenette furnished black writers and artists opportunities to poignantly explore and present black struggle, aspiration, and domestic life as it manifested in the largest urban destinations of the northward Great Migration.

Kitchenette Narratives

The kitchenette apartment—which I contend is a metonym of the black southern migrant experience in Chicago—can be read as an archive that exposes and contains black people’s negotiations of outsider status vis-à-vis the U.S. nation, an exclusion that is fundamental to the national project of modernity and that becomes refracted in various modes of cultural production. The kitchenette is a site at which segregation in Chicago manifests in both the design of the built environment and in the resultant cultural production, showing up as both modernity and modernism. Scholars have recently turned attention to the substantial and varied cultural production at midcentury known as the Black Chicago Renaissance. This renaissance, often overshadowed by the Harlem Renaissance, not only made Chicago a cultural hub, but also it placed the particularities of the Second City in the black representational limelight.³⁰

In “The Work of Representation,” cultural critic Stuart Hall holds that rather than reflecting an already- and fully-knowable reality, the practice of representation constructs a reality.³¹ Thus, the work of representation is that of creating an inflection of reality through an interpretation of it. Cultural production as representation, then, produces understandings of the world and society through the lens of actual and imagined truths. The kitchenette building and apartment are constructed through myriad representational lenses—organizational and government reports, literary fiction, stageplay, photography, local political ephemera, painting, and court proceedings. Not only did kitchenette narratives construct a discourse and symbolization of local urban blackness, but also the material form of the kitchenette impacted its narratives.

Sharon Marcus’ cultural and architectural history of the 19th-century western European apartment building, *Apartment Stories*, sheds light on what the author coins as the “apartment-house plot,” wherein “sequences of events [occur] in which an apartment-house setting is not merely incidental to the action but produces that sequence of events in a way that no other site could (and still retain its cultural legibility as that site).”³² In other words, the apartment-house

³⁰ See Darlene Clark Hine and John McCluskey, Jr., eds., *The Black Chicago Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Robert Bone and Richard Courage, *The Muse in Bronzeville: African American Creative Expression in Chicago, 1932-1950* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011); Steven Tracy, ed., *Writers of the Chicago Black Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes: Modernity, The Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Elizabeth Schroeder Schlabach, *Along the Streets of Bronzeville: Black Chicago’s Literary Landscape* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Bill Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Liesl Olson, *Chicago Renaissance: Literature and Art in the Midwest Metropolis* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017). For a compelling exploration of still another black renaissance outside of Harlem and Chicago, see Mark Whitaker, *Smoketown: The Untold Story of the Other Great Black Renaissance* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018).

³¹ Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation*. (London: Sage, 1997), 24-25.

³² Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 60.

plot is produced *from* the apartment-house; the domestic, social, and architectural setting is not merely coincidental but rather exceedingly consequential. While kitchenette buildings on Chicago's South Side in the 1940s and '50s differ substantially from Marcus' site of analysis—temporally, geographically, and demographically, at the least—they are comparable by measures of their generative cultural and discursive production. If the migration narrative is a “structure of feeling” that is born out of black migration from the South to the urban North and Midwest at midcentury, the repeated presence of the kitchenette in these narratives underscores this domestic space as a key site of black “confrontation with the urban landscape.”³³ Kitchenettes served not only as literary motif and representational shorthand for black urban residential life, but also they enabled plots that were immobile without them.³⁴

For example, Richard Wright's *Native Son* relies heavily upon the catalyst of kitchenette residence; without such a confined, crowded, and racially-locatable inciting space, the novel's events become inconceivable. Bigger Thomas' frustrations, apathies, and primal survivalist reactions would read as fantastical improbabilities if not springing from the constricted domain of the South Side's kitchenettes and a wider—if geographically narrow—landscape of racialized spatial and economic oppression. The protagonist's temperament and actions, if decontextualized from the kitchenette and conditions of living on Chicago's South Side, would be pinned squarely on his blackness and equate that blackness to a depraved state.³⁵ In her novella *Maud Martha*, Gwendolyn Brooks locates her title character in a kitchenette from the time she reaches adulthood through the end of the novella (about one-half of the book's length), using the domestic space to communicate the protagonist's ordinariness, which was a central feature of the overall text. Furthermore, the setting of the kitchenette apartment create the conditions for Lorraine Hansberry's path-breaking work of theater, *A Raisin in the Sun*. The Youngers' kitchenette apartment is a primary site of black homemaking, conflict, identity negotiation, and struggle in the immediate postwar period. The familial conundrums of adequate space for the existing—and expected—family, the unrequited dreams of Walter Lee for ownership and direction of his enterprise, the perpetually under-nurtured plant in the windowsill—all of these plot conditions, and the instance of their simultaneity, hinge on the kitchenette apartment context. Additionally, in Frank London Brown's 1959 novel *Trumbull Park*, the author draws parallels of racial residential violence between the protagonist's former kitchenette home and current besieged housing project.³⁶

³³ Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001 [1961]), 64-66; Raymond Williams *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132-34; Farah Jasmine Griffin, ‘Who Set You Flowin?’: *The African American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

³⁴ Carlo Rotella's *October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) accomplishes a similar analysis as Marcus's, using the urban neighborhood as a lens of analysis on the development of literature. Rotella focuses some of the text on Chicago's literary landscape in particular.

³⁵ Richard Wright walks a fine line himself in a naturalistic rendering of this “warped personality” of the South Side. He is heavily influenced by the Chicago School of Sociology that understood blacks in the urban context through the lens of disorganization and other pathologies.

³⁶ Notably, in each of these literary representations, the tensions of the kitchenette are relegated to the family (and in fact, Lena Younger in *A Raisin in the Sun* is the only non-nuclear family member appearing in central action). However, rather than discrete nuclear family units occupying the domestic space, a number of kitchenette dwellers shared their habitations with extended family, non-family, and had familiar home-like encounters with neighbors. In addition to the example of this reality that is depicted in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Chicago-based

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As one journeys through the worlds the fictional literary characters inhabit, one is met with manifestations of the exclusionary practices black people in the U.S. routinely encountered (e.g., housing and employment discrimination), especially as they made their homes in the urban North and Midwest. Indeed, the kitchenette literature exists because of the collusion of real estate agents, mortgage lenders, private developers, neighborhood associations, universities, and rag-tag white mobs to limit black access to home space by shutting them out of whole neighborhoods with strategic and violent legislative, financial, and physical coercion. The conditions of exclusion produced the narratives found in these black urban works.³⁷ The Chicago-based kitchenette narratives draw attention to the housing crisis faced by black migrants to Chicago, and analysis of these narratives highlights the contours and insidiousness of this normalized exclusion.

Chicago's Great Migration

In order to understand how the Chicago kitchenette building came into being, a discussion of twentieth-century migration is warranted. The Great Migration, a mass migration of black southerners to the urban upper South, North, and West, rapidly increased the black population in Chicago.³⁸ Typically distinguished as occurring in two periods, 1915 to 1940 and 1940 to 1970, the Great Migration resulted from increased employment opportunities in industrial cities due to wartime need and suspensions of European immigration. Blacks were also pushed from the South by the violent activities of the Ku Klux Klan, the limited opportunities for self-advancement (in employment and education), and the decreasing need for human agricultural labor with the industrialization of farming.³⁹ The *Chicago Defender* was integral in spurring migration not just to Chicago but to Northern cities more generally. As the leading black national newspaper, the *Defender* utilized its well-established platform and wide readership to draw southern blacks to northern industrial centers; their migration would work toward joint goals of black protest against southern repressive practices and institutions and the increased growth and solidification of black civic, service, business, and social institutions.⁴⁰

interviewees in Isabel Wilkerson's study of the Great Migration attest to strangers temporarily living in the hallways or landings outside of their kitchenette apartments. Moreover, as some South Side residents in designated slum areas were subject to relocation because of private urban redevelopment, families seeking admission into project housing were often told to split up, with the recommendation that extended family members seek separate housing elsewhere. See Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (New York: Random House, 2010), 271; Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 120, 123; Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

³⁷ Ann Petry's *The Street* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946) comparably features the kitchenette as a key aspect of black life in New York during this era.

³⁸ James Gregory discusses the Great Migration as encompassing white southerners as well but traces black and white migration patterns and motivations along divergent (and at times, overlapping) paths. See James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

³⁹ While at the turn of the twentieth century black migration to Chicago was primarily from southern border states like Missouri and Kentucky, the First Great Migration to Chicago that occurred in the World War I years was comprised of black populations from the Deep South in unprecedented proportions. Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 11, 140-41.

⁴⁰ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 134. See also Brian Dolinar, *The Negro in Illinois: The WPA Papers*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

In Chicago, the migration increased the black population from 44,103 in 1910 to 277,731 in 1940. During the United States' engagement in World War II, tens of thousands more landed in the city; in 1944, blacks in Chicago numbered 337,000.⁴¹ Racially restrictive covenants, redlining, and mob violence constrained that ever-growing populace to the Black Belt on the South and West Sides. A higher housing demand, negligible new construction because of curtailment during the Great Depression, and the potential for high profits led to hundreds, if not thousands, of buildings being converted to kitchenettes in the Black Belt. The poor condition of the buildings prior to conversion or black tenancy was rapidly made worse due to the high number of residents utilizing the space and facilities: kitchenettes were primarily known for their overcrowded and dilapidated nature. Moreover, high rents also led some residents to double up in already tight space in order to ensure making the rent and having enough for food and possibly leisure.⁴²

In his 1941 photoessay *12 Million Black Voices*, Richard Wright gives his most extensive treatment of kitchenettes. Shifting his focus from what he calls the Lords of the Land—the landholding class to which blacks and poor whites were bound through sharecropping (and debt peonage)—to the Bosses of the Buildings in the urban North, Wright depicts black life and “death on the city pavements.”⁴³ *12 Million Black Voices* apexes in railing against how black migrants fared upon reaching the city, an experience which Wright triangulates among health, finances, and social relation within kitchenettes. Scholars writing prior to and since then have leveraged a range of methodological approaches to shed more light on the migration process, experience, and subjects, with scholars more recently offering renewed attention to this important national and regional reorganization of citizens.⁴⁴

Isabel Wilkerson's 2010 *The Warmth of Other Suns* distills, through the stories of three black migrants, a massive ethnographic study on primarily the Second Great Migration, focusing especially on southern migrant desires for, journeys to, and living conditions in Chicago, Harlem, and Los Angeles. Wilkerson's text humanizes, quite literally, the experiences of otherwise abstract black masses who fled the South to pursue better life chances. Essentially

⁴¹ St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 8-9.

⁴² A survey of kitchenette buildings conducted by the Chicago Housing Authority in the late 1930s found that a little less than half (44.9 per cent) of kitchenette residents paid more than 30 per cent of their income in rent. During that period, rent was suggested to not be more than one-fifth of a family's income. In some cases, apartment rents were as much as doubled when changing from white to black tenancy. See Dolinar, *Negro in Illinois*, 162; Edith Abbott, *The Tenements of Chicago, 1908-1935*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 124-25, 299-303.

⁴³ The photographs in this central chapter on settling in the city are overwhelmingly of black people in Chicago, although the entire photoessay is aimed to be a representation of a generalizable black experience in the Great Migration.

⁴⁴ Most recently, Marcia Chatelain has foregrounded black girlhood and the multi-layered demands of respectable black womanhood within the period of migration of southern blacks to Chicago's South Side. Marcia Chatelain, *South Side Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015). See also Walter Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How It Changed America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1991); Farah Jasmine Griffin, “Who Set You Flowin’?": *The African-American Migration Narrative*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

rewriting and updating Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*, Wilkerson's study brings readers closer to the interiority of black subjects landing in places like Chicago. My study straddles the First and Second Great Migrations, because while kitchenettes appeared in Chicago at the start of the first period of migration, it was not until the end of that period and the start of the next (in the early 1940s) that kitchenette buildings existed in their most nefarious forms on Chicago's South Side.

The Black Belt

Black migrants to Chicago primarily took up residence on the South, and later the West, Sides in the city. The Black Belt, as it was known (South Side residents referred to that area as Bronzeville), was not the result of voluntary racial clustering for comfort and convenience as other ethnic enclaves in the city were.⁴⁵ Rather, Chicago's Black Belt existed and became more spatially consolidated due to anti-black racism in the form of racially restrictive covenants and deeds, redlining, neighborhood associations, and mob terror. Because of these racially-reliant practices, the Black Belt was a unique socio-spatial presence in the city. As Thomas Lee Philpott has forcefully argued in alignment with scholars before him, "The Negro ghetto, it turns out, was Chicago's only real ghetto."⁴⁶

When sociologist Louis Wirth first wrote about the Western modern ghetto, he stated that the historical sites of racial isolation and control originating in Europe and imposed upon the Jewish people were not only present in Western nations like the United States, but also that similar forms of them could be found among other racial and ethnic groups. He identified the presence of immigrant colonies Black Belts in urban sites as such iterations.⁴⁷ Others would go on to study the particularities of Chicago's "slum" and "ghetto" areas, distinguished by poverty, overcrowding, and racial composition.⁴⁸ In 1936, social reformer Edith Abbott published *The Tenements of Chicago, 1908-1935*, a comprehensive review and assessment of Chicago's

⁴⁵ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 383, 385.

⁴⁶ Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Neighborhood Deterioration and Middle-Class Reform, Chicago, 1880-1930*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 141. See also Robert C. Weaver, *The Negro Ghetto*, (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948); Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*.

⁴⁷ Louis Wirth, "The Ghetto," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 33, no. 1 (Jul., 1927): 58.

⁴⁸ Harvey Zorbaugh, shortly after Wirth's publication, released a study of Chicago's affluent Gold Coast neighborhood bordered by a slum area. Robert Weaver's work, produced a few years after Drake and Cayton's landmark *Black Metropolis*, details the various institutional actors and societal factors contributing to the problems of black housing in urban places and the creation and maintenance of Negro ghettos. Jane Jacobs, much later, presents the concept and strategy of "unslumming" to ward off the crystallization of an area into what she calls a "perpetual slum;" she gives some attention to Chicago and to restricted black areas. Thomas Lee Philpott zeroes in on the differences between Chicago's ethnic slums and the Negro ghetto and highlights the role social reformers played in first eliding, then working to eliminate, the city's black ghetto. Moreover, Mitchell Duneier's recent work traces the evolution of the idea of the ghetto and includes analyses of Horace Cayton's and William Julius Wilson's Chicago. See Harvey W. Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929); Robert C. Weaver, *The Negro Ghetto*; Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1961); Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Neighborhood Deterioration and Middle-Class Reform, Chicago, 1880-1930*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016). Sociologist Kenneth Clark also notably produced a study of the black ghetto but focused on New York in *Dark Ghetto: Dilemmas of Social Power*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

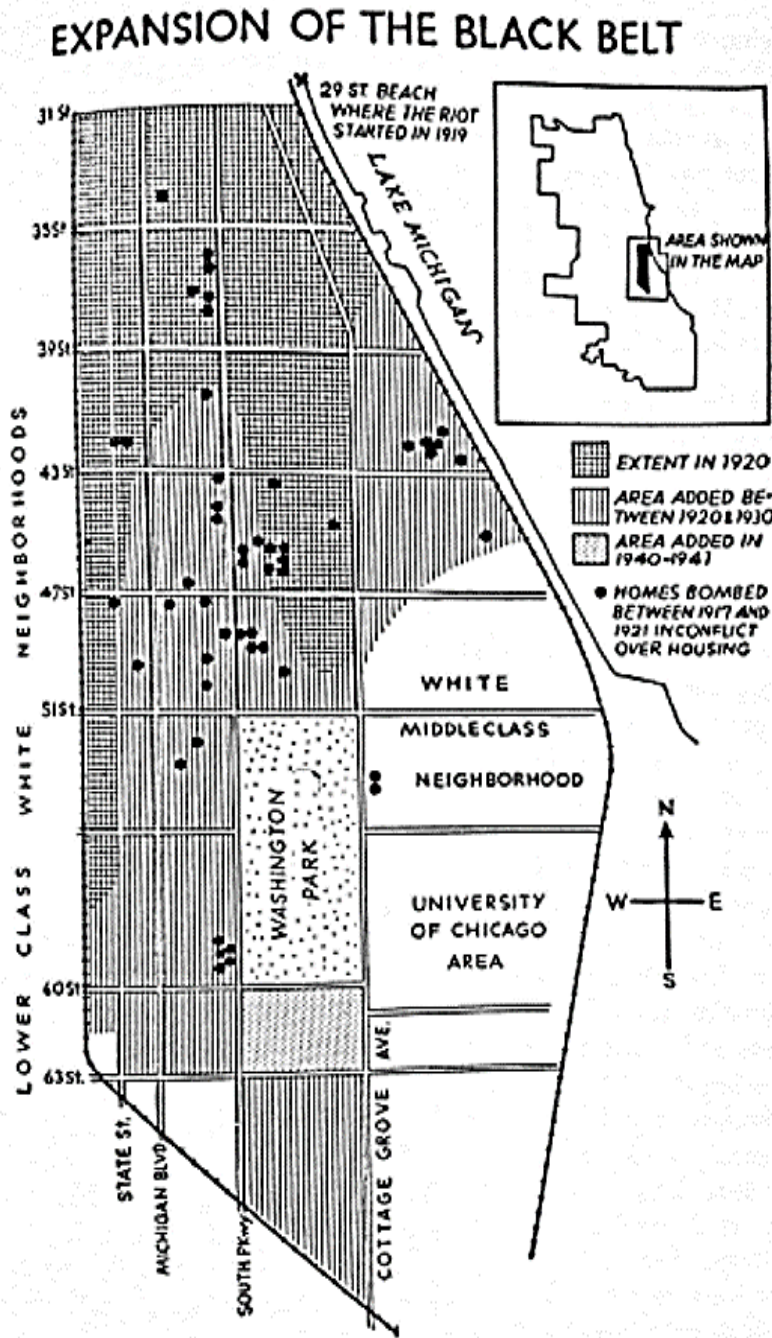


FIGURE i.1 The Black Belt

[Source: St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis* (New York: Harper, 1962), 63]

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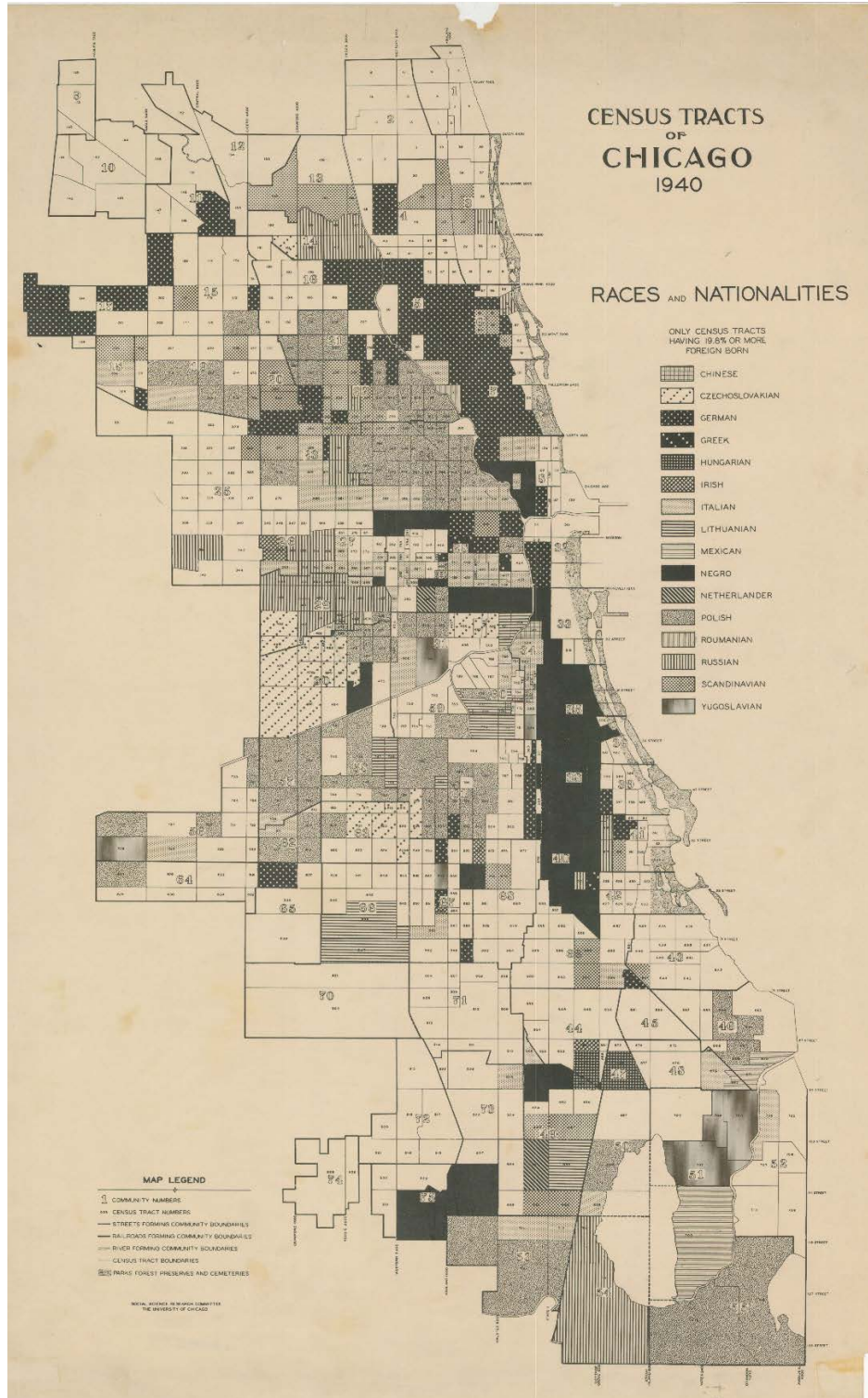


FIGURE i.2 Chicago Ethnicity Map, 1940

[Source: "Census Tracts of Chicago, 1940. Races and Nationalities." Univ. of Chicago, Social Science Research Committee. Univ. of Chicago Maps Collection, G4101-C6E1-1940-U55]

tenement houses located in slum areas and the associated public health concerns and government responses, chronicling the ongoing need—and lack of adequate provision—for livable tenement housing conditions. Abbott and her team recognized that in addition to the class privilege from which tenement dwellers were distanced by virtue of their habitations, blacks were doubly disadvantaged due to race, the most significant factor contributing to their relegation to dilapidated housing.⁴⁹ However, it was not until Drake and Cayton’s 1945 *Black Metropolis* that a detailed study of the many nodes and contours of life in Chicago’s Black Belt—the “unique and distinctive city within a city”—would be published.⁵⁰

Spatially, the Black Belt was an amalgam of various cross-sections of Chicago’s black populace. Unlike some areas that were clearly distinguished by distinctions of socioeconomic class, the Black Belt of the 1940s and ‘50s contained no such markers. The well-off lived in proximity to the destitute, middle-class families invested in respectability regularly crossed paths with those steeped in vice. While some lived in houses, many resided in apartment buildings. Thus, dwellings such as kitchenette buildings were not always necessarily homes of the poor, even if they were homes of very poor quality. The narratives projected onto, and policies shaping, Chicago’s Black Belt in toto had their deepest roots in anti-blackness rather than other categorical variables. The conditions of residential life in the Black Belt, as is evident in its moniker, designated a primarily racialized geography. It is within this landscape that the kitchenette building’s existence is most salient.

To be clear, kitchenettes were not the only housing form in Chicago’s Black Belt. Rather, due to the racial nature of residential segregation, African Americans living in any number of housing types made up the Black Belt. Single-family homes, duplexes, multi-flat apartment buildings, and kitchenette buildings may have lined a single block.⁵¹ However, proximity to kitchenettes may have been a key defining feature of black residential areas and non-black, or categorically “non-blighted,” ones. While ethnic Europeans inhabiting these zones were also documented heavily living in tenements buildings and so-called slum areas, they were noted for their foreignness or their othered or failed whiteness, whereas black living conditions, although decried, appeared consonant with the blackness of the subjects inhabiting the spaces.

Arnold Hirsch, in *Making the Second Ghetto*—a rigorous history of neighborhood-making in Chicago—meticulously traces the conjunctures of economic, institutional, and racial power in the establishment of Chicago’s highly segregated neighborhoods. Analyzing the actions and interactions of entities ranging from the Michael Reese Hospital to community organizations like the South Deering Community Association, from the Metropolitan Planning Council to the

⁴⁹ Edith Abbott, *The Tenements of Chicago, 1908-1935*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), 144-45, 295-96.

⁵⁰ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 12. E. Franklin Frazier’s *The Negro Family in Chicago* was an important precursor to this work; however, as indicated in the title, Frazier focuses his study around the (dis)organization of the black family in Chicago, engaging the Black Belt’s other facets only as relevant to his object of study. Additionally, the Works Progress Administration’s “The Negro in Illinois” Project was a major study of black life in various black settlements of Illinois, to include Chicago; however, it was not available in published form until recently. See E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932); Brian Dolinar, ed., *The Negro in Illinois: The WPA Papers*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

⁵¹ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 602-03; 660. A flat is an apartment spanning the entire floor of a building, meant for one family, and flats are typically created by converting a house into an apartment building. Many buildings ranged from three to six flats. These were the primary buildings converted to kitchenette buildings along with mansions. See Dolinar, *Negro in Illinois*, 162; Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 577, 660.

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University of Chicago, Hirsch argues that a vast range of actors colluded to violently and subtly exclude black people from claiming and inhabiting residential space in many areas in Chicago in the immediate post-World War II era. Instead, a second ghetto was created in the form of so-called urban renewal, slum clearance, and the strategic placement and racial restrictions for housing projects.⁵²

“When They Get a Deed”

Many white anxieties about black integration of neighborhoods were packaged as concern over the effect on property values. The fear was that black people moving nearby would result in a decline in white-owned property values. For many whites, the threat of so-called “black invasion” was enough of a motivation to seek out alternative residential areas, although some stayed and tried to drive out the new residents with daily and nightly bombing, physical threats, and other forms of material and psychological violence.⁵³ The Chicago Commission on Race Relations quoted an established real estate dealer on the South Side as he voiced the concerns of a neighborhood association: “They injure our investments. They hurt our values. I couldn’t say how many have moved in, but there’s at least a hundred blocks that are tainted. We are not making any threat, but we do say that something must be done. Of course, if they come in as tenants, we can handle the situation fairly easily, but when they get a deed, that’s another matter.”⁵⁴ While his statement was delivered in 1919, its sentiments continued to ring true in the actions of white property owners for decades to come. The control of the racial landscape that was managed “easily” through landlordship was obliterated if black residents were buying their own properties in a neighborhood. Spouting narratives of themselves as victims under assault needing to rally against encroaching aggressors, white residents and the neighborhood associations they founded organized campaigns against black residential mobility as it affected “their” territory. These anti-black entities also had help from the federal government in ensuring their neighborhoods remained white or enabling the establishment of new white spaces in other areas in and beyond the city.

The government fed and supported white racial anxieties with subsidized mortgages in the suburbs exclusively for white families through the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), which began in 1934.⁵⁵ The FHA enabled first-time home-buyers to afford their homes by backing (insuring) banks that could cover 80% of a mortgage with a 20-year payback timeline. To protect their potential investment, the FHA sought to appraise properties; however, they had a whites-only policy for appraisal, due to insistence that non-white groups constituted risk.⁵⁶ The

⁵² Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For more on neighborhood-making and the role of organizations like the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council in it, see Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For more on the heavy influence of community and neighborhood on social mobility and life outcomes see Robert Sampson, *Great American City: Chicago and the Enduring Neighborhood Effect*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

⁵³ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017), chapters 6 and 9; Hirsch, *Second Ghetto*, chapters 2 and 3.

⁵⁴ Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *The Negro in Chicago*, 206.

⁵⁵ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, (New York: Liveright, 2017), 64-65.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), founded in 1933, appraised neighborhoods in order to determine which areas might be risky for amortized mortgage lending based on existing neighborhood composition of dwellings and people. HOLC created maps with areas graded A, B, C, or D in descending order from most to least desirable based on the presence of so-called blight. These graded areas were also color-coded, with the most desirable areas in green and the least desirable or “hazardous” in red.⁵⁷ The HOLC maps constructed D-rated redlined areas where there was an all- or mostly-black populace, regardless of the degree of wear on the homes.⁵⁸ The neighborhood grading system, and the FHA’s reliance upon it, created vast opportunities for white Americans to purchase homes while black citizens were denied this enormous economic benefit. Richard Rothstein has deftly demonstrated how the inclusion of these racial requisites in federal housing programs constituted a breach of the Thirteenth Amendment, which protects against “badges” of slavery; housing segregation, he offers, is one such badge.⁵⁹

Some white property owners and real estate agents also preyed on white fears in the practice commonly known as blockbusting. Blockbusting consisted of speculators stirring fears of black influx in a white neighborhood block by staging heightened black presence in the neighborhood, including fake phone calls from black people to nonexistent residents with common black names, fake advertisements for home sales placed in black newspapers to draw black people to the neighborhood, and other deceptive strategies. White residents, leaning into anti-black racial assumptions and anxieties, would be ripe for speculators to convince them to move before their property values plummeted. With these methods, speculators often were able to acquire white-owned homes at low rates and convert or lease them at significantly inflated rates to blacks desperately needing housing. Blockbusting often occurred after one black resident or family moved into a previously all-white area; however, it also sometimes took place prior to neighborhood integration, especially in white areas closely bordered by multi-race or black residential areas (likely to be declared as declining by HOLC’s appraisal).

While the prejudicial sentiment that black habitation degrades white space is rooted in anti-blackness, the concern for decreased property values during this period was legitimate. By legitimate, I do not mean that the fears were accurately justified by racist notions of black depravity. I mean that white home values did plummet initially when black residents began moving into an area. However, this decrease in value occurred *only* because speculators exploited white racial anxiety and proposed quick and cheap sales of their property at the first sign of black potential residence in an area. Once one property sold under rate, the floodgates were thrown open for speculators to pitch increasingly undervalued rates to homeowners, using the fact of another low property value in the neighborhood to reify the depression of sale rates and justify the narrative of black influx as the reason for the decrease.⁶⁰ Furthermore, because FHA loans could be used not only for mortgages but also for home improvement, and because these loans were restricted to whites and racially homogeneous neighborhoods, white homeowners were unable to secure government funds for maintenance and improvement if

⁵⁷ The categories were A: “Best” (green), B: “Still Desirable” (blue), C: “Definitely Declining” (yellow), and D: “Hazardous” (red).

⁵⁸ Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 64-65.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, viii-ix.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 96-99.

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blacks moved onto their blocks.⁶¹ Justifications such as these, with the state to back them, contributed greatly to the maintenance of the Black Belt in Chicago and in cities across the nation.

The Modern City

To discuss the modern is to discuss the city and the urban. The city as a modern site was explored and expanded by not only those making the urban environment their home, but also by city planners, architects, and scholars. Le Corbusier, both architect and theorist, conceived of a Radiant City that would be the utopia of modern man. With high-rise, high-density residential buildings, rooftop green spaces, and traffic interventions, Le Corbusier's concept emphasized what he held were the ultimate needs of man in relation to the environment, both built and natural: efficiency, minimalism, and access to sky, sun, and vegetation.⁶² For the architect or city planner hungry for inspiration (and there were quite a few, given his vast legacy), Le Corbusier's vision was one to be grasped, emulated, and revised as needed. However, his universalist idealism for the standardized home and city was more invested in building an urban terrain for the abstracted "modern man" than for a diverse populace in any number of drastically different urban sites. Jane Jacobs leveled a critique of Le Corbusier and other architects and planners who had a desire to build cities based on how they ought to look and function and that were based more on visions of art than on practicality. These designed city spaces, to Jacobs, failed the city's inhabitants.⁶³

While Le Corbusier and others led a new guard of architects, designers, and planners in designing the modern built environment of cities, sociologists took to delving into the social landscape of them. New York City and Chicago (known as the "Second City") were centered in understandings of modern America, where European and southern immigration ballooned these populations in the early and mid-twentieth century to unrivaled and unprecedented numbers. A group of scholars at the University of Chicago investigated the city intensively beginning in the 1920s and developed what became known as the Chicago School of Sociology. Robert Park, one of its founding members, stated: "The city, in short, shows the good and evil in human nature in excess. It is this fact, perhaps, more than any other, which justifies the view that would make of the city a laboratory or clinic in which human nature and social processes may be conveniently and profitably studied."⁶⁴

The Chicago School of Sociology set itself apart by establishing sustained engagement of Chicago's patterns of urbanization and racial intricacies. These sociologists shaped their discipline by postulating methods and perspectives focused on human ecology, urbanism, and social organization. Louis Wirth, besides setting forth a concentrated theory of urbanism for effectual studies of the city, was invested in the analysis of racial "types" and differences among immigrant and minority populations in cities. Robert Park laid out an approach to the study of

⁶¹ Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 45.

⁶² See Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*, (New York: Orion Press, 1967 [1933]).

⁶³ See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1961).

⁶⁴ Robert Park, "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment" in *The City*, Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, Roderick McKenzie, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 46.

society based on ecology, which was echoed and extended by Roderick McKenzie who detailed the School's use of natural zones and "invasion." Ernest Burgess's concentric circle model of city growth and expansion, as well as his explication of the relationships between mobility and social organization, disorganization, and reorganization, were novel contributions to the field in the first half of the twentieth century. These theorists and students of city life managed multiple projects, trained protégés, contributed expertise to local and federal policy development, and produced an abundance of publications and talks. Their intellectual and practical influence in and beyond the discipline was vast.⁶⁵

Black adjustment to the city received unrivaled study, as it was a part of the social "laboratory." Studies of Chicago's black populace in the early to mid-twentieth century focused on migration, employment, crime, housing, and family life. In *The Negro Family in Chicago*, E. Franklin Frazier meticulously builds on the work of his mentors Ernest Burgess and Robert Park in the study of communities in various areas of Chicago. With charts, graphs, and ethnographic data, Frazier uses the premise of the disorganization of the Negro family as a departure point for his study. He analyzes aspects of black family composition and adjustment to the city by factors such as rates of illegitimacy, proportion of female-headed households, occurrence of family desertion, and rates of home ownership versus tenancy. Building from the fundamental assertion of problematic Negro life in the city, Frazier does much to further entrench this notion in sociological discourse, as he, a black scholar, corroborates ideas of black pathology espoused by his white predecessors and leaders of the field. While Frazier departs from studies preceding his in holding that the Negro population of Chicago must not be evaluated as "an undifferentiated mass"—and thus challenges the essentialist bent in prior sociological work—his analysis reproduces the framework of "the Negro problem."⁶⁶ He offers up some examples of exceptional blackness, highlighting the differential distribution of disorganization across seven distinct zones that he identifies within the South Side; he regards as laudable those groupings of black people who have achieved or striven to adhere to middle-class ideals of nuclear familydom, while he decries other "elements" of the Negro population whose ostensible distance from those ideals is the key problem to be solved.

As Burgess notes in his editorial preface, Frazier's study moves away from the assumptions of inherent Negro pathology and focuses instead on the intersections of social disorganization with geography.⁶⁷ While the distinction was an advancement, the anchoring presumptions of black irregularity prevailed, leading Burgess to proclaim, "The chief handicap from which the Negro suffers is perhaps not poverty, nor overcrowding, however serious and challenging these problems may be, but the persistence of an unorganized and disorganized

⁶⁵ See Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, Roderick McKenzie, *The City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925); Louis Wirth, *Louis Wirth on Cities and Social Life, Selected Papers*, Albert Reiss, ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964). See also Harvey W. Zorbaugh, *The Gold Coast and the Slum*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929); E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932); E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939). For a discussion of the elision of black sociologists from traditional conceptions of the founding Chicago School of Sociology, see Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 21-23.

⁶⁶ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 117.

⁶⁷ Ernest Burgess, "Editor's Preface," *The Negro Family in Chicago*, E. Franklin Frazier, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), xi.

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family life.”⁶⁸ Burgess’s summation gives a greater weight to traditional family organization and values—which emerge from categorizations of white nuclear heteropatriarchal familial normalcy—than to the systemically upheld, and historically perpetuated, material dispossession as key issues facing black American citizens in the urban environment. Black women become vilified through urban sociological discourse. However, black women as paradoxical to U.S. nationhood was neither novel in the mid-twentieth century nor specific to sociological study.

Black Domesticities

Domesticity and blackness—the one, an idealized stabilizing force and feature of pure nationhood, and the other, a category encompassing that which was never meant to be national—have historically been construed and constructed as irreconcilable. In the nineteenth century, notions of a “unified republic,” defined in large part by the microcosmic nuclear family, gained significant traction.⁶⁹ With ideals of stable homes central to ideals of pure nationhood, the role of women as managers of the home and family life became even more paramount. The Cult of True Womanhood, defined by ideals of piety, purity, submission, and domesticity, reigned in the public and private spheres during this era, as many women strove to become paragons of genteel femininity, to be matron-saints of sorts.⁷⁰ This Cult of True Womanhood was defined over and against black female subjects, as the institution of slavery made them legally chattel and the Constitution deemed them three-fifths a person, and all those who were free were still defined within the shadows of this white supremacist ideology.⁷¹ Moreover, while enslaved people were not understood as fully human, black females were not understood as women, because womanhood was fundamentally “white, frail, and virtuous”—protected and bolstered by white manhood and representative of the morals of national society.⁷² Perceived and represented as hypersexual or as animalistic workhorses, as deserving of their lot and incapable of managing more than the basest of duties and aspirations, black female subjects could not be included in the category of woman, much less achieve *true* womanhood, as to do so would fundamentally rupture the category itself. White womanhood and its ideal form—true womanhood—relied upon black women to serve as foil, as unspoken counterpoint below the baseline of white female selfhood.⁷³

As Phyllis Palmer astutely traces, even as racial roles, categories of the human, and domestic work changed in the post-slavery era and twentieth century, white women continued to rely upon Manichean dichotomies, enhanced by a century or more of racial and sexual ideologies, to define ideal womanhood. This womanhood continued to be wrapped up in the

⁶⁸ Ibid., xii. This opinion was built upon in Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s notorious 1965 report on the state of the black family in the United States. See Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, 1965).

⁶⁹ Candice Jenkins, *Private Lives: Proper Relations*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 6.

⁷⁰ Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Servants, 1920-1945*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); Candice Jenkins, *Private Lives: Proper Relations*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁷¹ Jenkins, *Private Lives: Proper Relations*, 5-7.

⁷² Ibid., 7.

⁷³ Ibid.

domestic sphere and required non-white women to do the “dirty” work of maintaining the home, while white women attended to what were perceived as the higher level needs of the family, such as the morality and education of the children, and the sexual and emotional needs of a husband.⁷⁴ Not only were domestic workers devalued because they were not white and were doing “dirty” work, but also because the naturalized position of women of color in domestic service roles imbued the work they were doing with the sexual ideologies already attached to many of their bodies. The associations followed as such: dirty work made one unclean, and being unclean was bad; “bad” women were inappropriately sexual and defiled; thus, dirty work made for bad women, and bad women did dirty work.⁷⁵ In essence, “The wife’s cleanliness was made possible by the domestic’s dirtiness,” and it was this contrasting juxtaposition that upheld middle-class white womanhood well into the mid-twentieth century.⁷⁶

As domestic work once again became overwhelmingly associated with black women at midcentury when ethnic Europeans in urban areas took up that work less often (they had increasing opportunities to claim whiteness and what might be aptly understood as white work, which might include being a full-time housewife), black women’s associations with domesticity continued to be both overdetermined and fraught.⁷⁷ Black women were often associated with the home, even as some of their own homes had to be neglected in various ways in order to make ends meet through domestic work. However, their domestic work did not translate into domesticity proper, as that ideal continued to be couched in whiteness. While black women had their own standards and discourses of keeping a proper home, their home lives were largely unacknowledged or disregarded by white employers (as they were expected to work early mornings and late evenings) or they were pathologized by emergent sociological scholarship and subsequently embedded in dominant discourse.⁷⁸ Housing what sociologists of the era deemed “disorganized” families and with many households under the direction of black women who were frequently employed full- or part-time in domestic service work, Chicago’s kitchenettes were on the margins of redeemable domesticity and modernity. Black domesticities, or ways of cultivating and being at home, thus offer insights into how black kitchenette residents navigated their home spaces and social relations in light of the discourse and materiality of their blackness.

Situating the Project

My project joins a conversation with scholars who have recently turned attention to the geography of Chicago’s South Side, emphasizing the spatial dynamics of race as well as the cultural works produced out of it. These scholars uncover layers of history, policy, cultural production, and social relations and how they operated at the scale of the state, the city, and the neighborhood.

⁷⁴ Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt*, 139-40; 146-47. Note that the normative family of the nuclear republic is heteropatriarchal. See Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); M. Jacqui Alexander, “Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: Feminism, Tourism, and the State in the Bahamas” in *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁷⁵ Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt*, 144-147.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 6, 12-13.

⁷⁸ Jenkins, *Private Lives, Proper Relations*, 20; Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt*, 66.

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Engaging the intersections of Chicago's black geography and representational history, Davarian Baldwin's 2007 *Chicago's New Negroes* explores black Chicago in the 1920s, analyzing cultural spaces and figures that paralleled, overlapped, and even rivaled, those of Harlem. Baldwin draws geographical attention in particular to the area between Twenty-Sixth and Thirty-Ninth Streets along State St. known as the Stroll, arguing that in this place the New Negroes of Chicago participated in public presentation of their modern selves within a contested terrain of labor, leisure, and respectability.⁷⁹ Elizabeth Schlabach's 2013 *Along the Streets of Bronzeville* also makes an argument for geography and black self-making. Schlabach holds that life along Bronzeville's streets provided the inspiration and imperative for black artists and writers to represent it. The geography and streetscape of Bronzeville enabled the richness of the spectacular and banal aspects of its inhabitants' lives to be given public audience, creating what is now referred to as the Black Chicago Renaissance. Schlabach highlights the kitchenette as a feminized space, to divergent ends, in the works of Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks.⁸⁰

In a distinctively different approach, Rashad Shabazz analyzes black Chicago through geographies of carcerality, arguing that for innumerable black men, Chicago's spaces on the South Side shift from one iteration of carcerality to another. Shabazz traces the constriction and surveillance on the South Side and the resultant manifestations of masculinity observable in the communities and representations thereof. Rather than a generative or productive space, as is presented in Schlabach's work, Shabazz's South Side is unrelenting in its severity. The kitchenette is a site Shabazz engages in depth; he contends that it manifested the surveillance of the state/society within black homes, making kitchenettes sites of black masculine imprisonment that sometimes led to their institutional incarceration.⁸¹ Shabazz is especially astute in making connections between segregation and the terrain of Black Belt kitchenettes: "[S]egregation," he offers, "unleashed the tyranny of the kitchenette; it was the socioeconomic and sociospatial context that brought it into existence."⁸² In other words, the plight of African American migrants who lived in these kitchenette buildings was wrought by the legal and extralegal strictures imposed upon them: those of racially restrictive housing covenants and physical intimidation and violence.

GerShun Alvilez also contributed a recent analysis of Chicago's kitchenettes, providing a useful interrogation of the domestic space as one wrought by segregation that ultimately rendered black subjects placeless and valueless. Alvilez does well to highlight and break down the ways that black kitchenette residents were subjected to death and alienation by their home spaces and how that subjection reflects the devaluation of black subjecthood in segregated

⁷⁹ Baldwin notes that in the late 1920s, the heart of the Stroll shifted to Forty-Seventh St. Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 25.

⁸⁰ See Elizabeth Schlabach, *Along the Streets of Bronzeville: Black Chicago's Literary Landscape*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

⁸¹ If, following Shabazz, the kitchenette is carceral, what of the innumerable women who disproportionately found themselves, with their children, living in that domestic space? For Shabazz, women are on the periphery of the impacts of the Black Belt's and kitchenette's carcerality, as masculinity in his formulation is that which is most at risk and has the most to lose. Imprisonment is masculinized in Shabazz's study, and women's experiences, influences, and affectedness are factored as peripheral to the constricting operations of racialized spatial confinement.

⁸² Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 40.

society. However, in Alvilez's account, as in Shabazz's, the kitchenette is irredeemable: it was a terrible place to live and it is a wonder people made it out alive. Those summations were inarguably true in many instances; however, much is lost in that history and narrative of kitchenette living if the investigation stops there. Kitchenettes were often uninhabitable places (materially or due to their crowded nature, if not both), but tens of thousands of migrants not only inhabited them but made homes of them. What Shabazz and Alvilez miss in their studies are *how* black people made lives in their kitchenettes, in light of their confinement and devaluation.⁸³ What knowledges and practices did they have and produce in order to inhabit these uninhabitable places? What bodily, social, and financial maneuvers did black kitchenette residents resort to, by circumstance and by choice, in order to make do with, and make the most of, their kitchenette lives?

Architecture and the Making of Identity

In addition to studies of Chicago in particular, scholars writing about the interconnections between architecture and identity have helped to develop my thinking about the kitchenette as a built environment, social container, and produced space. Gaston Bachelard's classic *The Poetics of Space* is one of the foremost works connecting, and theorizing, intimacy and self-development through an analysis of the built environment. The author offers that tracing a character's movements through a home yields insight into intimacy afforded by or foreclosed by the space. Privileging the "verticality" of the house structure, Bachelard laments that apartment high rises in cities results in "home . . . becom[ing] mere horizontality. The different rooms that compose living quarters jammed into one floor all lack one of the fundamental principles for distinguishing and classifying the values of intimacy."⁸⁴ Without room for the psyche and imagination to unfold, as it were, intimacy is foreclosed, or at least stunted in homes with inadequate height, space, and structural amenities, according to Bachelard. While his philosophy of domestic architecture is written from a position privileging middle-class Eurocentric values, his specifications of particular places in the home to particular types of imaginative practice and identity development offer useful points by which to think through assumptions of what valuable and adequate home space is.

Maurice Wallace's 1995 *Constructing the Black Masculine* is an interdisciplinary study that brings together visibility, performance, literature, and architecture to read the constructions of black masculinity in a U.S. and diasporic context. In particular, Wallace's reading of architectural design—showing the ways in which black subjectivity was constructed through the Freemason Lodge and confronted through the literal and metaphorical space of the house—provides a useful approach to engaging with the structures of spaces inhabited by black people.⁸⁵ In a similar vein, Shannon Jackson's 2000 *Lines of Activity* analyzes the architecture of Jane

⁸³ Toward the end of his chapter on kitchenettes, Shabazz writes briefly of this homemaking practice by black women: "For them the confinement of the kitchenette meant finding ways to create a productive life, family, and community in the midst of struggle. Black women did what Black men would not do, which was to organize the family in an effort to get everyone out of the kitchenette." Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*, 53.

⁸⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classical Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 [1958, trans. 1964]), 27.

⁸⁵ Maurice Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775-1995*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

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Addams' Hull House in Chicago to locate domestic praxis and "to understand the messy and paradoxical nature of reform work" within its walls.⁸⁶ While Jackson's study is decidedly not about black subjects or set within the temporal scope of my project, her analysis of the everyday and the domestic through the lens of performance-in-space is exemplary.

Bringing together architecture and American literature, William Gleason's 2011 *Sites Unseen* examines the centrality of race in the construction of place and the built environment through written narrative. His focus on the racial investments of domestic architecture and the architectural nature of narrative devices lays an important groundwork for my project, as well.⁸⁷ Additionally, Dianne Harris' 2013 *Little White Houses* is a cultural and architectural history of actual and represented postwar suburban homes and the ways American whiteness was constructed through them. Focusing on "ordinary," rather than custom-built, suburban homes between 1945 and 1960, Harris examines home layouts, yards, window design, and other features alongside popular print material, such as *House Beautiful* magazine, that instructed and constructed white domestic subjects as they moved away from city centers. Harris' work intervenes in architectural historical scholarship by centering whiteness as an integral element to be interrogated in analyses of suburbia's built environment.

Most recently, Adrienne Brown's 2017 *The Black Skyscraper* offers an in-depth analysis of the skyscraper through the intersections of race and visibility. Elucidating the "skyscraper's reception as a technology of perception and sensation," Brown centers the built environment and symbol of the skyscraper in her interrogation of how the novel modern architectural form shifted urban landscapes, cultural production, discourse, and engagements with racial identity.⁸⁸ Brown situates the tenement in contrast to the skyscraper: whereas the tenement made race locatable and highly visible in many urban settings (especially as racial and national groups inhabited specific sections of the city), the skyscraper frustrated possibilities of ascertaining race which in turn heightened racial anxieties. These scholars' deep investigations into the interplay of the built environment and subjectivity, especially as related to urbanity, have created an avenue of inquiry that I extend in this project.

Spatial Production

The kitchenette building serves as a rich case study in the intricacies of externally-imposed black spaces. The kitchenette is a symbol of black movement and black confinement. On the one hand, as the primary habitation of migrants from the South, the kitchenette was a literal marker of black mass migration. On the other hand, the proliferation of kitchenette buildings on Chicago's South and West Sides due to racially restrictive covenants preventing blacks from living elsewhere was a sure index of the inability of blacks to move. Also, while blacks moved often residentially from place to place in the Black Belt, their corporeal and social freedoms were constrained within overcrowded kitchenette buildings. Black movement, place, and spatial production are integral to my study of the Chicago kitchenette.

⁸⁶ Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 5.

⁸⁷ William A. Gleason, *Sites Unseen: Architecture, Race, and American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

⁸⁸ Adrienne Brown, *The Black Skyscraper*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 17.

Henri Lefebvre's seminal 1974 monograph, *The Production of Space*, challenged notions of space as an understood, or taken for granted, concept and reality. On the most fundamental level, Lefebvre argues that space is inherently social—it is a social product.⁸⁹ Space, he argues, has three components: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces.⁹⁰ Spatial practice is comprised of the movements and flows of human beings. This may include ways of moving, paths of movement, and interactions with the environment in moving; spatial practice involves performance. Representations of space are the modes by which space is communicated; they are constructed interpretations rather than reflections of some absolute truth. Representations of space are encoded signs such as maps, architectural plans, photographs, and dioramas. The third component, representational spaces, is a bit less straightforward than the previous two. Representational spaces are symbolic spaces: they encompass how people (non-verbally) project conceptions of space (i.e., meaning and value) onto physical space. Home, the market, and school are examples of representational spaces. Taken together, spatial practice, representations of spaces, and representational spaces constitute socially-produced space.

Lefebvre asserts that spatial practice—what we might think of as the movements and flows of beings—is indicative of the composition and nature of a society's space. He declares, “The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.”⁹¹ One way of ascertaining spatial practice is by analyzing societal space. To get to know a space is also to learn of how entities may or must negotiate the space. In Lefebvre's formulation, it also seems to hold that the inverse could be true: societal space can be ascertained through an analysis of spatial practice. By analyzing the flows of people and their interaction with and around objects, places, and other people, one gains knowledge of the structure, power, and meanings of societal spaces. Throughout this project, I will analyze the kitchenette building from both points of deduction: what spatial practice in the kitchenette tells us about the society that produced it, and what the space of Chicago's South Side and of the building itself tells us about the nature of spatial practice within the kitchenette.

In what might be understood as a work of geographic philosophy, Yi-Fu Tuan's 1977 *Space and Place* builds on and departs from Lefebvre's Marxist approach, interrogating space and place as concepts that are assumed transparent but that require unpacking. He posits space as movement, or “room in which to move,” and place as pause, or “an object in which one can dwell.”⁹² While space connotes freedom, expansion, and mobility, place connotes security and stability. Tuan writes, “[E]ach pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.”⁹³ In essence, when moving through space (whether momentary or over prolonged time), pauses enable rest and ascription of value to location. In this way, according to Tuan, locations in space become places. Space can also be opportunity or threat (e.g. an expansive forest), while place can be ascribed positive or negative value (e.g. home may be a

⁸⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), 22.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

welcoming/warm place or an alienating/cold place). In this project, I analyze the places of Chicago, the Black Belt, and in some instances, specific kitchenette buildings. More often, however, I engage the space of those places: that is, the room to move and the factors contributing to the breadth and form of this movement.

Geographers Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods have underscored black spatial production and knowledge from the nineteenth century to the present day. In their studies, they highlight racism, erasure, and spatial constraint as features of black American and diasporic experience in a global society harnessed by white supremacist and anti-black ideologies. McKittrick and Woods have argued that black people's production of space and spatial knowledges—what they call “black geographies”—are under-acknowledged and -explored. Rather than being primarily or solely victims of oppressive spatial power formations, black subjects produce space and possess alternative knowledges of geography in light of spatial power hierarchies.⁹⁴ In my project, I take up the charge of interrogating black geographic sites, navigations, and knowledges toward the end of illuminating the limits and possibilities of kitchenette space.

Project Structure

The kitchenette centralizes the spatial and behavioral modifications, social anxieties, and intra-community tensions built into and generated from constricted black domestic space in the modern urban American environment. Analyzing the kitchenette as a central site of black place-making yields new insights into how geographies and built environments serve as markers of racial ideologies. *Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History* is an investigation of race, space, and the built environment through literature, archival documents and photography, and performance. The written, imaged, and built offer overlapping yet distinct points of entry into black people's practices of remaking home in space. Literature affords insights into the creative reimagining (or naturalistic rendering, in the case of Richard Wright) of the lives of black migrants and dwellers in Chicago at midcentury, providing glimpses into their psychic negotiations and mundane activities that might go unrecorded otherwise. Literature also uniquely represents aspects of the visual, spatial, sonic, haptic, and olfactory as experienced by characters within the pages, who are figurations of black everymen and everywomen making home in the city. Visual images of Chicago's South Side index the existence of people, places, and things in a locatable temporal moment and construct narratives of the captured moments through angle, perspective, frame, lighting, and juxtaposition, among other things. Moreover, architecture provides the physically structured spaces that contained, or were exceeded by, black migrants' public and private lives. Where and how these settlers lived, as well as how they were meant to live, can be ascertained by analyzing space through these key sites.

The central question posed by this project, and answered to the fullest extent manageable with scope and resources, is: What role did the kitchenette play in black Chicago's geographic, political, housing, and cultural history? Other guiding questions for this project include: In what ways did black Chicagoans produce modern space within the limitations and strictures of the Black Belt and the kitchenette building? How did blacks confront and contend with their

⁹⁴ Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, “No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean,” *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), 1-11.

exclusion from urban modernity as it was manifested in their home spaces? What possibilities did the kitchenette afford and deny for black self-making and homemaking in the mid-twentieth-century United States?

Chapter 1 “Constructing the Modern Kitchenette” argues that the construction of kitchenettes—through public policy, private practice, economic downturn, material production, and discourse—make them prime emblems of midcentury modernity, its machinations, undergirdings, and failings. Chapter 2 “Quotidian Expenses: Domestic Design and Spatial Performance” interrogates the performances produced within kitchenettes prompted by the building’s design. Through analysis of the material conditions of buildings as represented through photography and archival data, it argues that navigating the normalized inadequacies, risks, and inconveniences of quotidian kitchenette living constitutes racial labor and produces in residents distinctive domestic knowledges and repertoires not required in other home spaces.

In a visual interlude between the chapters, I curate a set of archival photographs to represent the visual landscape of kitchenette buildings in the 1940s and ’50s. Chapter 3 “‘The Involuntary Plan’: Navigating Intimacies and Failures in the Kitchenette” contends that over-intimacy and domestic failure are primary nodes of black urban experience in the kitchenette. The intimacy within the kitchenette building and apartment constitutes domestic failure, because propriety is not conventionally attainable. The work required to buffer overly intimate encounters is atypical of modern domestic spatial practice, as the conventional home space is built to afford privacy and propriety. Through close readings of Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Maud Martha* and Richard Wright’s *Native Son* alongside archival documents, I examine how black subjects productively innovate and intervene in the kitchenette given this physical and discursive context.

Chapter 4 “Kitchenette Kin: Carl Hansberry Enterprises and Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*” analyzes renowned playwright Lorraine Hansberry and her father Carl Hansberry—advocate for black residential rights and also a slum landlord—as paradoxical representatives of/for black housing rights, reflecting tensions among the larger Black Belt population. The chapter employs close readings of *A Raisin in the Sun*, court briefs from the *Hansberry v. Lee* cases, and documents from the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council’s record of housing code violations to trace the complexities in the substantially different use of the kitchenette by the Hansberry family toward common goals of racial uplift and material claims to modern civic subjecthood. The kitchenette’s representation gives unique insights into the making of black modernity, which in its modernness was quintessentially urban. By analyzing the framing of narrative, subjects, and space in “slum” photography, the spatial innovations of literary characters and actual residents, and the paradoxes of a renowned black family’s housing advocacy, I also argue that the kitchenette is a linchpin in the history of mid-twentieth-century black Chicago’s struggles for collective civic inclusion.

Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History engages the writing, photography, sociological study, and organizing work focused on kitchenettes as an archive of black domesticity and modern material, spatial, and social design. By culling this archive, I also tease out the repertoire of practices needed by kitchenette residents to make kitchenette life possible. This project is not one of recovery. It is not that the kitchenette is unknown. Rather, my aim is to expose and analyze the granular and the banal within the known—and sometimes overexposed—kitchenette

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building. It, and the tenement housing with which it categorically overlapped, was widely regarded as an “evil” by social reformers and public officials who touted urban development, fights on blight, and neighborhood conservation as avenues holding potential for better housing conditions for residents and aesthetics for the city of Chicago. Writers like Gwendolyn Brooks and Richard Wright, as well as photographers like Mildred Mead and Edwin Roskam, represented the kitchenette and its subjects in a wide spectrum ranging from the carceral and abandoned (as Rashad Shabazz and GerShun Alivilez have deftly demonstrated) to the optimistic and determined (as Farah Jasmine Griffin shows).

Kitchenettes were not exclusive to Chicago. New York, Los Angeles, Boston, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. were also cities with a large enough kitchenette presence as to warrant news articles featuring them.⁹⁵ However, those kitchenettes, at least as featured in cookbooks and newspaper articles, were by-and-large modern apartments intended for white use rather than the results of racial residential segregation. New York’s kitchenettes in Harlem would be the exception. The amount of study Chicago received in the early twentieth-century—Richard Wright called it the “known city”—as well as the way that Chicago’s housing policies become models for national residential segregation, positions Chicago’s black residential landscape uniquely for historical study.⁹⁶ The Black Belt kitchenette, born amid this context, furnishes the opportunity to engage the particularities of Chicago’s locale, built environment, and cultural production, while also connecting it to the role of real estate, housing, and homemaking in the function and identity of the U.S. nation.

My aim is not to rush into linkages or comparisons of the kitchenette with instances of spatial, racial, and residential inequities today. Some parallels can certainly be drawn. However, I believe that deepening the engagement with the kitchenette building, in its historical social, political, and geographical contexts, enriches the understanding of black and Chicago history of that period and enables the particularities and nuances to be more fully drawn out and appreciated. After doing due diligence to understand how the kitchenette came to be, how it existed (and how people existed within and around it), and what became of it, only then can sufficient care be taken to bring the kitchenette into comparison with other housing and spatial forms during other periods (including the present), because it will be understood first on its own terms. My investments for this project are in the first step, hoping sincerely that my work will strengthen a foundation upon which effective studies toward the latter aim might be undertaken and achieved.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Mrs. Edward Brunson Clarke, “Kitchenette Entertaining: Hospitality that Requires No Elaborate Outlay,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 4, 1913, 12; Richard Burton, “In Praise of Kitchenettes,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1918, 71; “Thanksgiving Feast Possible in Kitchenette,” *Washington Post*, November 23, 1937, 16. ProQuest.

⁹⁶ Richard Wright, “Introduction” in *Black Metropolis*, Drake and Cayton, xviii.

CHAPTER 1

Constructing the Modern Kitchenette

The Chicago kitchenette was innovated by a black woman. Miss Grace Garnett (also known as Grace Garnett-Abney), an African American woman known as one of Chicago's "Old Settlers," takes credit for the kitchenette's origin.¹ "Of course I don't want to claim an idea that rightfully may belong to some one [*sic*] else," she states in a 1941 Works Progress Administration (WPA) interview with Joseph Bougere, "But so far as I know I started the kitchenette idea."² She goes on:

When I came back to Chicago in 1914, after having been away for fifteen years, I bought a three-story house at 3627 Vernon Avenue. There was a total of ten rooms. My mother and I lived on the first floor, and since my husband was dead I thought of taking in roomers. I thought the matter over carefully, and as summer was coming I didn't like the idea of roomers so well. I have never liked the idea of sharing my kitchen with some one else—not that I am selfish. So I took the top floor and made it into two apartments consisting of a room and a kitchen per apartment.³

While the *Encyclopedia of Chicago* notes that kitchenettes appeared in Chicago "around 1916 in Uptown," there is no source given for that information. Rashad Shabazz, who has most recently written of the kitchenette apartment in his *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*, cites the same encyclopedia entry and marks 1916 as the definitive year of the kitchenette's emergence in the Windy City.⁴ Garnett's interview, which has not been referenced in previous kitchenette scholarship, provides a slightly earlier date, and a much more concrete description of the motivations behind the design innovation. Her account also shifts the Chicago kitchenette's originating geography from Uptown, where a populace of mostly white and wealthy citizens lived, to the South Side, two blocks away from what would

¹ Davarian Baldwin and Allan Spear both refer to her as Grace Garnett-Abney, which was her married name, but the archival interview names her as Miss Grace Garnett. Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 64; Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto: 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 150.

² Black housing advocate Carl Hansberry was reputed by one of his children to be "the founder of kitchenettes." As Hansberry did not go into business until the 1930s, Garnett clearly precedes him. An extended analysis of Hansberry's involvement with kitchenettes in the city appears in Chapter 4 of this project. Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2012), 195.

³ Miss Grace Garnett, interview by Joseph Bougere, July 30, 1941, 3431 South Parkway, Chicago, IL, "Kitchenette—Origin; Early Chicago," Illinois Writers Project/"Negro in Illinois" Papers, Box 37, Folder 25, 1, Vivian G. Harsh Afro-American Research and Special Collections, Chicago Public Library, Chicago, IL.

⁴ Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 35.

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become Lorraine Hansberry's notorious childhood home.⁵ In essence, Grace Garnett's WPA interview inserts the kitchenette into Chicago's history very concretely: it provides the who, what, where, when, and why of the kitchenette concept.

Garnett's "why" was primarily spatial availability and perhaps also a desire for additional income, although it is very unlikely that she needed the additional funds. Her larger-than-needed home and deceased husband furnished the opportunity for enterprise.⁶ However, for Garnett, the kitchenette was not her first foray into independent wealth generation. She had opened one of the first black beauty parlors on the South Side in 1896. Located on State Street, the eastern boundary of black residential Chicago at that time, Garnett initially served white and black women clients until her clientele became all black. Since her beauty school training had prepared her for dressing white women's hair, she had to train herself in effective methods of styling and treating black women's textured hair.⁷ By the time of her kitchenette innovation, she had been in the business of recognizing opportunities and devising strategies to achieve them for some time.

Garnett's home renovation design and landlordship were shaped by her desire for separation from her future tenants. Miss Garnett may or may not have been a selfish person as she says, but her aversion to sharing the kitchen—*her* kitchen—with others highlights concerns around intimacy and cleanliness that would go on to characterize kitchenettes as they grew in abundance in the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, Miss Garnett's possessiveness of the kitchen space communicates that the kitchen, above all public spaces in the home, is a highly personal domain. Miss Garnett's kitchenette concept allowed roomers to forgo sharing a kitchen either with her or with each other. Others seemed to appreciate the separation (and, of course, the financial payoff) as much as she did. "My kitchenette idea spreaded [*sic*] quickly," Garnett attests. "Colored people took the idea first and the Jews later started it. It was much better than having roomers share your apartment with you."⁸ Converting sections of dwellings into kitchenettes, then, was a way to avoid sharing domestic space while still capitalizing on the demand for housing rentals.

⁵ This exclusionary landscape would be the one Carl Hansberry and his family would face as they moved in and fought for their Washington Park home in 1937, which is analyzed in Chapter 4. Note: Neither Sanborn maps of the 1920s nor present-day Google Maps contain an address of 3627 Vernon Avenue, as the street did not run that far north. However, it is possible that the interviewer or typist transposed numbers in the address. 6327 Vernon Avenue yields an existing address on the South Side in Washington Park. It may also be possible (but less likely) that the block/house numbering on Vernon Avenue changed between 1914 and 1925. See Sanborn: Chicago 1905-1951 Vol. 16, 1926, Sheet 17; Sanborn: Chicago 1905-1951 Vol. 14, 1925, Sheet 0.

⁶ Allan Spear points out that it was not uncommon for people more financially well-off to purchase or rent large(r) homes for the purposes of renting out portions of them. Spear also notes that many Old Settlers opened their homes to newly migrated relatives or other roomers. Allan Spear, *Black Chicago*, 149-50. Miss Garnett's dead husband allows her the space to conceive of her home space differently, allowing for architectural and residential innovation/invention. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lena Younger's drive to see a different home space for her family also comes out of the loss of her spouse. Coming full circle, black women have long had larger visions for their domiciles and their families in Chicago's actual and figurative landscapes.

⁷ Grace Garnett-Abney, interview with M. Bunton, "Beauty Parlors," June 28, 1941, Illinois Writers Project: "Negro in Illinois" Papers, Box 26, Vivian G. Harsh Afro-American Research and Special Collections, Chicago Public Library; Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, chapter 2 (53-90).

⁸ Garnett interview, "Kitchenette—Origin; Early Chicago," Illinois Writers Project, Box 37, folder 25, 2, Vivian Harsh Research Collection, Chicago Public Library.

However, years later, the average kitchenette apartment building was defined by its communal spaces, one of which oftentimes was the kitchen.⁹

Miss Garnett describes the neighborhood she lived in as “mostly poor whites” with “more whites than Negroes at that time.” Likely one of a few racial pioneers, Garnett self-assuredly boasts, “They did not object to my living there, nor did they object to my kitchenette idea,” which she couches in a justification that “the kitchenettes of those days were not like the ones of today.”¹⁰ The kitchenettes of the 1940s were objectionable to the self-proclaimed innovator. One- and two-room kitchenette apartments became standard products of residential conversion by the time of the Great Depression. Whereas kitchenettes may have spurred from well-off Chicagoans’ desire to create a passive stream of income in their own homes in the 1910s, the residential concept devolved into landlord absenteeism as its prominent management mode by the 1940s. Rather than kitchenette apartments appearing in one section of the home as Garnett first envisioned and executed, whole buildings began to be put to kitchenette use. Moreover, as migrants poured in from southern regions of the country and the housing stock became limited, residential buildings suffered from the heavy use of too many families in not enough space. Of her Vernon Avenue property Garnett notes, “The house was nice then but, of course, it is deplorable now. I no longer own the building.”¹¹ In her eyes, the building had declined under new ownership and presumably higher occupancy.

The typical kitchenette apartment was made up of one or two rooms, which were subdivided from larger apartments or flats. Rather than individual private bathrooms, one communal bathroom typically served a hall of kitchenette apartments. In a handful of his entries in the *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, black editor Hurley Green, Sr. describes the kitchenette building of his childhood (primarily in the 1930s). He notes, “A kitchenette is like a small village (36 families, 6 bathrooms, and three phones), thus requiring family cooperation.”¹² Green resided in kitchenette apartments with his mother for the first eighteen years of his life, living first at the aforementioned three-story building at 5633 S. Calumet Avenue where rent was three dollars per week, then after eviction living in another one-room kitchenette at 5901 S. Indiana Avenue for the same rate.¹³ Green identifies the standard make-up of a kitchenette apartment: “A kitchenette is a small, sleeping room, with a small closet that housed a two-burner stove and a

⁹ The other was the bathroom. Edith Abbott reports that furnished rooms rented to black tenants were often cheaper than unfurnished ones because residents were relegated to a communal kitchen rather than provided with a cooking surface in their rooms; she identifies this as a condition particular to room rentals to blacks. Abbott, *Tenements of Chicago*, 308, 330.

¹⁰ Garnett interview, “Kitchenette—Origin; Early Chicago,” Illinois Writers Project, Box 37, folder 25, 1, Vivian Harsh Research Collection, Chicago Public Library.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Hurley Green, Sr., “Shifting Scenes; Mothers Still Number One...,” *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, May 8, 1997.

¹³ Hurley Green, Sr., “Shifting Scenes; Changes in Times,” *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, January 30, 2003; Hurley Green, Sr., “Shifting Scenes; The Gains of Pain,” *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, November 13, 1997. This weekly rate is substantially lower than that suggested by Wright above and correlates to Grace Garnett’s description of kitchenette rental rates in the 1910s and ‘20s (see footnote 33). While Wright’s outlined financial scenario could be understood as near the higher end of kitchenette rentals, Green’s rate would have been highly unusual by the 1940s and ‘50s based on other reports on rents. See Abbott, *Tenements of Chicago*, 328-330.

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small, wooden ice-box.”¹⁴ His description mirrors that of St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton’s in *Black Metropolis*, where they offer, “Bronzeville’s kitchenettes are single rooms, rented furnished and without a lease. Sometimes a hot-plate is included for cooking, but often there are no cooking facilities despite the name.”¹⁵ At his Calumet address, Green lived among “five visible kitchenette buildings” on his block, with the vast majority of the apartments housing doubled-up families, suggesting that buildings and people were concentrated in this area.¹⁶ The mention of “visible” buildings also suggests that there were likely kitchenette apartments rented out of other types of dwellings (e.g., single-family homes), as well. Drake and Cayton’s assessment that “Bronzeville tends to have middle-class *buildings* in all areas, or a few middle-class blocks here and there” rather than whole middle-class areas corroborates this probability.¹⁷ Buildings housing middle-class citizens were interspersed among kitchenette buildings within the densely-populated Black Belt.

Garnett’s home on Vernon Avenue was located in what would be considered by Chicago School sociologists in the 1920s as the Washington Park community area. At the time of her residence, blacks often lived scattered throughout the city; however, the late 1930s and early 1940s would see a stark shift in racial landscape as blacks became more populous and whites resorted to devices of segregation that limited black housing options and residential mobility. While in 1910 over 75% of black Chicagoans resided in areas where they comprised less than half of the racial demographic, by 1930 63% of Chicago’s black population lived in communities constituted by a 90% or higher black populace.¹⁸ Garnett’s “kitchenette idea” was taken up and transformed into a housing design and monetary scheme that helped to constrict black Chicagoans in the mid-twentieth century. By the early 1940s, kitchenette buildings fit Isabel Wilkerson’s description as “the original colored quarters—the abandoned and identifiable no-man’s-lands that came into being when the least-paid people were forced to pay the highest rents for the most dilapidated housing owned by absentee landlords trying to wring the most money out of a place nobody cared about.”¹⁹

What does it mean that the very wave of mass migration that enabled the kitchenette’s proliferation contributed to its material and symbolic devolution (within the context of already-at-work racial capitalism and segregation)? Also, what does it mean for a potentially black invention of modernity to come to signify the failures of the interlocking economic, political, social, and spatial terrains for the southern Negro? In this chapter, I argue that the kitchenette apartment building was not only a site of black settling in Chicago, but also it was and is a metonym for the African American migrant experience from the South to the urban North and Midwest and the urban plight of the southern Negro in racially segregated U.S. society, exposing the tensions inherent in black modernity. I will first offer a history of the kitchenette before analyzing its relationship to modernity. I conclude with a brief engagement with two sets of texts that demonstrate the kitchenette’s metonymy for modern experiences of national black exclusion.

¹⁴ Hurley Green, Sr., “Shifting Scenes; Changes in Times,” *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, January 30, 2003.

¹⁵ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 573.

¹⁶ Green, “Shifting Scenes; Changes in Times.”

¹⁷ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 660, original emphasis.

¹⁸ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 176, footnote; Dolinar, *Negro in Illinois*, 162.

¹⁹ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration*, (New York: Random House, 2010), 270-71.

Chicago's Kitchenette History

In 1931 President Herbert Hoover called a conference to assess various facets of the housing sector across the nation. The President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership brought together a broad swath of esteemed individuals knowledgeable on, and invested in, matters affecting housing situations for Americans. Due to the widespread and distinctive circumstances facing black Americans in the housing sector—namely, a combination of racially discriminatory policies and practices and economic oppression—a group of professionals, community leaders, and scholars at the conference came together to form the Committee on Negro Housing. Chaired by Nannie Helen Burroughs, the Committee took up the task of compiling, analyzing, and evaluating data on urban and rural housing phenomena for African Americans. The committee's final report, *Negro Housing*, was prepared by Charles S. Johnson and published as a volume of almost 300 pages.²⁰

Negro Housing, again a survey of *national* black housing conditions, dedicates a fifty-plus-page appendix to Chicago, as the housing crisis facing black migrants to Chicago was so dire. No other city or town was highlighted in this way. Moreover, another appendix focuses solely on the kitchenette apartment highlighting how blacks' living conditions were comparatively far worse than those of their white counterparts in those dwellings.²¹ In "the most comprehensive and valuable document on Negro Housing that [had] been issued up to [that] time," the Committee "present[ed] a surprisingly well-rounded picture of the conditions of Negro housing in those areas in which the Negro population is relatively large," despite being granted a mere six months to collect, compile, and obtain the relevant national data.²² Given the increase in Chicago's black population from 44,103 in 1910 to 233,903 in 1930, and the steep decline in new housing construction in Chicago sparked by the Depression (from over 14,000 new dwellings built in 1930 to a scant 1,375 in 1931, with even fewer in the following year), it is not by happenstance that the Committee underscored the city of Chicago and kitchenette dwellings in their 1932 published report.²³

The Chicago kitchenette, then, represented the larger housing crisis facing black Americans in rapidly growing urban places. The report also offered recommendations for issues of black national housing by way of in-depth analysis of Chicago's racial disparities and of the kitchenette's spatial deficiencies. Chicago and kitchenettes were the sites with which national black urban subjects were most identified.

By the time of Miss Garnett's WPA interview in 1941, kitchenette buildings were largely the result of the compartmentalization of run-down apartments in tenement buildings to

²⁰ President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, *Negro Housing: A Report of the Committee on Negro Housing* (Washington, D.C.: National Capital Press, 1932).

²¹ See Appendix II, "Social and Economic Factors in Negro Housing— Housing Conditions Among Negroes in Chicago," and Appendix VII, "The Kitchenette Apartment— A Comparative Study of Apartments Occupied by Whites and Negroes in Parallel Areas" in President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership, *Negro Housing: A Report of the Committee on Negro Housing* (Washington, D.C.: National Capital Press, 1932).

²² John M. Gries and James Ford, "Introduction," *Negro Housing: A Report of the Committee on Negro Housing* (Washington, D.C.: National Capital Press, 1932), xi-xii.

²³ "Preface," *Negro Housing: A Report of the Committee on Negro Housing* (Washington, D.C.: National Capital Press, 1932), 3; *1940 Census of Housing, Housing Characteristics by Type of Structure, Section 3: Population and Agriculture: Georgia-Louisiana, Table B-1: "All Dwelling Units for the City of Chicago: 1940,"* 104.

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accommodate—and exploit—the influx of black migrants from the South to the urban North and Midwest. In their 1945 sociological study of black Chicago, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton note, “Hundreds of large apartment buildings have been cut up into kitchenettes to meet the chronic housing shortage in the Black Belt.”²⁴ Thousands of conversions occurred each year, and a number of them were undertaken illegally.²⁵ In the year 1948 alone, the Chicago Building Commissioner reported that 8,200 illegal conversions were discovered “accidentally” by building inspectors, potentially suggesting a far wider practice than was accounted for in those exposed occurrences.²⁶

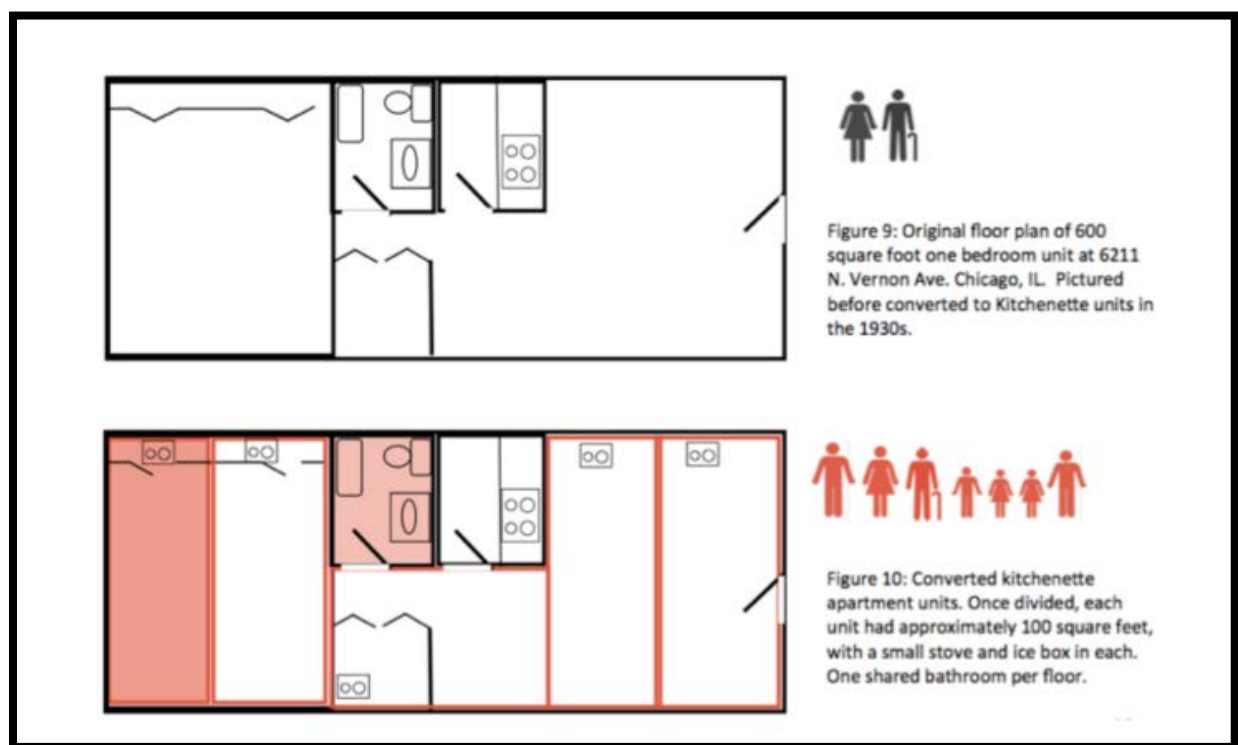


FIGURE 1 Image by Geneva Morris, “Ruin for Profit,” Sept 24, 2015, theurbanopus.com

²⁴ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 573, unnumbered footnote.

²⁵ In the 1940 Census on Housing, over 130,000 dwelling units were reported as being converted to a different number of units. Over half of these conversions were represented by dwelling units ranging from a five- to twenty-plus-family capacity (considered multifamily homes). While the Census table does not disaggregate the data for types of multifamily units beyond numerical capacity, (whether tenement, rooming/boarding house, kitchenette, etc.), the sheer numbers of overall conversions provide perspective on the extent to which property owners, landlords, and insurance companies were engaging in this enterprise.

²⁶ Roy Christiansen, report to City Council hearing on Merriam ordinance to reorganize the Building Department, c. 1950, Metropolitan Planning Council Records, Box 287 folder 3073, Library of Health Sciences University Archives and Special Collections, University of Illinois-Chicago, accessed 28 March 2017. For more discussion on illegal conversions in Chicago, see Preston Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

Kitchenettes were widely known to be illegal conversions, especially on the South Side. However, some people traversed the proper legal channels in order to convert dwellings into kitchenette residences. For legal conversion, and for any construction in the transformation of a building, an owner was required to obtain a building permit through the city's buildings department. Once obtained, building inspectors would monitor the construction progress as often as monthly and as infrequently as once a quarter, noting on the permit what aspects of the work was being carried out. Kitchenette conversions were often completed in three months, according to a sampling of permits from 1952.²⁷ There were also a number of owners who sought permits for conversions but ultimately never started the construction work, so the permits were voided.²⁸ While the permits themselves do not name the converted spaces as kitchenettes, the descriptions of work to be carried out reveal them as such. While some permits describe the addition of one or two more apartment units, more often, the description notes that the number of dwelling units will be doubled.

Once building permits were secured—or more often, when they were not but the decision to convert had been made—the actual conversion of the space began. Contractors were sought to undertake the work, some of whom had no official presence in the city.²⁹ The considerations for conversion included how many rooms would be added/changed, plumbing, electrical and gas lines, and building materials. For kitchenette conversions, room subdivision was most commonly achieved through the use of beaverboard partitions.³⁰ Beaverboard, known originally through the company Beaver Board, was a compressed wood material advertised for its strength, ease of installment, and durability, as well as its ability to block out noise and be cleaned easily. In a 1917 publication of *Keith's Magazine on Homebuilding*, an advertisement for the product proclaimed: “When a Beaver wall or ceiling is up, it's up to stay. / True enough, Beaver Board will make a new room out of an old one,” and “It will last as long as the building in which it is used.”³¹ Indeed, beaverboard made “new room[s] out of old one[s]” as kitchenette conversion became standard practice in the Depression and wartime eras.

The convincing promises of beaverboard partitions rung hollow in kitchenette buildings, as they were subject to heavy use in their overcrowded and under-maintained states. With a branch in Chicago, the Beaver Board company likely received a good amount of business, especially during the Depression era when housing construction was curtailed and people and building owners turned to conversions as the primary form of new housing development. Also,

²⁷ 1952 Permit Ledger Book 65, microfilm roll #48, City of Chicago Building Permits, Richard Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago. Note: earlier years of building permits relevant to this study were unavailable at this archive during the research period.

²⁸ Notably, the larger jobs involving a doubling of apartment units—from six converted to twelve units to as many as twenty-four converted to forty-eight—were often never started. However, given the demand for housing in the Black Belt with the demolition of buildings with so-called urban renewal in the 1950s, it is quite possible that some of these buildings were converted at a later date without the oversight of the city. This would allow construction not in adherence to building standards, resulting in financial savings.

²⁹ Roy Christiansen, the Chicago building commissioner during the Metropolitan Planning Council's rally to reorganize the Building Department, discussed in a City Council hearing how unregistered contractors were a key problem in Chicago's illegal conversions. Christiansen, report on City Council hearing, MPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073.

³⁰ Some building permits note use of plaster for conversion; however, the large amount of illegal conversions undertaken corroborate widespread description of beaverboard as the primary walling material.

³¹ *Keith's Magazine on Homebuilding*, vol. 37-38, 1916, 121.

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partitions used to subdivide spaces into kitchenettes were often found to be substandard, meaning they were not made of fire-resistive materials and did not meet the thickness requirement of the housing code. Although the modified housing code was not adopted until 1956, following the building code of 1949, the specifications reflect what the city council (and housing organizations like the MHPC who devised much of the plan) agreed were standards promoting health and safety.

A sampling of 1952 permits for domestic conversion to more apartments shows that the average cost for subdividing apartments ranged from \$2,000 for the conversion of one apartment (or a basement) into multiple apartments to \$21,000 for doubling twenty-four apartments in a Hyde Park building to forty-eight apartments (with the building containing sixty-six apartment units by the end).³² The sampled permits were distributed fairly evenly in the South Side and in areas north of the Loop including the Near North Side and running westward from there as far as Garfield Park. With the average kitchenette rents around ten to twenty dollars per month for whites and ethnic Europeans, and twenty-two to fifty dollars for blacks, kitchenette landlords stood to yield a substantial return on their investments over the period of a few years.³³

Conversions capitalized (quite literally, in an economic sense) on space and desperation for housing. Richard Wright explains the economic impetus in this way:

What they do is this: they take, say, a seven-room apartment, which rents for \$50 a month to whites, and cut it up into seven small apartments, of one room each; they install one small gas stove and one small sink in each room. The Bosses of the Buildings rent these kitchenettes to us at the rate of, say, \$6 a week. Hence, the same apartment for which white people—who can get jobs anywhere and who receive higher wages than we—pay \$50 a month is rented to us for \$42 a week!³⁴

In this example an almost thirty-dollar weekly rental difference (\$12.50 per week for white tenants compared to \$42 per week for black kitchenette tenants) is the economic inequity built into the kitchenette. If this seven-room apartment was one of six flats in a building, with the same amount of subdivided rooms in each flat, a landlord could stand to gain astronomical profits. A fifty-dollar monthly rental per apartment prior to conversion would earn the landlord \$300 per month and \$3,600 per year in rental income in a six-flat building. Continuing to think through Wright's example, after conversion to kitchenettes, a single converted flat would yield \$1,176 per month, the entire building would yield \$7,056 per month, and the building would yield a whopping \$84,672 per year. Of course, given the high transience and commonness of

³² The Hyde Park permit was rendered void when the work had not begun over one year later. Building permit #72328 (also lists #82505), April 10, 1952, Permit Ledger Book 65, microfilm roll #48, City of Chicago Building Permits, Richard Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago.

³³ In her interview with Joseph Bougere, Grace Garnett says that during the period before she relinquished her Vernon Avenue property, rent for a two-room kitchenette averaged five dollars. It is unclear how much she paid for her renovation and how much money she earned through her kitchenette enterprise. Inflation rates after the wars are also unclear. Garnett interview, "Kitchenette—Origin; Early Chicago," Illinois Writers Project, Box 37, folder 25, 1, Vivian Harsh Research Collection, Chicago Public Library.

³⁴ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 104.

eviction due to job insecurity and nonpayment of rent, landlords were likely unable to maximize their building's profit potential. However, even a fraction of the profits garnered by black kitchenette inhabitation would result in much higher financial yields than when renting the original space to whites. Wright's description paints a vivid picture of both the spatial and economic inequity built into kitchenette buildings.

Black people were concentrated in the South Side and in these types of residential spaces primarily due to redlining practices and racially restrictive housing covenants, wherein real estate agents, mortgage lenders, and neighborhood associations colluded to prevent black people from moving into neighborhoods with white people. Landlords capitalized on economic opportunities, converting over 80,000 apartment and mansion spaces into kitchenettes.³⁵ While black property owners comprised a much smaller portion of landlords in the Black Belt at mid-century, they were present and profited from kitchenette conversions alongside their white counterparts, as Grace Garnett alluded to in her interview. Garnett herself appears to have been unaffiliated with the enterprise by 1940. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, Carl Hansberry, the father of playwright Lorraine Hansberry and a prominent civic leader, was one such notorious landlord whose community interests for racial equity and access in the housing sector also served his personal economic interests.³⁶ In the aftermath of the 1948 Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kraemer*, which ruled against the legal backing of restrictive covenants, members of the black upper- and middle-class joined whites in this economic endeavor in larger numbers; they had greater access to means of acquiring and converting properties in newly accessible white neighborhoods near the overburdened South Side that could then be let to blacks desperate for more space.³⁷ Since black people were for the most part unable to live anywhere else, Chicago's South Side—alternatively known as the Black Belt, Black Metropolis, and Bronzeville—was rife with kitchenette buildings to accommodate the vast population of new and recent migrants.

Kitchenette buildings were known to be highly susceptible to fires and the spread of disease—notably tuberculosis—due to the severely overcrowded and under-maintained conditions. In the period between 1934 and 1940 in one area labeled “lower class” in the Black Belt, the syphilis rate was 304.5 per ten thousand and the tuberculosis death rate was 67.7 per 100,000. Furthermore, death rates exceeded birth rates, with infant mortality rates at 97.6 per thousand in the same residential community area, as compared to a 56.7 rate for the entire city of Chicago. The death rate per thousand residents in the community area was 21.3, more than double the 10.2 rate for the city.³⁸ Shabazz notes, “Between 1939 and 1941, deaths from tuberculosis in Black communities were five times the rate for whites. During the 1940s Chicago had the highest number of deaths from tuberculosis among Blacks in the country.”³⁹ And since black communities in Chicago were restricted to living in the Black Belt, and the Black Belt was overwhelmingly comprised of kitchenette apartments, these rates were directly illustrative of kitchenette conditions. Kitchenettes, as materializations of exclusionary residential policies and practices, were quite literally agents of death, leading Richard Wright to, “The kitchenette is the

³⁵ Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*, 40.

³⁶ Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis: Housing Policy in Postwar Chicago*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 195.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 201-02, 206-07.

³⁸ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 659 (Table 29).

³⁹ Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*, 49.

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funnel through which our pulverized lives flow to ruin and death on the city pavements, at a profit.”⁴⁰ Black residents’ lives were ever at risk because death was always looming.⁴¹

What is more, the dangerous degradation of kitchenette buildings spurred a series of ordinances and building codes to standardize aspects of safe and habitable housing as well as to enforce codes and identify, reduce, and punish violators. If, as some have argued, kitchenettes were not the catalyst but rather a convenient target for the new wave of capitalist urban development—the previous wave of which produced these very same dwellings—the conditions of kitchenette buildings and similarly overcrowded and under-maintained structures were central to the arguments for housing code standardization.⁴² Additionally, structures in so-called slum areas precipitated a restructuring of city government so that the safety of already existing housing could be properly attended to: the Department of Buildings took over aspects of health inspection in residential buildings, gaining health inspectors from the Health Department who were to be trained in measures of structural safety (although in the original iteration, the latter step was never done).⁴³ The ineffective merging of the Building, Health, and Fire departments following the 1949 ordinance led to the Metropolitan Housing Council to call for a renewed and invigorated effort for municipal restructuring to realize the aims of public health and safety in residences.⁴⁴ Their outcry for housing standards was far from original—the Committee on Negro Housing’s recommendations preceded MHPC’s by at least a decade.

The move to smaller apartment units for some (read: white) populations was a testament to their modern efficiency, due to widespread investment in Taylorism, a turn in industrial operations toward scientific management and efficiency. Smaller apartments meant smaller kitchens (hence the name, kitchenette), which purportedly yielded less housework for women (or less time and energy spent on it) and more time for leisure activities within and beyond the home. Kitchenettes in this model produced or enabled a new type of feminine subject: one potentially less identified with the domestic space and more identified with her talents and

⁴⁰ Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, 111.

⁴¹ GerShun Alvilez, in his analysis of Frank London Brown’s *Trumbull Park* points to the close associations of death and the kitchenette. He writes, “Brown’s narrative figures the Gardener building as a creature that is continually consuming or killing the tenants in the building; it has a destructive agency . . .” He continues: “If the tenants’ lives are intrinsically connected to the building, and the building is rotting (dying), then death becomes part-and-parcel to residency. To live there is to die. Therefore, the building engenders sickness and death, and segregated Black domestic space comes to embody these notions.” GerShun Alvilez, “Housing the Black Body: Value, Domestic Space, and Segregation Narratives,” *African American Review* 42, no. 1 (2008): 141.

⁴² Capitalistic opportunities for individuals in the form of kitchenette exploitation were supplanted by corporate and institutional expansion and development ventures (such as those undertaken by the University of Chicago, the Illinois Institute of Technology, and the Michael Reese Hospital), making the destruction of the once-profitable structures a boon for the successive stage of economic gain that overwhelmingly disadvantaged working-class and poor black residents. See Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto* for more on the discourse surrounding, and capitalistic stimulus for, urban redevelopment in Chicago during this era. For kitchenette conditions as justification for housing code standardization, see “A Report to the City Council Joint Subcommittee on Enforcement of Housing Standards,” MPC Records, Series II, Box 287, folder 3073.

⁴³ “Traditions, Personalities, Politics,” in “Editorial Opinion of *The Times*,” Chicago, 16 Dec 1946, 23, clippings, MPC Records; “A Report to the City Council Joint Subcommittee on Enforcement of Housing Standards,” MPC records, Series II, Box 287, folder 3073, 2-3.

⁴⁴ “A Report to the City Council . . .,” MPC Records, 2-3. For more on the MHPC’s role in the formulation of the building and housing codes, see Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 39-67.

interests outside of the home.⁴⁵ However, for black migrants, kitchenettes were commonplace domiciles due to racially restrictive housing covenants delimiting their opportunities for dwelling in the city to an area of eight square miles, deemed the Black Belt.⁴⁶ “The strongest visual evidence of a color-line in Midwest Metropolis,” note Drake and Cayton in 1945, “is the existence of a Black Belt. Of the city’s 337,000 Negroes, over ninety out of every hundred live in areas predominantly Negro.”⁴⁷ As extant housing in these limited areas of black residence became overburdened, there were few places new or existing residents could expand to, resulting in a burgeoning of kitchenette conversions. Thus, for poor, working-class, and lower middle-class black Chicagoans, kitchenette apartments were those cramped, dilapidated, overpriced firetraps that ethnic white immigrants moved out of as they became closer to whiteness and the American dream.⁴⁸ If anything, residence in these kitchenette buildings—oftentimes housing that was better suited for demolition than for habitation—signaled an as-yet-unattained modernity for black migrants, even as their subjugated status was part and parcel to the modern project.

The Kitchenette and Modernity

In modernist discourse, blackness cannot be accommodated within the national space because of its negation of civilization. Its inclusion in national peoplehood is foreclosed. At the same time, blackness is firmly embedded in the materialities of modernity, giving rise to the imperative of its management. It is presented ideologically as an intrusive and undesirable, even though necessary and unavoidable, presence in national spaces where civilization is imaginatively constructed and where its materialities are deployed.

— Percy Hintzen and Jean Muteba Rahier, *Global Circuits of Blackness*⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*, 37-39. Cookbooks designed for urban young adults and women (presumably) showcase the assumptions of who was inhabiting these trendy “efficiency” homes. For those for whom the abbreviated space of the kitchen was a new experience, products like cookbooks came in handy. As early as 1917, Anna Merritt East’s *Kitchenette Cookery* was published geared toward “friends of the business world” and to those “whose whole life, in so far as it has touched the kitchen, has known nought but the big old kitchen of her mother” (where a domestic servant likely performed the cooking duties). Cookbooks made for modern kitchenette residents contained within them the racial disparities reflected in larger society. Anna Merritt East, *Kitchenette Cookery*, (Boston: Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1917), v, 1. See also Margaret Pratt Allen and Ida Orom Hutton, *Man-Sized Meals from the Kitchenette* (New York: Macy-Masius, 1928); Ruth Taylor, *Kitchenette Cook Book* (New York: S. Scribner, 1936); Vicomte Mauduit offers a cookbook from a European kitchenette in *The Vicomte in the Kitchenette; being the art of cooking within restricted space, limited time and reduced income* (London: Stanley Nott, 1934).

⁴⁶ Drake and Cayton define the Black Belt as eight square miles, while Rashad Shabazz defines it as “roughly a seven-mile-long by one-mile-wide strip of land.” Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 201; Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*, 40.

⁴⁷ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 174.

⁴⁸ Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, 102. See also Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

⁴⁹ Percy Hintzen and Jean Muteba Rahier, “Introduction,” *Global Circuits of Blackness: Interrogating the African Diaspora*, eds. Rahier et al. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), xviii.

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Who, after all, registers and ascertains the fractal and contingent state of modern existence better than black folk?

—Adam Green, *Selling the Race*⁵⁰

For Black Chicagoans kitchenettes were not represented as modern, convenient, or liberatory.

—Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*⁵¹

The kitchenette as modern-cum-fashionable convenience was the exception rather than the rule, for the vast majority of kitchenette apartments were located in the South and West Sides among the poor and black—sometimes at the juncture of the two, but not always. These by-and-large black domestic spaces were constructed through, and representative of, modern capitalism's reliance upon exploited and abjected people groups and geographies/spaces. In this way, kitchenettes in Chicago's Black Belt epitomized the modern—its promises (to some) and its failures. I hold that Chicago's kitchenettes can be understood as modern racial geographies.

Literary critic GerShun Alvilez contends, "The construction of Black-occupied spaces as 'valueless' functions within both segregated and integrated spaces, and results in 'placelessness' for Black subjects or the displacement of the Black subject from the value more generally attributable to belonging and security within the home."⁵² In other words, domestic spaces produced in a segregated society are devalued by their occupation by, and proximity to, dwelling black subjects. Extending Alvilez's contention, I argue that this devaluation results in the further distancing of black subjects from modern citizen-subjecthood, as their bodies and their home spaces are both regarded as sites of unbelonging in the Western nation. As Hintzen and Rahier aver, their "blackness cannot be accommodated within the national space." At the same time, modernity relies upon this ideologically and geographically fixed blackness for its own definitions of proper citizen-subjects and national spaces.

If modernity is marked by self-making, national space(s), capitalism, industrialization, and linear temporal progress narratives, the kitchenette is an intriguing modern site.⁵³ In its subordinate status in the modern domestic hierarchy because of its close affiliations with denigration and blackness, it inhabits a position of alterity. As a geography of black socioeconomic exploitation, it is a paragon of the underside of capitalism. The spatial and temporal dimensions of kitchenette life and self-making, like the kitchenette residents themselves, encompass this alterity even while reinscribing themselves into the notion of "the modern." The modern is defined with and against the marginalized, colonized, subjugated subject—ever entangled with and constituted by the subject through its own continual disavowal of, and disassociation with, the subject. I contend that kitchenette residence precludes the possibility, and in fact predicates the impossibility, of its inhabitants being "proper" national (read: modern Western) subjects. The South Side kitchenette evinces how "blackness is firmly

⁵⁰ Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3.

⁵¹ Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*, 39.

⁵² Alvilez, "Housing the Black Body," 135-36.

⁵³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 49.

embedded in the materialities of modernity” even as the modern nation produces and eschews it.⁵⁴

Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods offer a geographical framework for understanding the intersections of race (blackness, specifically), space, and inclusion/exclusion. They identify three interwoven trajectories that “illustrate how black human geographies are implicated in the production of space.” The first attends to the fixity of essentialism which “situates black subjects and their geopolitical concerns as being elsewhere (on the margin, the underside, outside the normal),” ultimately rendering struggles of the everyday invisible. The second trajectory is comprised by how black lives serve as testament to the fact that “‘common-sense’ workings of modernity and citizenship are worked out, and normalized through geographies of exclusion,” which David Sibley defines as “literal mappings of power relations and rejections.” The third and final trajectory McKittrick and Woods offer involves the very real but sometimes un- or under-acknowledged political nature of black “situated knowledge” and “contributions to both real and imagined human geographies.” Taken altogether, the authors’ framework illustrates the tensions of black modernity as it is spatialized. They offer, “Black geographies disclose how the racialized production of space is made possible in the explicit demarcations of the spaces of *les damnés* as invisible/forgettable at the same time as the invisible/forgettable is producing space—always, and in all sorts of ways.”⁵⁵

The South Side kitchenette building, while the result of racially-motivated and economically-opportunistic marginalizing intentions on the part of predominantly white individuals and businesses (Richard Wright calls them “Bosses of the Building”), did not render the black populations inhabiting the dilapidated spaces as solely or primarily abject.⁵⁶ Rather, within these spaces, kitchenette dwellers embodied different, correlated worldviews and realities as a community “constituted . . . ‘otherwise than modernity.’”⁵⁷ Homi Bhabha contends, “Such cultures of a postcolonial *contra-modernity* may be contingent to modernity, discontinuous or in contention with it, resistant to its oppressive assimilationist technologies; but they also deploy the cultural hybridity of their borderline conditions to ‘translate,’ and therefore reinscribe, the social imaginary of both metropolis and modernity.”⁵⁸ In other words, populations figured as somehow outside of, or in contradistinction to, modernity perform the work of imbuing “the modern” with their own realities and worldviews. Kitchenette residents practiced their own “translation” work as contra-modern subjects within the realm of their domestic black geographies. In this way, while not *proper* modern subjects, these kitchenette residents can still be understood as modern in the sense that Paul Gilroy describes black people as “in but not necessarily of the modern, western world.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Hintzen and Rahier, “Introduction,” *Global Circuits of Blackness*, xviii.

⁵⁵ Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods, “‘No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean,’” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2007), 4. See also David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 11.

⁵⁶ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices* (New York: Basic Books, [1941] 2008).

⁵⁷ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 6.

⁵⁸ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 6.

⁵⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 29.

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Modernity, on the most fundamental level, is rooted in separation and exploitation: separation of races, separation of sexes, and separation of spaces by and for power. All of these separations correspond to divisions of labor and value, based in capitalistic accumulation and profit. The slave ship, modernity's peak technology, encapsulated all three forms of separation: the deck and the hold, enslaved Africans and European captain and crew, enslaved females in one section with males in another.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Cedric Robinson has deftly traced the origins of racial capitalism back to inter-ethnic rivalries in pre-modern Europe and the establishment of cities for trade and commerce. The city, and what became urban geographies, was a modern advent brought on by the needs of business. What would eventually grow into systems of capitalism relied upon cities and ports/centers of trade to maintain relevance as modern hubs of commerce.⁶¹ Robinson established that capitalism fundamentally operates from a racial logic. Other scholars have since built on his framework to draw out the intricacies of globalized Western ideology and practice. Lisa Lowe holds, "Racial capitalism captures the sense that actually existing capitalism exploits through culturally and socially constructed differences such as race, gender, region and nationality and is lived through those uneven formations."⁶² Housing is one site of uneven formations. In the mid-twentieth century, the kitchenette served as a primary technology of local racial capitalism and Chicagoan modernity.⁶³

Furthermore, a key function of modernity and the modern is self-definition. The modern subject is constructed through the realities and tensions of modernity. Separation and division allow for such definition, as subjects are constituted through counterposition to objects, value is ascribed hierarchically, and power is distributed, claimed, or wrested and inhabited accordingly.

⁶⁰ While Hortense Spillers has argued that the slave ship and transatlantic slave trade "ungendered" enslaved subjects—because they were detached from domestic spheres where they would have carried out their gendered roles and also because they were designated as chattel and cargo with certain volume dimensions—the fact that these people were divided by sex (thus devising gender through its reliance upon space and power differentials) signals a key enactment of modern separation. Marcus Rediker's *The Slave Ship: A Human History* details the complex network of relationships devised through the slave trade: imperialist relationships among Europe, Africa, and the Americas; power and labor relationships on slave ships among captain, crew, and the enslaved cargo; mutual dependencies of carcerality and capital production as well as of the slave ship and the plantation; the making of the commodity—"slaves"—and the making of race—"black slaves" and "white men." The slave ship, Rediker argues, was the technological crux of emergent global capitalism; its tripartite function as "war machine, mobile prison, and factory" established the slave ship as a cutting-edge technology of trade and terror. See Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Books," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2, (Summer 1987); Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, (New York: Penguin, 2007), 9, 45. The slave ship, and its land-based plantation counterpart, secured Western modernity. Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), argues for the slave ship as an emblem of a counterculture to modernity in that it served as a moving linkage between fixed national points and, therefore, can symbolize the flows of "outer-national," diasporic cultural forms (16). Gilroy, however, deploys the ship as a symbol rather than as a material place with a very particular social, economic, and spatial landscape, thereby rendering the ship as an adornment, rather than a progenitor, of Western modernity (4, 16-17).

⁶¹ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, [2000] 1983).

⁶² Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, (2015), 149-150.

⁶³ On racial capitalism, see Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, [2000] 1983); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Laura Pulido, "Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 27, no. 3 (2016): 1-16.

As modernity and the modern are constituted through, and reified by, separation and exploitation, their conceptual (and actual) stability rely upon integrity of boundaries. The potential for transgressed boundaries so haunt modernity's definition that resultant anxieties of breach, intermixing, commingling, and muddling are constitutive elements/fundamental components of the modern. Moreover, despite modernity's reliance upon self-definition through separation, and the anxieties of destabilization-through-intermixture, the modern is also characterized by its ironic inability to maintain—and often, desires to temporarily ignore, dissolve, or transcend—these boundaries.⁶⁴

The prevalence of kitchenettes *enabled* the fashioning of Chicago's urban modernity.⁶⁵ The construction, capitalization, and concentration of kitchenette buildings in Chicago's South—and later, West—Side enabled spaces of “untouched” whiteness in other sections of the city, or the aspiration for, and propagation of, such narratives to exist. George Lipsitz has shown that segregation resulted in the formation of a “white spatial imaginary,” wherein “moral worth” has been accorded to white people because of the privileged and valued spaces they have inhabited over time due to “unequal and unjust geographies of opportunity,” including discrimination and policies designed to benefit some to the detriment of others.⁶⁶ “The white spatial imaginary,” he argues, “idealizes ‘pure’ and homogeneous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior.”⁶⁷ Thus, the making and marking of the Black Belt created co-constitutive racial geographies: the attempts at a “pure and homogeneous” white residential landscape relied upon the shoring up of boundaries of black space through residential exclusion. Black hyper-concentration in kitchenettes made for black underpopulation and inaccessibility in other spaces and forms of residence; kitchenettes thereby served as a mechanism of spatial definition, underwritten by racial capitalism. To unpack this further, kitchenettes and their largely black populations helped to define the “slums” and “blighted” areas. The definition and delineation of these so-called slum areas—discursively and spatially—helped to produce unmarked, “unblighted,” and thus desirable areas. The material construction of kitchenette residences, and their concentration in, and symbolism of, the Black Belt, allowed for other residential forms—and racio-spatial narratives—to comprise and define spaces beyond the Black Belt.

The kitchen as a defining feature of the home predates the mid-twentieth-century campaign for modern kitchen technologies. In southern plantation homes, enslaved women, and later domestic servants, managed the kitchen. With the Great Migration, many women traveled

⁶⁴ Not only are the separations co-constituted by the anxieties of commingling, but also, the modern is characterized by anxieties around *the desire* to transgress divides. For more on modern anxieties of racial commingling, see Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Tavia N'yongo, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

⁶⁵ Rashad Shabazz provides a convincing analysis of the confining kitchenette as an instantiation of black carceral geographies in *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

⁶⁶ George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 28.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

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to urban centers where they primarily labored as domestics, some with live-in duties.⁶⁸ Homes and class status were defined in part by who was in the kitchen.⁶⁹ With the advent of modern kitchen appliances and the decrease in domestic service work, the efficiency of a home hinged upon—at least according to product advertisers and women’s journals—*what* was in the home, and especially in the kitchen.⁷⁰ Notably, when domestic employment declined in the mid-twentieth century, households employing domestic workers were even further distinguished by both *who* and *what* was in their kitchens.⁷¹ Joy Parr explains, “We might feature kitchens as supporting characters in the twentieth-century drama about home and nation, articulating contradictions and heterogeneities that kept the main action moving along. For modern kitchens have been about bodies, both the bodies who have worked in them and the bodies this work was to produce.”⁷² Women’s bodies, and black women’s bodies especially, were treated as extensions of the domestic landscape and were ideologically tethered to reproductive labor. The labor carried out in kitchens served to nourish and reproduce contributing members of modern society.

The kitchen, as synecdoche of the home, corresponded to two slightly different but related sets of logic: “the associative chain [of] good kitchen/good wife/good cook/good meals/good home” as well as “good kitchen/efficient production/nutritious fuel/productive citizens/strong nation.”⁷³ The efficient management of the home, symbolized through the efficacious authority over the kitchen had implications for feminine valuation and national strength. The kitchen, then, anchored national concepts of favorable gender roles and family constitution and was a domestic space central to assessing national stability.

The kitchenette nominally and materially was defined by the kitchen space, and in the Black Belt it was often by the lack thereof. Cooking facilities in many kitchenette apartments were fashioned in one of three ways: with a closet converted to a tiny kitchen area, with an electric hot plate, or without any cooking mechanism in the room but the possibility of a communal kitchen on the floor or in the building. Tenants had to make do with what they were given to prepare sustenance for themselves and their families.

As such, residence in a Black Belt kitchenette apartment made for a tenuous positioning within the modern nation: it was a home space that lacked the space or resources to properly nourish and grow the family, ground the home, and by extension support or contribute adequately to the maintenance of the nation. That black and poor people inhabited these

⁶⁸ On black women domestic workers and the Great Migration see Lisa Krissoff Boehm, *Making a Way Out of No Way: African American Women and the Second Great Migration*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West,” *Signs* 14, no. 4 (Summer 1989): 912-920; Joe William Trotter, ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

⁶⁹ See Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women’s Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South: 1865-1960*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Servants, 1920-1945*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

⁷⁰ Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), chapter 5 (159-184).

⁷¹ Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Servants, 1920-1945*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

⁷² Joy Parr, “Editor’s Introduction: Modern Kitchen, Good Home, Strong Nation,” *Technology and Culture* 43 vol. 4 (2002): 660.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 657.

domestic spaces only reinforced notions of these groups being unready for or undeserving of modern national inclusion.

Moreover, modernity relies upon the confinement of blackness and the constraint of black mobility toward the end of the production of labor, the production of whiteness, and the production of assimilable blackness (read: middle- and upper-class black subjects and sensibilities). The Great Migration was thus anxiety-inducing for many whites and well-off blacks. Black movement of this sort destabilized demographics and geographies in both the places of origin and arrival, thereby also shifting the cultural and economic landscapes. Whites who were comfortable with the Old Settler population—a group of blacks who had migrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were often middle class and race leaders—and the trickle of black migrants whom they may have accepted on an exceptional or token basis were overwhelmed when confronted with the wave of migrants creating a fast-forming large black populace.

Blacks who had established themselves in civic, professional, financial, and social senses, and who had also experienced relatively stable and unsensational representation of the race locally, were faced with a destabilized depiction and reception of the race, as well.⁷⁴ While clear “zones of settlement” could be distinguished and corresponded to socioeconomic status within the black population, the increased density of the area known as the Black Belt effectively eroded some of these forms of black distinction.⁷⁵ With the mass migration and black settlement in the city, assimilated blacks became geographically and perceptually proximal to the newer arrivals. They were concerned about the crowding and shift in socioeconomic plane that the migration would bring to their neighborhoods; however, they also regretted the destruction of structural markers of class distinction.⁷⁶ Very early on in the migration periods, Old Settlers as well as prominent news organs like the *Chicago Defender* made a point to distinguish between the respectable behavior and comportment of settled black citizens from that of the masses yet to be adequately “trained” in the ways of the modern city.⁷⁷ This angst was often communicated by way of antagonizing the proliferation of kitchenette buildings. An interviewee in Drake and Cayton’s study lamented about a neighboring house, “I hear that the people who are buying the place are going to cut it up into kitchenettes. This will be terrible, but what can we do? I wish that we could petition and protest against their making kitchenettes here. Kitchenettes usually bring a lower class of people into the neighborhood. So many fine houses have been ruined by cutting them up into kitchenettes.”⁷⁸ The interviewee focuses on the process of conversion, the desire to capitalize on real estate and housing needs, and the lack of regard for architectural preservation as the harbingers of worse things (and people) to come. The introduction of kitchenettes into a neighborhood or on a block was a signal of migrant influx and economic

⁷⁴ Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*, 29-31. For more on destabilizing racial perceptions in the early twentieth-century, see Adrienne Brown, *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

⁷⁵ E. Franklin Frazier, *Negro Family in Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932), 238.

⁷⁶ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 73-74. See also Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes*, especially chapter 1 (21-52).

⁷⁷ Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 168.

⁷⁸ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 660.

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decline; following these material markers were the accompanying associations with loudness, uncleanliness, sex work, and an overall lack of “respectable” qualities.⁷⁹

Grace Garnett herself, the self-proclaimed progenitor of kitchenettes in Chicago, placed the full brunt of responsibility for the tainted kitchenette image on the migrants who inhabited them: “Kitchenettes are not bad, it’s the people who are bad.” She distinguishes between the first wave of migrants who “were industrious and intelligent on the whole” with the second wave who “didn’t have anything and represented a different class.” Describing with disdain a key distinction in the two “classes” of migrants, she continues: “They all had a lot of relatives back home in the South that they sent for as soon as they got here. They all wanted to park in one or two rooms, and got mad if you objected. A couple rented a room from me, and after they were here a while they sent for two more relatives. They thought that I should allow them to let their relatives stay with them.”⁸⁰ An Old Settler of a different class and different means than her migrant tenants, Garnett had a narrow opinion of newer black southerners finding their way (and making a way for their families) in the urban North.

Drake and Cayton note throughout their study that middle- and upper-class blacks worked to actively distinguish themselves from the lower classes (who were often migrants) through behavioral and social proscription as well as self-aggrandizement: “They emphasize their *differentness*.”⁸¹ Furthermore, Preston Smith II has detailed the extent to which the group he identifies as “black policy elites” went to propagate an agenda of racial integration through class stratification. He argues,

[B]lack policy elites were responding to a racist real estate industry by putting forward the “best” representatives of the race to undermine racial stereotypes, in the hope that this strategy would eventually open housing markets to all blacks, though along class-stratified lines. This led them to advance the cause of the class that they believed had both the economic and cultural capital to prove African Americans were deserving of modern housing and therefore full citizenship in the postwar United States.⁸²

In other words, middle class blacks had a racial agenda for national inclusion via real estate that they sought to achieve in part through respectability politics. The black policy elites could not be mired with those who they thought might be a hindrance to the race’s progress (e.g., those who might align with certain racial stereotypes). Newer migrants lacking their sensibilities and refinements (and who were not positioned to attain property ownership) detracted from their collective self-representation, so intra-group distinction was imperative for the ultimate goal of inclusion for all black people.

With a similar objective but a different approach, black creatives sought to represent the race, as well. Rather than hone in on class conflict within the race, writers constructed a generalized black migrant collective representing the racial travails of black subjects nationwide.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 559, 576-77, 596-99, 610-11.

⁸⁰ Garnett interview, “Kitchenette—Origin; Early Chicago,” Illinois Writers Project, Box 37, folder 25, 1-2, Vivian Harsh Research Collection, Chicago Public Library.

⁸¹ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 563. See also 558-59, 598-99, 610, 710-12.

⁸² Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis: Postwar Housing Policy in Chicago*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 226.

The Kitchenette as Metonym in Literature

The kitchenette has been invoked by writers as metonym to represent the larger terrain of exclusion characterizing black U.S. migrant experience in the mid-twentieth century. The southern migrants' blackness within an avowedly anti-black racist society made them prime subjects for confinement, exploitation, and neglect.⁸³ Both Richard Wright and Langston Hughes figured Chicago and its kitchenettes into their representational analysis of black urban migratory experience and the quest for modern national inclusion it represented.

Richard Wright, in *12 Million Black Voices*, presents a development of consciousness and intragroup diversity corresponding to the black migration north. The photoessay, the only substantial visual analysis in book form of the black Great Migration up to that time,⁸⁴ was the result of a collaboration with Edwin Rosskam: Rosskam approached Richard Wright, employed with the Federal Writers Project, to compose a narrative for a set of photographs he would compile from the Farm Security Administration (FSA).⁸⁵ Divided into three parts, the narrative and images take the reader from the inequities and injustices of the agrarian South in the first part, to the generational divisions and death within the race in the urban North in the middle segment, and self-actualization (or strivings toward it) in the final part. The second and longest section, "Death on the City Pavements," centers the kitchenette apartment as Wright details the grim realities awaiting eager and optimistic migrants and their families: economic exploitation, infant mortality, limited physical and social mobility, and relational estrangement (from oneself and others). The kitchenette, then, is the site through which all of these urban challenges can be accessed representationally. Moreover, for Wright the kitchenette becomes an extension of the racial violence of the South. He writes, "The kitchenette is our prison, our death sentence without a trial, the new form of mob violence that assaults not only the lone individual, but all of us, in its ceaseless attacks."⁸⁶ The dwelling is figured as the latest iteration in a string of historical racial brutality; however, in this form, it claims more people at a time than lynching (the "mob violence" to which he refers), making the kitchenette an even larger threat. He goes on to say that in both the North and South black people are like soldiers because "life . . . is daily warfare." He continues, "We are set apart from the civilian population; our kitchenettes comprise our barracks; the color of our skins constitutes our uniforms; the streets of our cities are our trenches; a job is a pill-box to be captured and held . . ."⁸⁷ In this instance the kitchenette stands in for both regions' (and thereby, national) black experiences: it totalizes the oppressive exclusion of black Americans from fundamental access to rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

⁸³ Rashad Shabazz, traces the interconnections of the police state and housing in black Chicago, highlighting the carceral nature of domestic spaces such as the kitchenette. He offers, "Unlike the representation of the kitchenette as modern and convenient, for Black migrants the kitchenette was a return to antiquated forms of housing that in many cases was no better than the conditions they experienced in the South during and after slavery. The kitchenette was a form of punishment for moving North" *Spatializing Blackness*, 39.

⁸⁴ Benjamin Balthaser, "Killing the Documentarian: Richard Wright and Documentary Modernity," *Criticism* 55.3 (2013): 364.

⁸⁵ Rosskam was a photographer hired by the FSA to spearhead its visual publicity efforts in the design of exhibits. Maren Stange, "'The Record Itself': Farm Security Administration Photography and the Transformation of Rural Life" in *Official Images: New Deal Photography*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 1. A discussion of documentary photography and its expressive uses appears in Chapter 2.

⁸⁶ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, (New York: Basic Books, [1941] 2008), 106.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

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The phenomenon of national black migration comes to be figured in the symbol of the Chicago kitchenette, with even the majority of photographs taken in the city.⁸⁸

Langston Hughes, in a poem entitled “Visitors to the Black Belt” in his larger 1949 collection *One Way Ticket*, names Chicago’s South Side kitchenettes in particular as what McKittrick and Woods have called “black geographies.”⁸⁹ He sets up the kitchenette description by way of context in the poems preceding it. Appearing in the collection immediately after two other poems referencing Chicago, “Visitors to the Black Belt” is the third part of an expose’ on black migration to, and settlement in, the urban North. Appearing as one of many cities in a list in the first poem “One-Way Ticket,” Chicago is among the places to which the black narrator can flee southern Jim Crow and lynching:

I pick up my life
And take it with me
And I put it down in
Chicago, Detroit,
Buffalo, Scranton,
Any place that is
North and East—
And not Dixie
. . . ///
I pick up my life
And take it away
On a one-way ticket—
Gone up North,
Gone out West,
Gone!⁹⁰

In this poem, the narrator juxtaposes northern and western destinations like Chicago, Los Angeles, and Oakland to the segregationist and mob violence of the South. The aspiration for better, different social and living conditions begins to degrade in the second poem in the set of three, “Restrictive Covenants.” Focusing specifically on Chicago as a setting in the second half of the poem (it is the only named place), it describes the constricted residential landscape black migrants and dwellers faced in the city:

In Chicago
They’ve got covenants
Restricting me—
Hemmed in
On the South Side

⁸⁸ Almost two-thirds (19 out of 30) of the images in the “Death on the City Pavements” section are of black Chicago.

⁸⁹ Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Adrian Woods, eds., *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

⁹⁰ Langston Hughes, “One-Way Ticket,” *One Way Ticket*, (New York: Knopf, 1949), 61-62.

Can't breathe free.

*But the wind blows there
I reckon the wind
Must care.⁹¹*

The poem serves as a continuation of the spatial contours of racial experience depicted in “One Way Ticket.” However, rather than refuge, the urban destination becomes a place of constraint and suffocation. The geographic confinement constructed through white and ethnic European flight (to which Hughes refers in the first half of the poem), racially restrictive covenants, and mob terror (which is conspicuously absent in the poetic account) is represented as unnatural, as Hughes juxtaposes practices of black exclusion to black acceptance by anthropomorphized entities of nature: an unfleeting moon and sun, and a caring wind.

Invoking Chicago through mention of the South Side, the third poem in the set, “Visitors to the Black Belt,” zeroes in on the distance between perceived white visitors to the black residential and social geographies of Harlem (mentioned in the first half of the poem) and the South Side of Chicago:

You can say
Jazz on the South Side—
To me it's hell
On the South Side.

Kitchenettes
With no heat
And garbage
In the halls.

Who are you outsider?

Tell me who am I.⁹²

The South Side as hell, or at least steeped in hellish conditions, invokes the “evil” of the kitchenette. The proliferation of exploitative kitchenette buildings and apartments led housing reformers and organizations, sociologists, and public workers to decry the existence of such practices and structures as “the kitchenette evil.”⁹³ The framing of the matter as such did not originate with black-populated kitchenettes but rather with poor, ethnic European tenement districts, as noted in Edith Abbott’s 1936 *The Tenements of Chicago, 1908-1935*. The published study exposes widespread “housing evils” in the city—seemingly equated with “tenement evils” and “slum evils” referenced throughout—toward the end of mitigating the incidences and severity of such conditions through an updating and enforcement of the city’s housing code and

⁹¹ Langston Hughes, “Restrictive Covenants,” *One Way Ticket*, 64.

⁹² Langston Hughes, “Visitors to the Black Belt,” *One Way Ticket*, 65-66.

⁹³ See, for example, Dolinar, *Negro in Illinois*, 162.

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an improved oversight by the health department.⁹⁴ However, while Hughes does implicate the evils of restrictive covenants and the political makings of black confinement, the comparison to hell in “Visitors to the Black Belt” refers not to fleeing and defensive white residents and their governmental and bureaucratic protectors, but to slum landlords. The kitchenettes are the exemplars of that hell: heatless and garbage-filled residences that blacks were made to call home in the bristling cold of Chicago.⁹⁵ While Hughes himself could be considered a South Side visitor, as he was no long-term resident, he spent enough time residing and frequenting the area to be well-acquainted with the discriminatory housing practices and deteriorated housing conditions.⁹⁶ Hughes, by way of the poem’s narrator, demands white confrontation with black lived realities as well as white self-reflexivity in relation to the geographic and social distance between themselves and Black Belt resident reinforced by their reductive and superficial engagement in the area. In this set of poems, Hughes telescopes into black quotidian realities in the racially segregated landscape of the urban North to illuminate the scales at which blacks experience exclusion from geographic and civic national belonging. The kitchenette serves as his most specific example to do so in these poems.

From its Chicago appearance in 1914 as black innovation to its transformation by the 1940s to a symbol of national racial tribulation, the kitchenette constituted the complexities of black urban modernity and collective racial representation. In the next chapter, I turn to the kitchenette building’s materiality to unpack the racial inequities built into the environment.

⁹⁴ Edith Abbott, *The Tenements of Chicago, 1908-1935*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), x; 489n19.

⁹⁵ The kitchenette, ironically, is a cold hell to live in.

⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Hughes’ experiences in kitchenettes and the South Side were not only hellish, as depicted in the poems. In Gwendolyn Brooks’ autobiography, she describes a party she and her husband put on to celebrate Hughes: “We squeezed perhaps a hundred people into our Langston Hughes two-room kitchenette party. Langston was the merriest and the most colloquial of them all. ‘Best party I’ve ever been given!’ He enjoyed everyone; he enjoyed all the talk, all the phonograph blues, all the festivity in the crowded air.” The kitchenette party rendered by Brooks was likely held within a few years of the publication of Hughes’ collection of poems, as Brooks notes that for her the 1940s “was a party era” and that her “best parties were given at 623 East 63rd Street, our most exciting kitchenette,” within which she also welcomed news of the publication of her first poetry collection, *A Street in Bronzeville*. The contrast of pleasure and warm festivity in Brooks’ portrayal with the refuse and frigidity of Hughes’ exemplifies the range of emotion and experience in the South Side kitchenette. Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report from Part One*, (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972), 70; 68; 69; Marjorie Peters, “Poetess Brooks Calmly Greets Book’s Success in Kitchenette,” *The Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), September 1, 1945: 11, accessed Oct. 11, 2015 in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender*.

CHAPTER 2

Quotidian Expenses: Domestic Design and Spatial Performance



FIGURE 2.1 *Child going up the stairs into “kitchenette” apartment house, Black Belt.* Edwin Rosskam, 1941. Library of Congress.

In a 1941 photograph taken by Farm Security Administration photographer Edwin Rosskam, a pre-pubescent female child is walking up the outside stairs to a worn brick building in Chicago’s Black Belt. Only the upper portion of the staircase is pictured, and the girl is two steps down from the door landing. She is balanced on the balls of her feet, toes pressed into her shoes, shoes pressed into the inside of the stairstep, heels raised mid-lift. The fingers of her left hand lightly press onto the top metal tubular railing as she pauses to turn over her left shoulder, poised to acknowledge the camera. Unsmiling mouth parted and a questioning eyebrow slightly raised, her face reveals a searching expression. Based on the girl’s nonverbal acknowledgment of Rosskam in this captured moment, the photographer appears to be unexpected or uninvited: an interloper. The girl’s gaze rebuffs the photographer’s desire to follow (with his camera) her traversal to a more intimate, unpublic place.

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The girl, while the focal point of the image, is slightly left-of-center. The photo's center is the open right-hand door of the kitchenette building entrance. An invitation to the girl but perhaps a barrier to the photographer (and viewer), the door, although ajar, lends no visual entree into the domestic space. The child has access to the unseen interior, but the outsider is unwelcome in the unpublic place. Indeed, the girl's gaze and body serve as checks to assumptions of availability or access to the intimate unpublic—whereas her body is only marginally positioned to block physical and visual entry, her returned gaze serves to counter the seeming invitation to the viewer (and photographer) of the open door. This challenge is doubly reinforced by the twinned gaze on the far left side of the image: a figure (whose age and gender is not completely ascertainable) looks out of the corner of a window that is in line with the outer door, pushing aside the curtains that obscure the rest of the person and whatever lies inside. The gazing figure, with chin resting on knuckles, contemplates and checks the photographer's stare and documentation, and lends a protective presence to the otherwise vulnerable girl. The low angle shot only intensifies their spurning expressions. Both subjects are positioned above Rosskam, and the girl is looking back at him: two witnessing, confronting, downward gazes are returned to the photographer. His practice is literally and figuratively beneath them, and it is unwelcome there.

Just as the photographer's eye is disallowed access within the kitchenette residence, the stares of the child and adult eschew the very notion that their existences could be rendered intelligible via this outsider's lens. The brick facade of the building underscores the opacity of the two black subjects' lives to the camera: neither the camera, photographer, nor the subsequent image viewer can grasp the interiority of these kitchenette dwellers, cannot fully ascertain the complexities of kitchenette spaces and dwellings through the uninvited photograph.

In 1890 Jacob Riis popularized “slum” photography for its persuasive impact in *How the Other Half Lives*, a visual expose' marketed to the middle class depicting New York's poor and immigrant inhabitants making lives in tenements and on the city streets. Since then, the photographic document has been employed by innumerable entities to create and bolster narratives about urban spaces and subjects. Chicago, also referred to as “the known city” by Richard Wright, was one such visually indexed placed. Marginalized sectors of the modern urban landscape were of particular intrigue to those studying within the so-called social laboratory of Chicago. The Black Belt and its kitchenette buildings, then, easily compelled myriad students of the city. Numerous photographers documented deadly fires, “blight,” poverty, and evidence of slum landlords in juxtaposition to the quotidian pleasures, trials, and banalities of black urban life amid this discrimination and neglect.

In documentary kitchenette photography, residents are imaged both candid and posed, some caught in a passing snapshot while others are clearly the photographer's access point to the interior spaces of the kitchenette building. While in some instances it is evident the white photographer is imposing an agenda on the built environment and its subjects, in other moments it appears that the subjects could very well be implementing an agenda of their own, leveraging the intrigue and pity of the photographers (along with the platforms they represented) to draw attention to aspects of their living with which they were intimately familiar and wanted to highlight for change. As will be evident in selected photographs, this was a gendered and aged

labor: women and children, often found in or near the home (and who existed in large numbers in the kitchenette population), were the primary subjects of the camera's lens.¹

Interrogating the everyday yields insights into the normalized burdens of being black and/or poor in America. In being studied subjects within a studied landscape, Black Belt residents, and kitchenette residents especially, performed a form of labor in front of the camera's lens. They also labored with and against the photographer. Additionally, the photographs exposed the labor endemic to kitchenette living by capturing the design and poor state of amenities in the buildings. If infrastructure is comprised of the basic facilities which help to sustain a society (namely transportation, buildings, electricity, water/sewage management, and communication), at the scale of a kitchenette building community, the infrastructure might refer to the walling and windows, plumbing, heating/cooling mechanisms, electricity, and modes of immediate and distant communication (e.g. doorbells, telephones, mailboxes). In this chapter I argue that the infrastructure of the mid-twentieth-century kitchenette building produced unique domestic practices evincing Black Belt Chicagoans' predisposal to increased labor expenditure in their daily home lives.² Through my analysis, I expose just how expensive—in terms of attention, labor, and energy—kitchenette dwelling was, by design. In doing so, I illuminate the subtleties of racialized spatial discrimination affecting blacks in Chicago during this period.

The inconvenience and additional labor endemic to kitchenette living was built into everyday life. Accessing the restroom, ringing the doorbell, keeping the home sanitary, and negotiating uninvited visitors were all laden with added awareness and intentionality. As a result, tenants of kitchenette buildings were required to expend more energy in their home lives as they went about day-to-day tasks. While the heightened attention and increased labor in and around the kitchenette building was standard fare for residents—and therefore may not have registered to them as added expenditures of personal energy reserves—it is important to draw attention to these normalized inconveniences as they highlight the workings of residential discrimination and geographical racism on the micro level. Black residents likely negotiated the labor of the space with the same orientation as they did in society: that is, with the understanding that they had to work twice as hard as their white counterparts and might receive half as much.

Saidiya Hartman has attended to the quotidian in the study of normalized violence against black historical subjects. Focusing particularly on the enslaved, Hartman argues that analyzing the subtle, rather than the spectacular, hones in on the everydayness of violence. She argues that the violences that are not readily apparent as monstrous, inhumane, and brutal are just as worthy of investigation, if not moreso, because they have the ability to reveal how embedded and

¹ Women are more consistently cited in relation to being in the home, but not necessarily because they did not take jobs outside of their domestic spaces. Rather, many men are noted to be deserters, working outside of the home, transient, living with a woman solely for the security of shelter, food, and money, or some combination of these. St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton note that “fragments of families” lived in kitchenettes, alongside “young bachelors” and “girls and young women.” While some of these families were comprised of siblings or extended family, a number were homes of women, with and without children, who had dismissed, or were deserted by, male companions. Data on non-heterosexual coupling and housing patterns are largely unavailable in Drake and Cayton's study. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 576, 583-585.

² Since landlords were often absent, I will focus primarily on the tenants and visitors of the Black Belt's kitchenette buildings.

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normalized they are in a white supremacist society.³ Moreover, feminist scholars have long cited the labor of the home, while black feminist scholars in particular have articulated the expectation and exaction of sacrifice in black women's (domestic) work for others.⁴ Bell hooks, for example, has offered "homeplace" as a radical, resistive site created by black women in their homes for the community for the purposes of affirmation, recovery, and humanization in the face of white supremacist violence. This affirming space was constructed out of love for, and protection of, black vitality; however, it was often done amidst contending with their own full days' work in someone else's home.⁵ Analysis of the quotidian locates the tactics formulated by those racially and spatially oppressed.⁶

Moreover, Laura Pulido, in a poignant analysis of the recent lead poisoning crisis in Flint, Michigan, has analyzed the interplay of infrastructure and racial disposability. She writes, "Infrastructure maintenance is a form of social investment. The decision to neglect infrastructure so that it becomes toxic must be seen as a form of violence against those who are considered disposable. This is the politics of abandonment."⁷ Thus, neglect in the most basic arenas of a society's or community's material structures constitutes a violent abandonment by the society or community impacting the everyday lives of its inhabitants. When disposability is determined by a racial logic—as black bodies are devalued, considered surplus, and thereby deemed disposable—infrastructure becomes a site at which spatial and value politics are exposed.⁸

Analyzing quotidian performances within the Black Belt's kitchenette buildings sheds light on the built environment's impact on black domesticity and how racial capitalism in housing design and maintenance produces particular—and peculiar—home practices. By examining the interiors of kitchenette buildings as presented in archival photographs and literary narrative I locate sites at which unique residential repertoires are developed, and I draw attention to the habitual nature of these embodied practices. What is more, I offer that interrogating domestic repertoires has the potential to yield powerful insights into the workings of urban racial capitalism and its embeddedness into quotidian space and place, as well as how black subjects confront and navigate it. As cultural studies scholar George Lipsitz has asserted, "[W]e have

³ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). On quotidian black resistance, see also Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*, (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

⁴ See especially Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, (New York: Random House, 1981); bell hooks, "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 45-46.

⁵ hooks, "Homeplace," 42.

⁶ Michel de Certeau distinguishes between "strategies" and "tactics" along lines of power. Strategies are tools of dominant forces that often conceal the relations of power at work in societal institutions. Tactics, by contrast, are tools of the oppressed, waged not to overcome or defeat the enemy but to weaken, contest, or challenge it in a meaningful and significant way; the guerilla warfare that is tactics is waged inconspicuously, stealthily, or not out in the open. De Certeau asserts, "The place of tactic belongs to the other," and also notes that "Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character." Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xx, xix.

⁷ Laura Pulido, "Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 27, no. 3 (2016): 4-5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, 2, 8.

much to learn from people who have learned to transform spaces of deprivation into places of possibility.”⁹ One site of learning is the documentary photograph.

Documentary Photography, the Archive, and the Repertoire

Maren Stange has argued that documentary photography in the United States was wielded from the very start to consolidate a middle-class perspective of the working and lower classes.¹⁰ Beginning with Jacob Riis, regarded as the originator of photographic social documentary, Stange tracks the use of the persuasive form from the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century by white male reformers putting forth a classed social agenda. She states, “The documentary mode testifies both to the existence of painful social facts and to reformers’ special expertise in ameliorating them, thus reassuring a liberal middle class that social oversight was both its duty and its right.”¹¹ Of Riis she notes that he worked to establish a middle-class solidarity that was less concerned with identifying with the “slums” and its subjects and more concerned with making housing reform about philanthropy and penance (as the existing class needed to atone for their forefathers’ sins and greed in creating the material disparities).¹² Indeed, the very title of his work, *How the Other Half Lives*, positions the audience as the privileged other ignorant of, but ready to empathize with, the plight of their marginalized brethren.¹³ The documentary photograph, then, is important to be recognized as a type of social tool. Pete Daniel and Sally Stein also draw attention to the large archive of governmental documentary photography of the New Deal era, highlighting that its very reason for existence was to “influence public policy and opinion” and to “convince people that government intervention was beneficial and proper.”¹⁴ Moreover, Deborah Willis and other scholars have underscored the importance of imaging to black Americans and the various uses to which the photograph has been put; Willis in particular intervenes in the lack of substantial engagement with race or black photographers in studies of documentary photography preceding hers.¹⁵ Across these studies, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and its vast photographic archive of the New Deal era are discussed for its employment of gifted photographers and for its large body of images focusing on impoverished and urban geographies.

However, after New Deal programs ceased, there remained entities interested in wielding documentary photography to reform public opinion and policy. In Chicago specifically, freelance Jewish photographer Mildred Mead captured Chicago’s settling migrant populations and the

⁹ George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 125.

¹⁰ Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America, 1890-1950* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), xiii, 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4-5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 14, 18. Saidiya Hartman has described the repressive quality of empathy where the other is obliterated and one feels for oneself in the place of the other, thereby occluding the other’s suffering and normalizing it. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 19-20.

¹⁴ Pete Daniel, Merry A. Foresta, Maren Stange, Sally Stein, *Official Images: New Deal Photography* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), xi.

¹⁵ Deborah Willis, *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York: The New Press, 1994); Deborah Willis and Jane Lusaka, ed., *Visual Journal: Harlem and DC in the Thirties and Forties* (Washington: The Center for African American History and Culture and Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 5.

dilapidated environments to which they were relegated.¹⁶ She documented the South and West Sides from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s, spending a significant amount of time in the Black Belt. Mead's work offers interior views of kitchenette buildings at several locations in the Black Belt. Many of the photos have specified dates, including month and day, as well as addresses, making them locatable in ways that those of FSA photographers Russell Lee and Edwin Rosskam are not.¹⁷ At best, the FSA photographs offer names of major thoroughfares in the South Side and names of kitchenette buildings, which is useful information. However, Mead's addresses pin the images to city-recognized parcels of land and the properties built and utilized upon them. Mead's documented images provide multiple reference points for what were accepted as common living conditions in the Black Belt. She provides specific sites at which often egregious states of overcrowding and disrepair were endured for the sake of shelter.

Mead's sympathetic rendering of the Black Belt's residential situation was complicated, however. The kitchenettes photographed were to be used to build a sweeping case for urban renewal in the South Side; Mead was commissioned by the leading organization influencing mid-century Chicago housing reform, the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council (MHPC). While the images shed additional light on the extent of black precarity within the material confines of kitchenette buildings, they (and Mead, and the MHPC) failed to be self-reflexive in regard to the added precarity their attention and indexing of these black home spaces introduced. With photos often used as strong, incontrovertible evidence, Mead's images spotlighted interior states of uninhabitable-yet-inhabited residences to make particular what the city's public was well-aware of generally: the Black Belt's blocks of kitchenettes were the posterchild of Chicago's slums. They were a visual and moral taint on the city's image of itself, a problem it had created and supported and wanted eliminated, at least superficially. What Mildred Mead offers in her South Side residential portfolio are black domestic sites targeted for elimination. With visual evidence and addresses indexed, the only thing needed was a bulldozer to realize a new vision for the city—one free (or substantially diminished) of “blight” and “slums” and those black and poor citizens living within their purview.

I offer a selection of Mead's photographs in this chapter and in the curated Interlude that indexes and places—quite literally—South Side kitchenette conditions. The images are also artifacts of heady liberalism intoxicated with its own social and financial interests (on the part of the MHPC, but also maybe Mead). Since photographs were often taken by subjects who were not kitchenette residents themselves and, in the archives I have accessed, were white individuals extraneous to the Black Belt social and residential landscape, I find it important to distinguish between what was documented and what the lived (dis)continuities may have actually been in these residences. Visual culture scholars have long noted the ways that framing in the practice and results of photography (and cinematography) is imbued with power, and that the gaze has been wielded by photographers who ultimately render subjects in a reductionist light.¹⁸ A part of

¹⁶ Wayne Miller also documented the South Side in the late 1940s. See Wayne F. Miller, *Chicago's South Side, 1946-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Lee and Rosskam's FSA photos cover black Chicago among other migratory sites and are the sole photographers representing Chicago in the only substantial visual study of the black Great Migration in book form up to its time, *12 Million Black Voices*. Benjamin Balthaser, “Killing the Documentarian: Richard Wright and Documentary Modernity,” *Criticism* 55.3 (2013): 364.

¹⁸ In addition to Deborah Willis and Maren Stange, see Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3-64; Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, eds., *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*

my work here is to disencumber some of the images taken in the so-called slums of the Black Belt from what may have been sensationalism or paternalism. Despite its faults, the archive of kitchenette photography accords some sense—and a very helpful one for my purposes here—of the interior spaces, proximities, and subjects of kitchenette buildings. Rather than read the images for what they might reveal about the photographer, I aim to explore the possible performed realities of kitchenette-dwelling subjects as captured in the visually-indexed conditions.

Kitchenette Orientations

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed offers, “Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our energy and attention toward.”¹⁹ Taking up residence, inhabiting, occupying, and turning toward are all concepts woven throughout her analysis of phenomenological theory and orientations toward people and objects. Ahmed contends that the direction of one’s personal investments, the means by which one makes sense of the world, and the modes of being and operating in space are all influenced and informed by one’s orientation(s).

In a very literal “world of shared inhabitance,” kitchenette residents’ energy, attention, and practice was directed toward coordinating their movements, schedules, and spaces, and cooperating with co-residents of their apartments and building. Kitchenette orientations were directed in part to negotiating the substandard, failing, and overburdened material conditions of the building and the social interactions that resulted from them. Bodies were physically orientated to “inhabit space” in particular ways: moving within rooms tight with furniture and people, negotiating sleeping space, being aware of one’s volume or actions in light of neighbors. Moreover, inadequate and failing building amenities, such as clogged plumbing, short-circuited wiring, uncollected refuse, or unaddressed pest infestation, would require orientations that were hyper-aware of impending danger or extreme inconvenience. Energy, labor, and attention were invested in tasks such as protecting children from potential physical threats, making do with infrastructural conditions as-is or devising new methods to meet one’s needs in the short- or long-term, and persistently contacting (or attempting to contact) the landlord to issue concerns and complaints.²⁰ Furthermore, kitchenette residents were also orientated, as Ahmed describes it, to be on the lookout for new housing openings, either in presumably better rented rooms or in houses they saved for (and for which they hoped to get loans approved).²¹ In sum, kitchenette

(New York: International Center of Photography and Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003); John Tagg, “Introduction,” in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); Allison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 3.

²⁰ Residents also aired grievances in letters to the *Chicago Defender*. See for example Lambert W. Brown, “Picketing of Kitchenettes,” *Chicago Defender* 25 May 1940.

²¹ Note that high rates of relocation internal to the city existed not only among kitchenette residents, but also among the black populace more generally. See Chicago Commission on Race Relations, *Negro in Chicago*, 169, 173, 178, 180. Richard Rothstein describes how HOLC had a large impact on who could attain mortgages through denying insurances for properties in “risky” areas; neighborhoods containing black residents, and especially those mostly comprised of blacks, were labeled red on HOLC’s maps for their undesirability. See *The Color of Law*:

orientations were taxed orientations, as they required added expense on the part of building residents (and visitors, too).

Staying Connected

The kitchenette building's design afforded myriad possibilities for interaction among residents, spaces, and objects, and it also *required* things of its inhabitants. While affordance describes what was *possible* in the kitchenette—and from that possibility, what tenants chose to do in/with that space—there were also ways in which the kitchenette necessitated certain types of behaviors or actions.²² For instance, in what was likely a common practice in converted buildings, doorbells at building entrances were labeled with multiple names per bell. This was because in the original building design, each doorbell was designated to a discrete apartment flat; when these flats were subdivided into kitchenette units, there was no investment in—or perhaps no need for—rewiring the units to include more doorbells. Indeed, this electrical renovation may not have been possible in some buildings, if the walls of the kitchenettes were beaverboard partitions instead of proper walls capable of safely housing wiring behind them. As a result, the original number of doorbells were employed to service *all* of the kitchenette apartments, using a ring system delineated by the building landlord or supervisor.

A 1955 photograph taken by freelance photographer Mildred Mead captures one such instance. The image shows the call bells on the inside lobby of a kitchenette building. There are six simple circular white buttons on the wall with a crudely cut half-sheet of paper with typewritten font taped beside each one. Each sheet contains the heading “North” or “South,” underneath which are two columns. The left column contains the last name of a resident/family, sometimes preceded by a first initial, and the right column features the number of bell rings required to reach each resident, with an increasing number of rings as one descends the list on each sheet. Three of the lists contain three resident/family names, two of the lists contain four, and one list contains five names of distinct residents. The variant number of names, indicating number of subdivided units within each flat, signal a plausible difference in apartment size. If a flat was converted into four kitchenettes, it would contain four names next to a bell, whereas a flat subdivided into five units would contain a corresponding number of names assigned to its bell. On the bell sheet, three of the name entries contain handwritten corrections to the resident name, one of which indicates a likely succession of dwellers (it is entirely scratched out with a new name written above it, indicating a replacement of tenants).

A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America (New York: Liveright, 2017), 63-64. The constricted space, overcrowding, and lack of accessible infrastructure would have made kitchenette living especially challenging for residents with limited physical mobility. Within the confines of the tightly-packed Black Belt, black Chicagoans with physical disabilities were unlikely to have much choice in their selection of housing; accessibility would likely have been secondary to availability. In the event of an emergency, then, those ailing or otherwise impaired would have heightened susceptibility to the worst outcomes of the danger.

²² For an explanation of my use of affordance theory in the project, see the Introduction. Briefly, affordances (a theory used by design practitioners and scholars) are action opportunities. I posit *black spatial affordances* as the coexisting limited and expansive opportunities for behavior or action within racially circumscribed space.

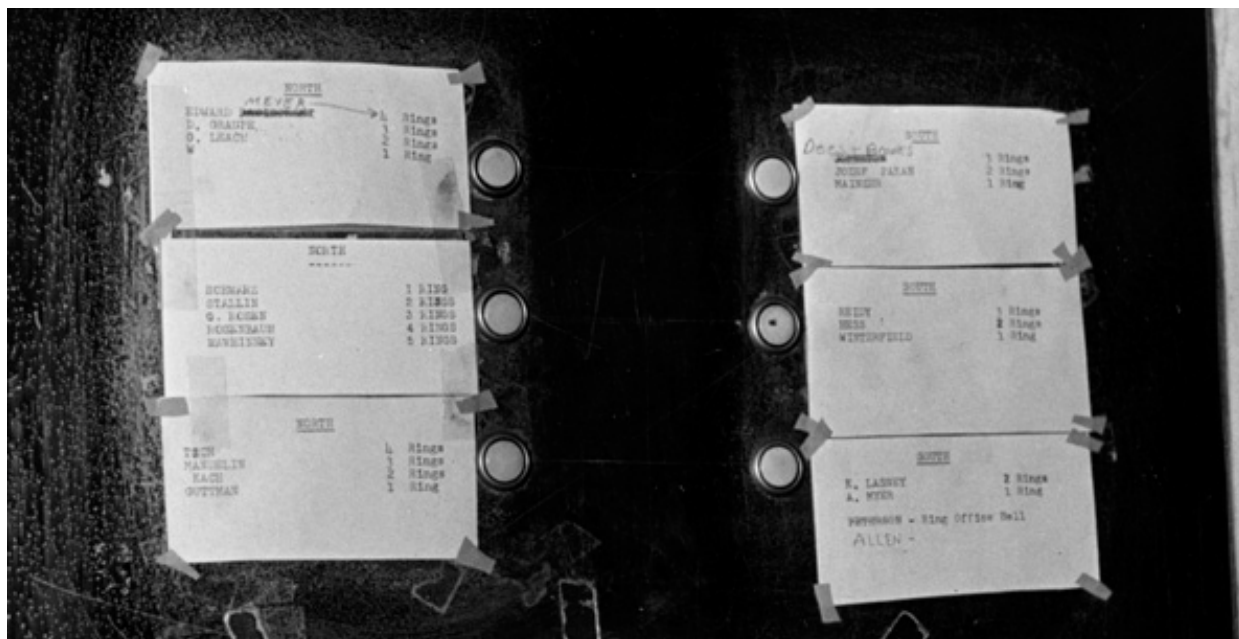


FIGURE 2.2 Once a six flat apartment building, it has now been converted into a 3 to 5 cut up apartments per each. Mildred LaDue Mead, 1955. Courtesy of University of Chicago Photographic Archive, apf2-09072 (cropped), Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

As Mead's photo description indicates, what was once a six-flat apartment building has been converted to a kitchenette building with twenty-two separate residences. Since only one bell was wired for each apartment of the original six-flat building, the conversion of apartments into kitchenettes posed a problem, as multiple distinct residents/families resided within severely subdivided portions of one flat. To get around the issue of residents having either no doorbell at all or having confusion about whose residence might be visiting, a bell-ringing system was devised, such that each kitchenette residence within an original flat was designated a set number of rings on the same doorbell. Thus one kitchenette tenant received one bell ring, while another received two, and so on, when visitors were calling on them at their homes. The system of rings gives insight into kitchenette life (at least in this, and similar, buildings), as it must have been common for residents to hear the doorbells for other kitchenette residents within their own home spaces. A pointed listening was necessary when the doorbell rang so that residents received proper notice of their visitors, for if one was not attentive, a visitor could be left unattended or one might mistake someone else's visitor for one's own. What is more, a caller would also need to be accurate in deciphering and enacting the number of rings on the proper bell to reach their desired tenant. In this way, the design of kitchenette buildings *required* attentiveness and accuracy on the part of both the visitor and the visited.

Ahmed offers that in addition to orientation being a condition of certainty of place, "To be orientated is also to be turned toward certain objects, those that help us to find our way."²³ When orienting—or in Ahmed's usage, orientating—objects fail to give guidance to a subject, it

²³ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 1.

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is possible for the subject to become disorientated, with the disorientation factored as an added expense. To be disorientated is to lose one's way with an object or to engage with an object toward a path of deviation.²⁴ In the kitchenette, the doorbells were infrastructural technologies to facilitate communication between a resident and a visitor. Doorbells also were labeled to assist the visitor in correctly identifying the bell which would notify their desired residence. The lobby doorbells, with their descriptive key, were orientating objects to help people find their way to others inhabiting a kitchenette building. When these guiding technologies were arranged by a potentially disorienting logic—each bell connecting to multiple residences and needing careful and precise handling—the visiting subject could also become disorientated.

While the bell ring system was devised as a workaround for the limitations of the extant bell mechanism, it also created a larger possibility of failure of the notification mechanism. On the one hand, the visitor and the inhabitant might fail to be connected because a visitor was unable to correctly employ the bell system (e.g. did not use the accurate number of rings). On the other hand, the bells themselves might fail in functionality due to overuse. If one bell was subjected to higher use because it was employed to service multiple residences, and an additional ring was required for each additional residence, the bell button itself would endure more wear and tear over a shorter period of time, resulting in a possible interruption or termination of functionality. What then, would become of the multiple residences attached to a single out-of-order bell and their interactions with their visitors? An added layer of pre-communication might be necessary, in the form of letting an expected visitor know before they visited that the bell was out of order or in the form of a scribbled note attached to the doorbell panel. It could also yield a higher number of instances where inhabitants might be disoriented by an unexpected guest. While one could certainly be surprised by an unexpected ring of the doorbell, how much more might one be surprised by a knock on the door? The additional time and attention, however minimal, accorded to the readying of one's space and oneself to receive a guest would be eliminated when a doorbell was out of use. Moreover, keeping someone waiting at a door might be regarded differently (e.g., with less patience or graciousness) than keeping someone waiting in the lobby.

Comparably, mailboxes posed similar issues. In *12 Million Black Voices*, Richard Wright describes a common scene of black urban life:

If you want to see how crowdedly we live, if you want to know how our meager incomes force our families to “double up” to save space, visit a kitchenette building in some Black Belt and look at the long list of American names under our mail boxes: Jackson, Jefferson, Harrison, Grant, Adams, Johnson, Wilson, Madison, Washington, Taylor...So many of us are forced to live in one building that you would think you were reading a crude telephone directory or a clumsy census report when you see our names scrawled on the walls of a thousand dingy vestibules.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., 158-59, 166.

²⁵ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, 116.

Mailboxes in kitchenette buildings belied the hordes of residents housed in the building and in a single apartment.²⁶ They also may not have always reflected the accurate number or identity of inhabitants, as kitchenettes were often transitional dwellings for new migrants. Others found housing in kitchenettes in certain blocks of the West or South Sides for temporary periods until they could secure better, slightly more affordable, or simply different housing in another building on another block. The *Negro Housing* study noted that the average time spent in a kitchenette residence ranged from two to six weeks.²⁷ As a result, the ordinary task of sending, delivering, receiving, and retrieving mail could easily become complicated and very involved.

Sending mail to a relative or friend living in a kitchenette would entail keeping track of their up-to-date address. It was not uncommon for residents to be locked out of their apartments or evicted by landlords with little notice, forcing them to quickly locate another rented residence, attempt to double-up with another family, or devise other temporary means of housing (such as squatting on an abandoned property or making use of barns or alley shacks as homes).²⁸ Maintaining accurate records of residence for the purpose of communicating with a migrated loved one could prove difficult, if not serve as a deterrent to communicating via mail at all.

In regard to mail delivery, a mail carrier would need to closely check the name on the mail against the names on the mailboxes, since multiple dwellers would be listed on one box in some instances. While separate mail slots may have been created to account for subdivided kitchenette apartments, doubling up in even those small domiciles was not uncommon. Perhaps a mail carrier would keep unofficial knowledge of a building's residents (e.g., if a resident mentioned they might be moving or might be new, or if an eviction was witnessed or rumored). Furthermore, carriers might have operated from unofficial knowledge to deliver mail for people not listed on a mailbox but whose address was listed on the mail (e.g., newly migrated individuals who might be doubling up with relatives). Receiving and retrieving mail could also be more involved than doing so in less crowded dwellings. With the array of possible parties a single article of mail might be directed to (and given the possibility of different residents having the same "American" last name, as Wright refers to it), ensuring the reception of one's own mail and engaging in proper redirection of mail mistakenly received required neighborly cooperation. The very possible lack of familiarity with one's neighbors in a kitchenette building, due to its often transient population, could impede the speed and ease with which a resident might retrieve or return misdirected mail.

The postal service was a means by which black migrants established themselves in the city, as blacks had far more opportunities to be employed as postal clerks than other comparable positions at stores; postal work was considered clean, respectable, stable, and remunerative

²⁶ Amanda Seligman, in her study of neighborhood change in Chicago, includes a photograph of a multiple names listed at individual mailboxes, attesting to the likelihood of it (and also, possibly the doorbell system) being a widespread practice. Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 40, Figure 4.

²⁷ President's Conference, "Appendix VII: Kitchenette Housing," *Negro Housing*, 258-59. See also Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 576-77, 608.

²⁸ Abbott, *Tenements of Chicago*, 432; Hurley Green, "Shifting Scenes: The Gains of Pain," *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, November 13, 1997. Mildred Mead visually documented some families on the West and South Sides living in makeshift domiciles.

employment, albeit lacking in opportunities for advancement.²⁹ The postal service was also a prominent mode by which black migrants and the relatives and friends they left behind in the South sustained connection. It was not uncommon for adjusting migrants to apprise their southern relatives by letter of potential and actual economic security found in northern urban centers, or at least this was true of the first wave of mass migration.³⁰ However, the possibility for maintaining a sense of connection and community across the geographic expanses of migration would have been challenging for many kitchenette residents despite the functionality of this federal institution of communication. Due to the highly transient nature of kitchenette life—whether due to intolerable living conditions, eviction because of late or lost wages, or rare openings in a seemingly more optimal kitchenette blocks away—the postal service could not be considered a stable means of keeping in touch. Kitchenette residents then, and the loved ones (and other official entities) who desired to contact them, were unable to rely upon the postal service that for other citizens was a by-and-large dependable social institution.

The doorbell and mail systems of kitchenette buildings represent aspects of kitchenette alterity. While the need to be intentional in ringing and listening to the doorbell and in sending, delivering, and receiving mail were far from the most severe disadvantages or threats to black life in the kitchenette, it does underscore a different way of having to *be* in the kitchenette by way of its design. These subtle inequities manifested themselves from the very point of building entry. What appears as minutia in one instance amounts to a significantly more labor-intensive quality of life when compounded with other seemingly banal inconveniences. In these cases, the guiding labels were integral to the successful execution of ringing and delivering mail to a kitchenette resident. Moreover, the designs left little room for error, as the altered usage of basic housing features would require people to follow instructions to interface with the building and its inhabitants effectively. The consistent cooperation and coordination necessitated by kitchenette living made these habitations interdependent. Not only were doorbells shared in the most literal sense among multiple residences, but also residents would have relied upon each other at times to properly (re)route their mail or visitors. Again, this domestic interdependence was necessitated by its infrastructure. In what follows, I examine instances in the kitchenette of heightened awareness and labor with higher stakes and larger potential consequences for sharing amenities.

Bare Necessities

High-level intentionality was also needed for activities as mundane and personal as bathroom use. Effectively timing bathroom access to a heavily shared hall bathroom involves a knowledge of neighbors' bathroom behavior, general schedules, and perhaps even how many people live in a given residence (so that one is aware of those with whom one is competing for bathroom time). It also relies upon centering modern, industrial time. The bathroom competition brings into light just how many people are doing certain types of industrial and service jobs, how many are in school, and the like: the clock-in time for factory work, for example, would determine certain patterns of high bathroom competition because residents would need to be

²⁹ Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 36; Henry McGee, "The Negro in the Chicago Post Office" (master's thesis, The University of Chicago, 1961), 13-15, 37-58, ProQuest (TM07745).

³⁰ Spear, *Black Chicago*, 133-136; Brian Dolinar, ed., *The Negro in Illinois: The WPA Papers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 142-43.

groomed and dressed by a certain hour to ensure timely arrival to work. Residents might also be privy to how much and what type of grooming their neighbors regularly performed because of these temporally-oriented interactions as well as the thin walls characteristic of the apartments.

Moreover, sharing a communal kitchenette bathroom required residents to be visually and aurally attuned to their neighbors. While attending to the doorbell involved awareness of a generalized bell or buzzer and its corresponding labels, competition for the communal bathroom required tuning into sounds and sights both particular and intimate. One must listen for the water turning off, the bathroom flushes, the cobbling together of grooming items and peeled-off housewear that signal an impending exit and the slim window of opportunity to gain access to the coveted amenities before someone else more poised for action (and perhaps more agile, too) converges upon them. One scans down the hallway to see if the door is opened or closed; if occupied, one checks and rechecks every so many minutes until the bathroom is vacant. Moreover, one finds oneself regulating not only one's own individual and familial bathroom use, but also that of one's neighbors, most likely in protest of usage duration; this might be especially true when residents are mutually knowledgeable of each other's morning schedules and situational constraints (e.g. other members of a household needing to use the bathroom before or after another for timely departure).³¹

With four or five times as many people utilizing a single bathroom, a number of practices were likely devised (if not reformulated/adapted from comparable southern living conditions of shared outhouses) and implemented by individuals for personal sanitation and comfort. In a number of photos of kitchenette bathrooms, the floors are covered in water; leaks and other plumbing issues were common. To enter the bathroom then, one would need proper foot gear: shoes that not only prevented one's bare feet from contacting the water but also that would not themselves absorb water or be ruined by it. Also, setting any personal items on the floor would be out of the question unless protected in some fashion (e.g., by a hard container, like a basket or bucket). Accidentally dropping toiletries or clothing on the floor would require cleaning and sanitizing them or, possibly, discarding them altogether. Wet floors, and damp areas in general, provided breeding grounds for bacteria, mold, mildew, and vermin. The high rates among the Black Belt population of instances of tuberculosis were no doubt tied in part to the prevalence of dampness in kitchenette buildings in addition to the very close quarters being shared, as tuberculosis is both an air- and water-borne disease. Basement apartments were especially susceptible to perpetual dampness, but because basement units were often among the cheapest to rent, innumerable people found homes among them despite the material conditions. Even if a resident did not have to contend with frequently damp floors in the bathroom (and/or neighboring hallway), it would behoove kitchenette residents to be prepared for such an occurrence. With plumbing capacities maximized or exceeded, water could easily leak and pool at any given moment.

In one photo taken by Mead of the Old White Eagle Hotel's converted kitchenette units, a toilet and surrounding area is pictured strewn with newspaper pages. The toilet, captured at an angle, is covered with a layer of dry pages across the toilet seat. This may have been a way to line the seat, creating a toilet cover for personal sanitary use in what may well be considered a public restroom. If this was a practice, it could help to explain the pile of discarded crumpled and

³¹ A good example of this bathroom phenomenon can be found in the opening scenes of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.



FIGURE 2.3 *White Eagle Hotel, 18th and Indiana. Exposed plumbing and general deterioration! Convenient for the plumbers?* Mildred Mead, April 8, 1954. University of Chicago Special Collections, apf2-09088.



FIGURE 2.4 *Once the swank White Eagle Hotel, now badly deteriorated by crowding and illegal conversions. Tenant shows the photographer around. Mildred Mead, April 8, 1954. University of Chicago Special Collections, apf2-09086.*

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FIGURE 2.5 *White Eagle Hotel converted, 18th and Indiana. This sort of condition repeated all over this building. Mildred Mead, April 8, 1954. University of Chicago Special Collections, apf2-09085.*



FIGURE 2.6 *Stove heat, broken window plugged with clothing.* Mildred Mead, Near Maxwell Street area, Chicago, IL, undated. University of Chicago Special Collections, apf2-09085.

dampened pages in the corner of the image. The papers may also have been used as an initial, or even last-ditch, effort to sop up water from a leaky or overflowing toilet or sink. Either of these functions would have been a mode of mitigating the bathroom's perils. Most likely, however, newspaper would have been used for personal clean-up in lieu of toilet paper, as newspapers were a readily available resource and could be obtained daily for little cost.

What is more, heavier usage of the bathroom facilities would undoubtedly result in not only a faster accumulation of dirt, refuse, and bacteria, which would require vigilant cleaning regimens, but also the bathrooms would likely succumb to temporary or prolonged disuse as issues of plumbing and object-related wear-and-tear (e.g., toilet seat, sink handles) were prone to occur more frequently.³² The loss of a bathroom due to mis- or dysfunction would increase the volume of traffic in other bathrooms in a kitchenette building, requiring even more coordination and cooperation among residents.³³ It would also intensify the susceptibility of other building bathrooms falling into a similar predicament. With landlords often absentee and disinvested in responding promptly (if at all) to tenant complaints and concerns, it is highly possible that many kitchenette buildings underwent periods of severely limited bathroom access due to this set of compounding issues of overuse, dysfunction, and disrepair.

In a photo taken on the West Side, the hypervigilance and improvisation needed for kitchenette living with children is depicted. In the photo a toddler is captured (likely while walking) as they balance themselves with the stable object of the wooden chair seat. In the foreground of the image looms a wood-burning stove with cooktop; one of the surfaces is occupied by a large kettle likely used to produce steam to heat the room. Behind the chair in the top portion of the image, a window pane partially stuffed with a coat and a sweater signals the disrepair of the apartment and the increased need for heat to counteract a draft. An adult figure, with only skirt and hands shown, is partially pictured; it is possible that she did not want to be included in the photograph, as a number of Mead's photo inscriptions denote such requests/declinations from adult residents. The woman, with hands folded over each other and body turned toward the child, has positioned herself watchfully over the small, exploring subject.

The child, partially occluded and shadowed by the stove pipe, is separated from a potential fall from the window or cut from the broken glass by the strategically-placed chair. Given the child's diminutive height, the wood stove also poses a risk, which is visually enhanced by the shadow, as the toddler might be wont to touch or fall against the heating device. The woman stands nearest the stove, perhaps because its threat is fully exposed (unlike the window), but is only a step or two away from intervening in any mishap with the broken window. Close attention to small children would be imperative in spaces configured such as these. Conversely, a form of domestic spatial pedagogy may have also been integral to child-rearing in kitchenette residences, wherein children were taught to be hyper-aware of, and careful around, the various forms of risk commonplace in kitchenette buildings.

³² In regard to cleaning shared kitchenette facilities, long-time kitchenette resident Hurley Green, Sr. disclosed, "There were six rooms and six families on each floor, which meant going to the bathroom required the utmost cooperation. Ditto for dishwashing. As the only child on the floor, I was responsible for keeping the bathtub, even when I didn't use it." Hurley Green, Sr., "Shifting Scenes; Changes in Times," *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, January 30, 2003, ProQuest.

³³ I am grateful to Laurie Wilkie for suggesting the likelihood of bathrooms falling into disuse. See also Abbott, *Tenements of Chicago*, 208-09, 334-35.

Kitchenette Traces

In addition to the coordination required by the modern kitchenette building, the structure also prompted behaviors from its residents that remained with them even after they were able to secure other types of home space. Some of the labored kitchenette orientations lingered beyond kitchenette inhabitation. Gaston Bachelard posits that the spatial design of a home is embedded in performance practice—he presents the body as a repository of, and conditioned by, particularized spatial knowledge of the home. He asserts, “[T]he house we were born in is physically inscribed in us. It is a group of organic habits.”³⁴ While Bachelard’s generalizing assumptions of the design of childhood homes assumes a European middle-class subjectivity, aspects of his interpretations of domestic inscription prove useful beyond his limited perspective. He continues later that an individual’s domestic behaviors stem from those experienced within, and conditioned or delimited by, one’s childhood home space. Moreover, as people reside in other home spaces, they carry with them—and even reproduce—the previous space, and their performances within that space.³⁵ In this way, bodies become archives or repositories of spaces as well as possess repertoires of domestic practice. I shift here from the photograph to a literary example because it offers a detailed description of bodily movements in response to kitchenette space and infrastructure. Placed within the context of the photographs, the actions are imaginable in a more vivid manner.

Frank London Brown’s 1959 novel *Trumbull Park* centers upon the mob violence and hostility black families (including the author’s) endured in the struggle to integrate the government-funded Trumbull Park housing project in Chicago. While the titular public housing project is the primary setting of the novel’s action, the Gardener Building—the kitchenette dwelling from which the protagonist’s family moves—is a linchpin in Brown’s narrative.

At one meeting of the collective formed by the bomb-ravaged black families of the Trumbull Park Homes, a character’s odd behavior draws the attention of his peers. Upon departure from the Martin house, Terry’s coat is retrieved from the closet. When he is given the coat, he immediately shakes it and pats down the body and both sleeves. Others in the group pause, peering questioningly—and suspiciously—at him, wondering if he believes someone may have stolen something from his possessions. He looks up at the questioning eyes and begins to explain:

You know, my wife and I went through college together. . . . Slept in dingy one- and two-room kitchenettes for almost three years. Once Nadine’s economics professor invited us to visit his home. We did, and when we were preparing to leave, the old guy, trying to be polite, held Nadine’s coat so that she could slip her arms into it. And, while I watched, I swear, not one but two big family-sized roaches crawled right out from under the collar of Nadine’s coat and galloped right across the back.³⁶

³⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classical Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁶ Frank London Brown, *Trumbull Park* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005), 177-78.

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Noting that it was unclear if the professor noticed the scurrying creatures because he engaged them in conversation for fifteen minutes more, Terry claimed, “We thought we’d die. We both knew that those roaches had come from our dump of a room.”³⁷ Pest and vermin infestations were a consistent feature of kitchenette living, as was the inadequate attention given by landlords to address the issue.³⁸ Neglect of pest control highlights two aspects of failed infrastructure: the insufficient garbage collection as well as the inadequacy of provision for safe and sanitary home space (i.e., proper extermination).³⁹ The traveling evidence of their kitchenette residence breeds personal embarrassment and mortification on the part of the couple. The professor’s home is clearly spatially and socioeconomically removed from Terry and Nadine’s “dingy” kitchenette apartment, as the existence of the roaches in that space is framed as foreign and out of place. Further, the figure of the roach marks the young black couple as outside of the realm of classed cleanliness of the professor’s home, associating them, to their horror, with an unclean home and potentially marking them “unclean” house guests. The roaches are rendered monstrosities, as they are described as “two big family-sized roaches” that “gallop,” with clear ability to trample underfoot any semblance of refinement—or even clean ordinariness—the couple may have desired to convey. The larger-than-life description of the vermin signal the immensity of feeling provoked by their unexpected, inconvenient, and disorienting appearance. When the couple departed the professor’s home, they “rushed to a street light” to inspect the garment “inside and out” for the seen—or any additional unseen—roaches but ultimately “couldn’t find a trace of them” after a fifteen-minute thorough investigation. “We knew we’d left them behind,” Terry concludes.⁴⁰

While at the time of the recounting Terry and Nadine are Trumbull Park housing project residents—they inhabit new construction that is seen as a welcomed escape from whatever prior dwelling they resided in—the practices that arose from their kitchenette dwelling remain embedded in their routine practices. Terry states that although his wife spent the night crying about the professional nightmare,

We laugh about it now. Yet and still, both of us shake and brush our coats whenever we put them on. At first we did it because we wanted to make sure that the ‘professor incident,’ as we called it, would never happen again. But as the years have gone by, it has become a fetish, a ritual, a compulsion. Now we’re trying to break the habit, and we can’t . . .⁴¹

³⁷ Ibid., 178.

³⁸ Mice, rats, and roaches appear across kitchenette documents (creative and archival). In her autobiography, Gwendolyn Brooks described her family’s perpetual confrontation with mice in one kitchenette apartment at 623 E. 63rd Street, noting that they marched from their radiator “in droves.” Gwendolyn Brooks, *Report from Part One* (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1972), 59. Also, housing court violations often included vermin infestation, as in Housing Code Violations, 1950-70, boxes 296-300, MPC Records, Series II: Housing 1919-1998, Library of Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago. See also Wright, *Native Son*; Brooks, *Maud Martha*; Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

³⁹ Overcrowded residences produced more refuse and also the city neglected whole streets until the alleys became impassable due to the garbage accumulation. Landlords did not see to it that the city serviced their properties.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Trumbull Park*, 178.

⁴¹ Ibid.

The fear of being embarrassed again in a similar fashion breeds in the couple the compulsive behavior of giving their coats—and presumably other items that could also transport vermin—an investigatory once-over. What was once a conscious preventative mechanism has evolved into subconscious habit so strange as to invite the stares of others. That Terry also describes the behavior as “a fetish” and “a ritual” illuminates the couple’s investment in the embodied routine, even as it is compulsive and happens with a large degree of automation. Richard Schechner has defined ritual as “collective memories encoded into actions” that “don’t so much express ideas as embody them.”⁴² The ritual of the coat pat-down in spaces other-than-home make it an enacted practice, one happening beyond the couple’s private dwelling in the midst of a public. The embodied ideas the couple enact are those of distancing themselves from public judgment bound up in assumptions of black people being unhygienic as well as ideas of constant concern of invasion by creatures.

The experience of the public exposure of a private condition is mediated by Nadine’s coat. The coat, then—with its capacity to expose—is a precarious object and becomes the symbol of differential socioeconomic status and residential geography between the couple and the professor. Terry’s narrative does not focus on the state or condition of the coat, not on its age or material composition, but rather on the emotions and enactments surrounding the whole ordeal. In other words, it is not a fraying collar, discolored print, or thinned material that are physical markers of the couple’s different class status. The coat itself is not described. Rather, the roaches from the kitchenette make both the coat and the ritual into objects of discussion. The performative fixation conveys the couple’s vulnerability to home infestation and undesired material violation during and after their years of kitchenette living. The two are compelled to confirm and reconfirm their bodily integrity through routinized acts of sartorial inspection. Rather than inspect their garments upon leaving their residence, the two do so upon leaving spaces in which they are only visitors, spaces that are unlikely to be private. This public-facing anxiety over years has sublimated into routinized self-scrutiny, enacted out of a normalized fear of being perceived as unhygienic and/or desperately poor, both common associations with urban blackness during the migration era.

Terry and Nadine are so vexed—emotionally and psychologically taxed, if you will—that they institute an added measure of physical and social security. The additional time expended, if only seconds, on each coat-inspecting occasion would no doubt amount to several hours in a year’s time, taking into account traversals to and from the workplace, social outings, house calls, and Chicago’s four-to-five-month winters (to say nothing of the three to four other spring and autumn months requiring outerwear).⁴³ Despite their residential distance from their previous home space, the couple continues to pay for their former kitchenette inhabitation. Terry and Nadine, although fictionalized, represent any number of kitchenette dwellers whose residence in

⁴² Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 52, 57.

⁴³ Terry and Nadine’s coat-patting is juxtaposed to the incessant pacing and mumbling of Arthur Davis, a member of the very first family to integrate the Trumbull Park Homes; these behaviors stand in for a fuller characterization, as they appear several times in the narrator’s description of him. While Arthur’s actions grow out of living in the terror-ridden Trumbull Park Homes as the first black family to integrate those projects, and eventually become compulsive as he responds to bombs exploding by the minute and bricks being thrown in all of his front windows, Terry’s actions come from his prior residence of the kitchenette apartment. Black home spaces in the novel are portrayed as bringing about abnormal behaviors that become normalized through commonality and duration of habitation/existence.

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the buildings became inscribed in their bodily practice and/or psychosocial memories. As one black Chicagoan put it, “When all was said and done, none of us forgot our kitchenette lives.”⁴⁴

Conclusion

The kitchenette building—a built environment characterized by racial segregation, geographical constriction, economic exploitation, and undermaintenance—required residents to have orientations in their domestic space that involved more labor than residents in other types of dwellings would have to expend. Moreover, the accumulation of these time- and energy-expensive banalities amounted to an overall different mode of being in the home. From engaging photographers wanting to observe their other(ed) way of living to staying connected to loved ones, from accessing bathroom facilities to assuring physical security, kitchenette dwellers gave more attention, energy, and time to everyday tasks comprising home life because of their home design. Documentary photography and literature provide access to the repertoires necessitated by kitchenette infrastructure; when mined for bodily practice, they offer a powerful glimpse into historical corporeal practice shaped by race and space.

⁴⁴ Hurley Green, Sr., “Shifting Scenes; Starting with Kitchenettes...,” *Chicago Independent Bulletin*, January 22, 2004, ProQuest.

VISUAL INTERLUDE

Photographers captured Chicago's kitchenette buildings toward myriad ends. All contributed to a visual archive of this distinctive domestic space, allowing access to places that have since been razed or reconverted. What follows is a visual sampling of the kitchenette's documentation and construction with original inscriptions included.

VISUAL INTERLUDE



Kitchenette Corner

Russell Lee, 1941

Library of Congress

Kitchenettes on S. Parkway, Chicago, Illinois. These are rented to Negroes.



Youth and Wisdom

Edwin Rosskam, 1941

Library of Congress

In the 'kitchenette' area of S. Parkway, a formerly well-to-do avenue.

VISUAL INTERLUDE



Watchman

Edwin Rosskam, 1941

Library of Congress

Apartment building now subdivided into 'kitchenettes', Chicago, Ill.



1-2-3

Edwin Rosskam, 1941

Library of Congress

Children in front of 'kitchenette' apartments, Black Belt, Chicago, Ill.

VISUAL INTERLUDE

*“...the underside is, for some, not an underside at all, but is,
rather, the everyday.”*

—Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods¹

¹ “No One Knows the Mysteries at the Bottom of the Ocean,” *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place* (Boston: South End Press, 2007), 3.



A Pause and a Peek

Mildred Mead, January 29, 1948, 6130 S. Michigan Ave.

Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections, Apf2-09257.
Southside. Basement. Families and children living in cubby-holes improvised from the coal bin and beaverboard partitions.

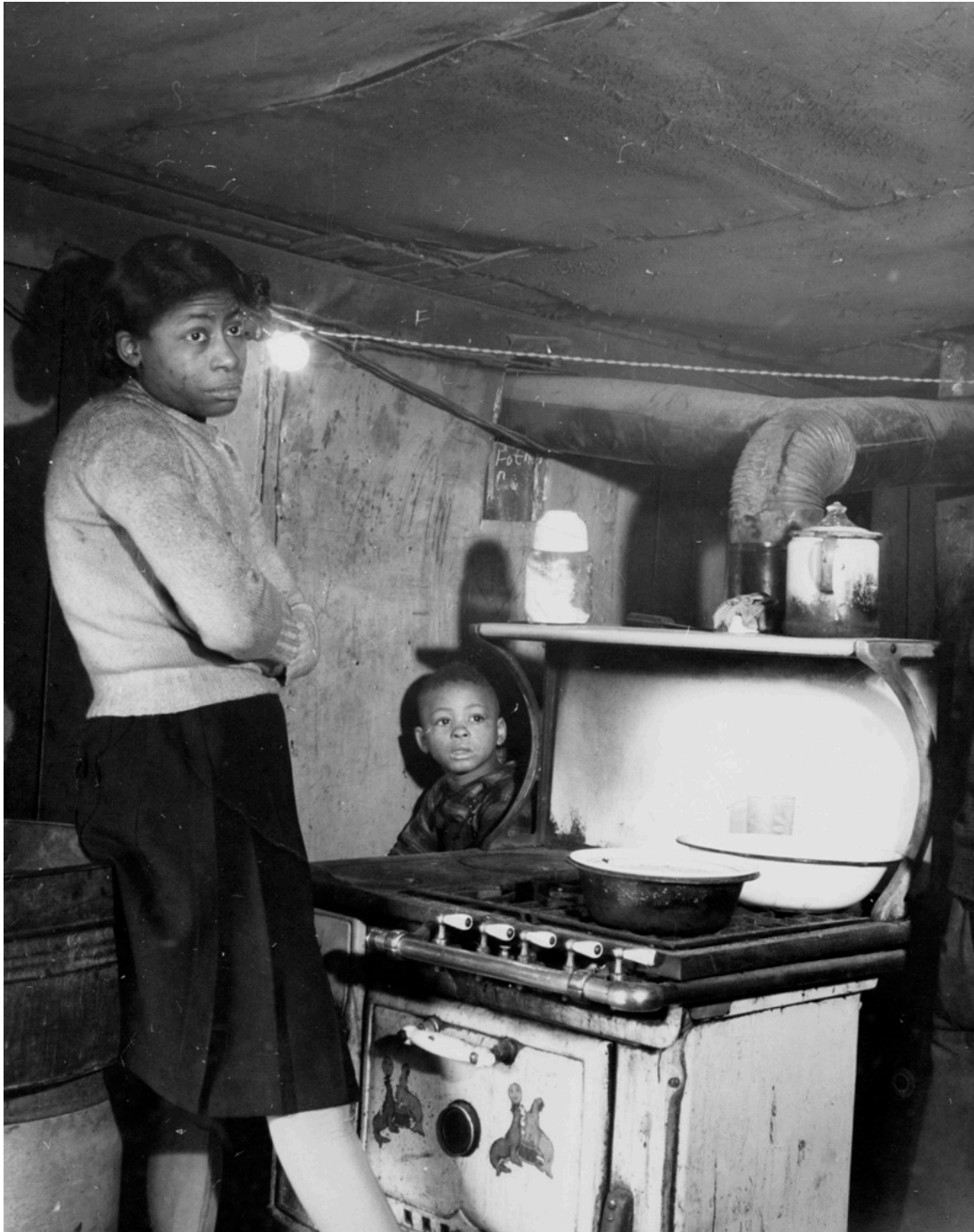
VISUAL INTERLUDE



Teamwork

Mildred Mead, May 1948, 2621 S. Cottage Grove Avenue, apf2-09558, apf2-09559.
Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections.
Apartments over the store. Twenty-four people in four rooms, cleared for Michael Reese Hospital.





Bare Necessities

Mildred Mead, January 29, 1948, 3106 S. Wentworth Ave.

Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections, Apf2-09258.

Basement living, an old stove and a low ceiling that looks like cardboard. The stove in the community kitchen of a basement which provided cooking and heating facilities for five to seven families. The rest of the basement is partitioned off into small cubicles with beaverboard.



Black Boys

Mildred Mead, January 27, 1950, 4851 S. Dearborn St.
Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections, Apf2-09259.
Basement dwellers, illegal partitions and fire hazards.



Making Do

Mildred Mead, January 27, 1950, 533 E. 36th Place.

Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections, Apf2-09589.

Little girl demonstrates getting water by breaking the ice in a tub. No heat in this kitchen, only when cook stove in use. Water was carried in. Note the cardboard walls, block under the table legs.

VISUAL INTERLUDE



All Powerful

Mildred Mead, December 7, 1948, 215-219 E. 31st St.

Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections. Apf2-09359.

Wiring trap. All electricity for one floor taken from this hall socket. Each of these seven leads serves 2 or 3 apartments.



Handyman and Helper

Mildred Mead, December 7, 1948, 215-219 E. 31st St.

Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections. Apf2-09364.

This wiring comes up the outside wall from the fifth floor and into a window.

VISUAL INTERLUDE



If You Can't Stand the Heat

Mildred Mead, 1950, Chicago, IL.

Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections. Apf2-09275.

Stove heat: the pipe had burned out the ceiling above it.



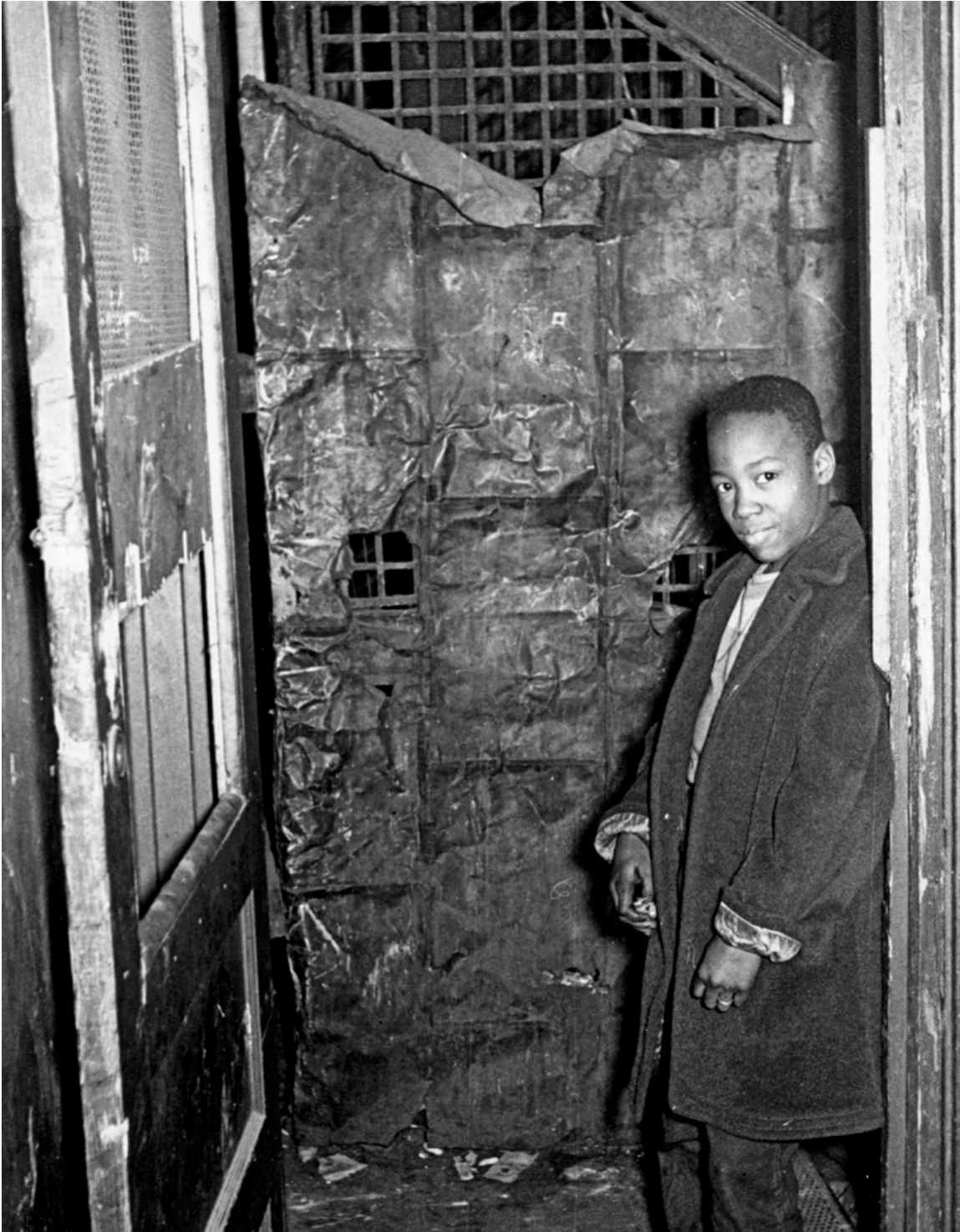
Laughing in the Face of Danger

Mildred Mead, March 10, 1950, 210 E. 50th St.

Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections. Apf2-09269.

Fire escape door padlocked.

VISUAL INTERLUDE



Pride

Mildred Mead, December 7, 1948, 215-219 E. 31st St.

Courtesy of University of Chicago Special Research Collections. Apf2-09370.
On the way upstairs, seven floors, impoverished coverings and boarded up doors.

CHAPTER 3

**“The Involuntary Plan”: Navigating Intimacies and Failures in the
Kitchenette**

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
Grayed in, and gray. “Dream” makes a giddy sound, not strong
Like “rent,” “feeding a wife,” “satisfying a man.”

But could a dream send up through onion fumes
Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
And yesterday’s garbage ripening in the hall,
Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms

Even if we were willing to let it in,
Had time to warm it, keep it very clean,
Anticipate a message, let it begin?

We wonder. But not well! not for a minute!
Since Number Five is out of the bathroom now,
We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.¹

In her poem “kitchenette building,” Chicago poet Gwendolyn Brooks depicts the tensions between the affective and material conditions of a typical kitchenette building. The collective “We” that narrates the poem with reserved optimism represents residents of the kitchenette building who contend with material demands at the expense of some, or many, of their dreams. The “involuntary plan” of kitchenette living, due to the circumscribed residential and economic opportunities outlined in Chapter 1, shadowed many kitchenette residents’ domestic realities. These residents included newly and not-so-newly migrated southerners, aspiring home- and business owners, multi-generational families, single-parent and nuclear families—many of them black, all of them seeking to make better lives for themselves in the burgeoning Black Metropolis. Few planned on living, and staying, in habitations as squalid and overpriced as the kitchenettes they were relegated to. Nonetheless, the daily grind to meet immediate concerns—paying rent, putting food on the table, meeting sexual needs, and securing bathroom time—crowded out time and space for serious consideration of dreams.² Brooks renders a snapshot of the material and affective accoutrements of quotidian kitchenette living.

In this chapter I analyze how subjects contended with “the involuntary plan” of kitchenette dwelling. Through close reading of archival, literary, and visual cultural texts, I argue that intimacy and failure are primary nodes of black domestic experience in the urban context,

¹ Gwendolyn Brooks, “kitchenette building,” *A Street in Bronzeville* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), 2.

² A more extensive analysis of Brooks’ poem appears in Chapter 4.

and that negotiations of these nodes elucidate the constrictions on family, aspirations, and sociality built into the kitchenette environment. I offer over-intimacy as a unique set of spatial, domestic, and interpersonal relations engendered by the space of the kitchenette apartment. The latent possibility of the over-intimate domestic space shapes the creative imaginings of Gwendolyn Brooks, Richard Wright, and Eldzier Cortor.

Domestic Failure and The Involuntary Plan in *Maud Martha*

Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* is a sustained engagement with the object of her poem. The novel, published in 1953, paints an expanded picture of the “involuntary plan” of kitchenette living, with its title character, Maud Martha, as its main subject. A semi-autobiographical bildungsroman, the narrative traces the protagonist's development across a span of predominantly unspectacular events: anticipating a male visitor, moving into a kitchenette, deciding to not kill a rat, preparing for Christmas Day. The quotidian, rather than the fantastic, is the context through which readers encounter and appreciate Maud Martha. Brooks' work features the kitchenette building and its characteristics as prominently as it does some of the novel's characters, and the text presents the failings and disappointments of kitchenette living as representative of everyday life for many black people in similar domestic situations on Chicago's South Side.

In the novel, when the protagonist moves into a two-room kitchenette apartment, the narrator describes the place as plainly furnished with only one of three stove burners working. After noting that Maud Martha and her new husband Paul would have to share a bathroom with four other families, the description goes on: “The housekeeper at the kitchenette place did not require a reference...The *Defender* would never come here with cameras.”³ The juxtaposition of the bathroom description and the lack of references needed to live there leads the reader to assume that Maud Martha and Paul's neighbors may not have desirable qualities. As references would vet the inhabitants of the kitchenette building to ensure residents would take care of the space and be respectful of their neighbors, the noted lack of required references highlights that one would have to make do with any type of neighbor in the kitchenette building. What is more, kitchenette dwellers also would have to share a most intimate space—the bathroom—with whomever lived on their floor. Noting that the *Chicago Defender* would never visually capture a kitchenette dwelling like theirs out of admiration, apprehension, or curiosity emphasizes the plainness, or even squalor, of the building.⁴

In the kitchenette building, the protagonist finds herself unable to be both homemaker and tenant effectively. Despite the lack of space, color, and glamor in their kitchenette apartment, Maud Martha “was, at first, enthusiastic. She made plans for this home.”⁵ Maud Martha hopes to decorate the apartment with green curtains, Venetian blinds, and her own taste in furniture but is told by the landlord that she must make do with the existing furnishings instead. Her desires to make a home out of the apartment are curbed by the property owner's dictates. It is at this point that Maud Martha loses enthusiasm and begins to be enveloped by the

³ Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1992), 61.

⁴ The kitchenette was such a commonplace fixture in black life in Chicago by this time that it did not garner journalistic interest unless a murder, fire, or other tragedy occurred.

⁵ Brooks, *Maud Martha*, 61.

“grayness” of the whole kitchenette building. As the possibilities to transform the space are diminished, so are Maud Martha’s hopes to achieve a likeness of a home.

The pedestrian nature of Maud Martha’s kitchenette building renders it—and by extension, the inhabitants’ experiences within it—unspectacular in every way. The banality of Maud Martha’s kitchenette life becomes more evident later in the chapter, as she encapsulates the sensorial encounter of the kitchenette building as “gray.” Not only was “the color . . . gray,” but also “the smell and sound had taken on a suggestion of the properties of color, and impressed one as gray, too.”⁶ While the color gray suggests dullness or things unspectacular in nature, the various iterations of kitchenette life described in the text point to some rather animated occurrences: “the sobbings, the frustrations, the small hates, the large and ugly hates, the little pushing-through love, the boredom . . . came to her from behind those walls (some of them beaverboard) via speech and scream and sigh.”⁷ Moreover, the smells of bodies—sweating, bathing, excreting, and making love—overwhelmed the hall and stairwell, and all of these “were gray.” The pervasiveness of these intimate aspects of tenants’ lives—the utter inability to escape them—blurs them all together, inures one to them, and reduces these elements to the banalities of kitchenette dwelling. The narrator fittingly reiterates, “There was a whole lot of grayness here.”⁸ The staleness is palpable through multiple sensory registers, suggesting that the circumstances and conditions of black life in this building is simultaneously commonplace, sapped of life, and somber. That inhabitants are confronted with not only the sounds but also the smells of their neighbors’ restroom use and lovemaking magnifies the inescapable blur of over-intimacy intrinsic to everyday life in these buildings.

When her mother, Belva Brown, visits her, she mentions that Maud Martha’s sister, Helen “doesn’t like to come here much,” citing that “[s]he says it sort of depresses her. She wants you [Maud Martha] to have more things.”⁹ When Maud Martha responds in defense, naming her prized possessions, among which is “a clean home of [her] own,” her mother matter-of-factly remarks:

‘A kitchenette of your own,’ . . . ‘without even a private bathroom. I think Paul could do a little better, Maud Martha.’
 ‘It’s hard to find even a kitchenette.’
 ‘Nothing beats a trial but a failure. . . .’¹⁰

The mother’s comments highlight the inability, in her eyes, for a kitchenette to be an acceptable home. Indeed, Belva Brown’s quip that “Nothing beats a trial but a failure” underscores the kitchenette as failure in the effort to secure a home. It is not clear whether her (de)valuation of the place is due to it being anything less than a single family dwelling or if it is the lack of particular aspects, such as the private bathroom she mentions. It is abundantly clear, however, that Helen devalues Maud Martha’s home in large part due to the lack of “things.” Feminist scholar Iris Young attends to the manifestation of identity in domestic space and objects. She

⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁷ Ibid., 64.

⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹⁰ Ibid., 167-68.

“THE INVOLUNTARY PLAN”: NAVIGATING INTIMACIES AND FAILURES

writes, “There are two levels in the process of the materialization of identity in the home: (1) my belongings are arranged in space as an extension of my bodily habits and as support for my routines, and (2) many of the things in the home, as well as the space itself, carry sedimented personal meaning as retainers of personal narrative.”¹¹ In other words, one’s quotidian activities and performances, as well as personal history and values, are embedded in the home space and in one’s domestic objects. Perhaps Helen’s condemnation of Maud Martha’s apartment stems from the kitchenette’s inability to reflect its inhabitants’ identity, and, in so doing, it falls short of being a proper home.

As Maud Martha continues conversing with her mother, she says, “It hasn’t been a hard cold world for you, Mama. You’ve been very lucky. You’ve had a faithful, homecoming husband, who bought you a house, not the best house in town, but a house. You have, most of the time, plenty to eat, you have enough clothes so that you can always be clean. And you’re strong as a horse.”¹² The centrality of having a house as a decent home is key to the Brown women’s understanding of having a good life, or at least one worth mentioning and engaging in repeatedly. Also, the importance of a “homecoming husband” signals another key to home—it is a place that a hard-working man, or a man of means, secures for his wife and one to which he wants to return on a daily basis. However, despite the fact that Paul secured and returns to his and Maud Martha’s domicile, Maud Martha’s kitchenette does not fit into the Brown women’s notions of home or of decency. The kitchenette apartment always falls short and is evidence for some of the inhabitants’ shortcomings, as well. For the Brown women, the devalued kitchenette reflects on Paul and Maud Martha, devaluing them by association. That they would choose to not just live, but settle and start a life, there with their newly formed family signals a flaw in the couple’s judgment, value system, and/or work ethic. Their indecent home suggests their own indecency, which is why Helen must visit infrequently. Overall, the substandard construction of the domicile—for it falls below standards of ideal residential space (in the U.S. context during this period)—extends to its inhabitants. Those who occupy substandard housing are naturalized as deserving of, or requiring nothing more than, such a domestic space.

Intimacy

Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, contends that “both room and house are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy.”¹³ Thus, conducting a spatial analysis of domestic environments in literature is worthwhile as it yields insight into intimacy perceived and produced by the authors. Analysis of intimacy offers the opportunity to engage with domestic space, and the inverse is also true: the domestic sphere lends itself to an analysis of the intimacy it contains, produces, and prevents.

Intimacy conjures up a wide range of associations. It is exposure to one’s most vulnerable aspects (be they emotional, physical, or something else). It is close contact. It is intentionally

¹¹ Iris Young, “House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme,” in *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 149-50.

¹² *Ibid.*, 168-69.

¹³ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classical Look at How We Experience Intimate Places* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 38.

cultivated over time but can also occur in a moment. It is shared among some family members, romantic or sexual partners, and friends. It is something that can be achieved as well as lost; it can be stimulated, sustained, or stifled. Intimacy also involves, in part, repetition. The repetition of an act, an encounter, a feeling produces a familiarity with the aspects of said act, encounter, or feeling, and also produces a familiarity with one's self in response to the thing.¹⁴ Thus, intimacy, is not only proximity, interiority, or affective ties—it is also an embodied knowledge-base. Intimacy is intertwined with privacy, although everything that is intimate is not private and everything that is private is not intimate.

Bachelard does not provide a straightforward definition of intimacy, but rather he refers at various points in the text to interiority, the soul, and the inside space of the home as interchangeable with, or at least strongly correlated to, intimacy. Bachelard's version of intimacy is idealistic in that it exists only with positive resonance. He notes, "There does not exist a real intimacy that is repellant. All the spaces of intimacy are designated by an attraction. Their being is well-being."¹⁵ If the home is, as he asserts, the originary producer and container of intimacy, both home and intimacy must always already be laden with "well-being." Bachelard's intimacy, then, must be regarded as an ideal rather than a fact or common reality. His idealism is characteristic of common associations with intimacy; however, while these ideals are present in other scholars' definitions and analyses, they do not dominate them.

Intimacy, according to a number of scholars, is productive, if not reproductive.¹⁶ Lauren Berlant notes its generative quality, asserting that "intimacy builds worlds" as it has the ability to "creat[e] spaces" and also to "usur[p] places meant for other kinds of relation" in the public sphere.¹⁷ For Berlant, intimacy points to "something shared" and a vested hope for a positive outcome of that shared something.¹⁸ However, intimacy is also tenuous: "Its potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity," placing the very elements that comprise its form in "a state of constant if latent vulnerability."¹⁹ Thus, in Berlant's formulation, intimacy is comprised of reaching for the "something shared" as well as a confrontation with the ruptures and/or failures in that communality. Moreover, failure is part and parcel to intimacy's very definition. Candice Jenkins notes, "[N]o matter how hard one tries, intimacy simply cannot be made 'safe.'"²⁰ The risk of intimacy, then, is that it always looms in the shadow of failure, whether that failure be small and gradual or grand and abrupt. Intimacy can neither guarantee permanence nor guarantee against volatility and rupture.

Berlant emphasizes the expectations built into intimacy when she writes, "'I didn't think it would turn out this way' is the secret epitaph of intimacy,"²¹ The death of intimacy is precipitated—or at very least, marked—by expectations and their failures—expectations, Berlant

¹⁴ Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Winter 1998): 287.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶ Lauren Berlant, ed., *Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Candice Jenkins, *Private Lives, Proper Relations: Regulating Black Intimacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," 282.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 282.

²⁰ Jenkins, *Private Lives, Proper Relations*, 20.

²¹ Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," 281.

offers, of “a life” in a utopian sense, full of stability, consistency, and positivity. When intimacy fails, it is often not intelligible, because “intimacy reveals itself to be a relation associated with tacit fantasies, tacit rules, and tacit obligations to remain unproblematic.”²² In other words, the ideal of intimacy is inconsistent with problems or issues. This romantic notion, Berlant argues, is built upon convention and is often imagined through dominant narratives and institutions of intimacy: the reproductive heterosexual couple, marriage, the nuclear family, the nation.²³ Aspiration towards an ideal with such limited form necessarily encounters failure: utopian intimacy manifests through, and is defined against, forms that cannot—and never intended to—encapsulate and accommodate the multiplicities of identities, desires, and encounters found in society.

Failure: Substandard Dwellings and Impropriety

The kitchenette building was never supposed to be a model of success—not of successful architecture or design, not of ideal landlord-tenant relations, not of a promising quality of life. Failure was part and parcel to kitchenette buildings. Kitchenettes in the Black Belt were at best functional responses to the housing crisis and, at worst, economic exploitations of the disadvantaged migrants who had scant choice of living elsewhere. The kitchenette localized the disjunctures between the promises (for increased opportunity) and the realities of the Great Migration. They were spaces where black people were confronted with the harsh realities of the urban environment, even as they strove to find their way amid them.²⁴ The effective performance of some roles in the domestic space of the kitchenette often precluded the effective performance of others, meaning that people failed early and often as kitchenette dwellers: children left unattended got into mischief, youth faced potential conscription into sexual transgression and predation, parents and partners struggled to provide for both the material and emotional needs of their families. Yet the failures in the kitchenette should not be accorded to those individuals inhabiting the dwellings but rather to the dwellings themselves, as failure was quite literally built into the environment through substandard construction, neglect of maintenance, and insufficient space. Moreover, the environment was created and circumscribed by, and imbued with, ideological, geographical, and socio-political anti-blackness.

Kitchenette dwellings were at the heart of discussions on inadequate housing. The concern around “slums” was so targeted that Chicago’s housing code grew out of an aim to prevent the existence and spread of such housing. What became the city-wide code for housing standards was at points referred to as the “anti-slum housing code” and the “powerful weapon in [the] war against blight” and “fight against the slums.”²⁵ In a pamphlet aimed to educate the

²² Ibid., 287.

²³ See also Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Winter 1998). Roderick Ferguson also engages these concepts, unpacking the sexual, class, and race dimensions of heteronormative intimacy. See *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

²⁴ Farah Jasmine Griffin highlights these spatial negotiations as defining features of migration narratives. “Who Set You Flowin’?”: *The African American Migration Narrative*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4-10.

²⁵ “Approve the Housing Code!,” *Chicago Daily Sun-Times*, 14 June 1956, Box 287, folder 3073, MHPC Records, University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL; Jay McMullen, “Code Adopted by Council: City Forges Powerful Weapon in Its War

public about the need for a consolidated housing code, the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council (MHPC) ominously warns, “*Every day, new slums are made. More are made every day than fall down. To eliminate the blight of slums, Chicago must prevent decent housing from becoming future slums. A sound housing code vigorously enforced, will help cure the disease which makes slums.*”²⁶ The Chicago Housing Authority’s (CHA) code for housing standards and the MHPC’s derivative document “Unfit Housing” detail the material and moral parameters for sufficient or decent housing in mid-century Chicago. While the CHA guidelines present descriptions of housing standards as well as how an inspector should evaluate material conditions of the domicile (whether to assess issues as “major” or “minor”), the MHPC code succinctly enumerates qualities of two categories of poor housing: “intolerable” and “substandard.”²⁷ The MHPC further distinguishes between issues pertaining to “Structure and Environment” and “Maintenance and Occupancy,” with the former’s intolerable category qualified by “Unfit for Human Occupancy” and the latter’s by “Hazardous for Health, Morals, or Well-Being.” Among the list of intolerables are basement apartments, a lack of running water, and an excess of two persons over eight years old in one sleeping room.²⁸ Included in the list of substandard aspects are a lack of “private bathing facilities,” rat infestation, and inadequate mechanisms for garbage disposal.²⁹ Taken together, the CHA and MHPC codes for housing standards are a late-1940s guidebook in all that plagued black residential areas, for which “slums,” “blighted areas,” and “ghettos” became shorthand.³⁰ To establish a baseline standard for acceptable living conditions, the organizations necessarily highlighted the worst living conditions among the city’s residents along “the ten worst square miles” of Chicago.³¹ As Chapter 1 argued, it was by design, rather than by sheer coincidence, that the “blighted” sections of the city with a preponderance of intolerable and substandard residences were overwhelmingly populated by black inhabitants. While not the sole residence type captured on these lists of deficiencies, kitchenette apartments and buildings would have anchored the lists.³²

Against Blight,” *Chicago Daily News*, 25 June 1956, MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073, University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

²⁶ Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council, *Needed! A Housing Code for Chicago: A Yardstick for Better Living*, (Chicago, 1955), MHPC Records, Box 296, folder 3170, University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

²⁷ “Appendix III: Definition of Minimum Housing Standards and Outline for Evaluation of Standard Factors in Housing” and “Unfit Housing: Tentative Outline for the Review of Housing Survey Data from Urban Slums or Blighted Areas,” circa 1948, MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073, University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

²⁸ “Unfit Housing: Tentative Outline for the Review of Housing Survey Data from Urban Slums or Blighted Areas,” MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073, p.1, University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁰ Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Amanda Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago’s West Side*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.

³¹ “A Report to the City Council Joint Subcommittee on Enforcement of Housing Standards,” MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073, p. 3, University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

³² Rooming houses were proscribed a slightly different code than tenements and other dwellings, specifically relating to numbers of persons per bathroom and minimum room size. “Proposed Housing Standards-Final Draft,” 6 October 1954, MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3074, pp. 10-11.

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A Tentative Outline for the Review of Housing Survey Data from Urban Slums or Blighted Areas ¹	
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Schedule One</u>¹ STRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT</p> <p>A. <u>Intolerable: Unfit for Human Occupancy</u></p> <p><u>Structures:</u></p> <p>1) in danger of collapse;² 1</p> <p>2) Having three or more occupied stories above ground if of combustible floor construction and lacking adequate fire-escapes or fire-resistive stair-walls.</p> <p><u>Dwelling units:</u></p> <p>1) without private indoor flush toilets, or with flush toilets subject to freezing;</p> <p>2) without inside running water;</p> <p>3) without windows opening from each habitable room to freely-circulating outside air; * 2</p> <p>4) without facilities for heating each habitable room;</p> <p>5) located in basement or substantially below grade. *3</p> <p><u>B. Substandard</u></p> <p><u>Structures:</u></p> <p>1) with inside or dark public halls requiring artificial light (see also Schedule Two, B, Structures, 1); (cont. on p.2)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Schedule Two</u>² MAINTENANCE AND OCCUPANCY</p> <p>A. <u>Intolerable: Hazardous to Health, Morale, or Well-being</u></p> <p><u>Structures:</u></p> <p>(1) with walls, roofs, or windows not tight to rain and wind.* 6</p> <p><u>Dwelling units:</u></p> <p>1) of which the rental or ownership cost (including heat and water) consumes more than 25% of the occupants' income;* 7</p> <p>2) containing two or more families per unit of sanitary or kitchen equipment;</p> <p>3) with more than two adults (or child equivalent) per sleeping room; * 8</p> <p>4) with less than 50 sq.ft. of bedroom floor space per bedroom occupant;</p> <p>5) with effective living-space for daytime uses (in kitchen or living-room not encumbered with beds) less than 100 sq.ft.;*9</p> <p>6) with plumbing of water-closet chronically out of repair or water pressure too low for scouring action in flushing.</p> <p><u>B. Substandard</u></p> <p><u>Sites:</u></p> <p>1) without grading and drainage (cont. on p.2)</p>
<p><small>1. Substandard structures are characterized by certain characteristics, generally not remediable in</small></p>	

FIGURE 3.1 “Unfit Housing: Tentative Outline for the Review of Housing Survey Data from Urban Slums or Blighted Areas,” MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073, p.1, University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

In these housing code documents, questions of proximity and adequate space for people and activities are noteworthy. Under the dwelling units subsection of the “Intolerable: Hazardous for Health, Morals, or Well-Being” section in the MHPC document, four of the six listed qualities concern a lack of adequate space and implied privacy. They include:

- “containing two or more families per unit of sanitary or kitchen equipment;
- with more than two adults (or child equivalent) per sleeping rooms;
- with less than 50 sq.ft of bedroom floor space per bedroom occupant;
- with effective living space for daytime uses (in kitchen or living-room not unencumbered with beds) less than 100 sq.ft.”³³

Further, the CHA code notes, “There should be a kitchen with sink and sufficient room for cooking facilities separate from the sleeping quarters,” making clear the need for spatial divisions of domestic appliances and activities, and thus of the bodies operating and enacting them.³⁴ The parameters for sufficient or successful domestic space are couched in concerns of sanitation and safety; however, they also belie anxieties around propriety. Having too many people in a sleeping room and having inadequate space per person would—and did—result in very close or crowded sleeping arrangements, with whole families sharing one bed. These arrangements disallowed for separate space for sexually intimate activity and was thought to promote premature sexual activity and provoke sexual violation.³⁵ Additionally, kitchenette buildings themselves were rife with sex workers (or those purported to be), and many families did not have the option to choose their own social proximity to such activities.³⁶ Thus shared cooking and bathroom facilities could also result in a scandalous commingling of residents that would offend the gatekeepers of bourgeois propriety. Separating cooking facilities by family as well as from other private domestic activities (such as sleeping) enabled a shoring-up of “proper” spatial relations that could promote “health, morals, and well-being.” These models of successful domestic space included concerns of propriety in order to stabilize proper familial and extra-familial relations, which in turn would help to stabilize the city and nation. The need for separateness was couched in understandings of properly gendered (and aged) activities and spaces which were necessary to maintain heteropatriarchal power dynamics fundamental to pure nationhood.³⁷

The kitchenette building and its apartments constitute domestic failure because there were no properly private spaces in many kitchenette apartments. In fact, the lack of privacy inherent in kitchenette buildings meant that sexual taboos were lived out in the open—or they did not have the convenience to be concealed from neighbors, should subjects have wanted to. Sex workers, as previously mentioned, were one such group, as well as their madams. Pimps

³³ “Unfit Housing,” MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073, p. 1.

³⁴ “Appendix III,” MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073, p. A3-5.

³⁵ Richard Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, (New York: Viking Press, 1941), 108, 110.

³⁶ St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton report an interviewee saying, “I think you’ll find them [“prostitutes”] in every kitchenette apartment. Nearly everybody in here is doing first one thing and then another.” Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 596.

³⁷ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004).

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were more associated with the streets than domestic buildings. Another such group was same-sex-loving people. Dianne Harris has noted that postwar suburban homes offered social protections, in the form of material occlusion and privacy, for sexually queer residents who may have otherwise been excluded from possibilities of recognized civic-subjecthood if their sexual preferences were known to their white neighbors invested in heteronormativity.³⁸ This type of control over the public knowledge of one’s private life was less available—if at all—to kitchenette residents.

Moreover, black domesticity in itself was largely represented as inferior, abnormal, and inadequate, often centered on the failings of black womanhood, as women were ideologically mapped onto all things domestic.³⁹ Roderick Ferguson has noted the ways in which social reformers put intimacy to work as a mechanism of liberal capitalism during the New Deal era of the 1930s and ‘40s. “Responsible intimacy” was touted as a moral necessity that could be taught to those minority groups considered outside of national culture—such as immigrant Europeans and African Americans from the South—so that they could effectively assimilate culturally into heteropatriarchal nationhood. “Responsible intimacy” was sexual and familial organization that reproduced the male-headed heterosexual nuclear family, the stabilizing node of the society’s moral and economic fabric. Many black people concerned with racial uplift through self-representation leaned into notions of responsible intimacy by upholding what Candice Jenkins has deemed the “salvific wish,” rooted in “the desire to rescue the black community from racist accusations of sexual and domestic pathology through the embrace of bourgeois propriety.”⁴⁰ The salvific wish was a “voluntary sacrifice,” usually on the part of black women, of perceived and actual sexuality through the bolstering of and aspiration for “the only legitimately ‘private’ and protected sexual arena”—heterosexual marriage—for the ultimate salvation of the race.⁴¹

³⁸ Harris refers more generally to those with “non-conforming lifestyles,” to include “anyone whose sexual orientation defied accepted heterosexual norms, whose political beliefs and activities were suspect, who practiced a religion outside the accepted Judeo-Christian norm, or whose racial or ethnic identity might be seen as unsuited to the neighborhood.” Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses*, 117.

³⁹ In his 1932 *The Negro Family in Chicago*, E. Franklin Frazier meticulously builds on the work of his mentors Ernest Burgess and Robert Park in the study of communities in various areas of Chicago, using the premise of Negro family disorganization as a departure point. He analyzes aspects of black family composition and adjustment to the city by factors such as rates of illegitimacy, proportion of female-headed households, occurrence of family desertion, and rates of home ownership versus tenancy. Building from the fundamental assertion of problematic Negro life in the city, Frazier does much to further entrench this notion in sociological discourse, as he—a black scholar—corroborates ideas of black pathology espoused by his white predecessors and leaders of the field. While Frazier departs from studies preceding his in holding that the Negro population of Chicago must not be evaluated as “an undifferentiated mass”—and thus challenges the essentialist bent in prior sociological work—his analysis reproduces the framework of “the Negro problem” (117). He offers up some examples of exceptional blackness, highlighting the differential distribution of disorganization across seven distinct zones that he identifies within the South Side; he regards as laudable those groupings of black people who have achieved or striven to adhere to middle-class ideals of nuclear familydom, while he decries other “elements” of the Negro population whose ostensible distance from those ideals is the key problem to be solved. Frazier’s work lays the foundation for Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s notorious report condemning the black family via attacks on black women as heads of households. Frazier, *The Negro Family in Chicago*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932); Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, (Washington, DC: Office of Planning and Policy Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965).

⁴⁰ Candice Jenkins, *Private Lives, Proper Relations: Regulating Black Intimacy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 43.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13-14; 20.

Through this self-restraint and self-denial on the part of women, and policing of women's restraint on the part of men, the black middle-class and aspiring middle-class could present responsible intimacy (i.e., heterosexual, patriarchal, nuclear-family-producing) as the “public” face of black middle-class desire.”⁴²

With bourgeois intimacy as a central arm of capitalist assimilation discourse, reformers espousing liberal ideology, and sociologists seeking to use minority groups as case studies of social disorganization theory, held up the African American non-nuclear family as a case in point for how culture could inhibit assimilation and, thus, also prevent effective coherence of the national logic of the heteropatriarchal family.⁴³ Writ large, successful intimacy—deemed responsible, disciplined, and invested in a very circumscribed understanding of nation-making—was buttressed by the perpetuation of a readily-cited black and migrant failure. With the kitchenette home unable, in some ways, to be a “private” sphere, it fell beyond the pale of conventional domesticity, and thus, could only *improperly* contain and sustain the nuclear family—the paragon of modern, moral civic social organization—much less other subjects.

Over-Intimacy

The kitchenette is a space characterized, and often exceeded, by its intimacies. In their massive study on black life in Chicago, which resulted in the two-volume 1945 publication *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton note an inevitable intimacy in the sharing of space, appliances, and the exchange of goods in kitchenette buildings: “The twenty households, sharing four bathrooms, two common sinks in the hallway, and some dozen stoves and hot-plates between them, were forced into relationships of neighborliness and reciprocity.”⁴⁴ The interactions forced by the design of the building are exemplary of those defined by the MHPC as “intolerable” and “hazardous for health, morals, and well-being.” While Drake and Cayton’s description of this kitchenette building certainly does not communicate sentiments as visceral as does the MHPC’s use of “hazardous,” it certainly does convey the over-intimacy that predominates the kitchenette space.

By over-intimacy, I mean heightened—and in many cases, unwanted—closeness and vulnerability that potentially (or inevitably) degrades one’s sense of security and/or quality of life. It is in part what Richard Wright captures when he describes an “unbearable closeness of association” in the kitchenette.⁴⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary defines the prefix “over-” as “beyond what is normal or proper; too much; excessively; too.”⁴⁶ Thus, to be over-intimate is to exceed the parameters of customary or proper interpersonal interaction. Furthermore, “over-” is also referred to as “‘across a (physical) boundary’; hence also figuratively of transgression.”⁴⁷ This second denotation references movement through space beyond a barrier, especially a barrier that is ostensibly fixed so as to prevent or deter its crossing. Therefore, over-intimacy refers to the exceeding of personal privacy norms especially in regard to physical space and boundaries.

⁴² Ibid., 15.

⁴³ Ferguson, Roderick. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 37-38.

⁴⁴ Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 572.

⁴⁵ Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, 108.

⁴⁶ *OED Online*, s.v. “over, adv. and int.” 11a.

⁴⁷ *OED Online*, s.v. “over-, prefix”, 1L.

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To combine the prefix with Berlant’s definitions, over-intimacy is an excessive sharing of worlds, a familiarity that crosses a boundary or transgresses space.

The excessive and transgressive nature of over-intimacy makes it a risky closeness, a precarious proximity. The nearness to death—by way of electrical fire, diseases like tuberculosis and syphilis, and intentional and accidental injury—is one central feature of the kitchenette building’s over-intimacy. For example, Frank London Brown’s critically under-explored 1959 novel *Trumbull Park* opens with a tragic rupture in the lives of the black residents of the Gardener Building, a kitchenette tenement on Chicago’s South Side. While playing on the fourth-floor back porch, two-year-old Babydoll falls abruptly to her death through a hole in the banister of the “rotten porch.”⁴⁸ Thudding to the ground of the base level, the girl is dead on contact, her head falling back limply as her mother gathers her up in a flood of sorrow. The plot’s inciting action, a jolting and inconsolable tragedy for all who live in the dilapidated Gardener Building, prompts the relocation of Buggy Martin and his family to the newly, but unsuccessfully, integrated Trumbull Park public housing project.⁴⁹ The Martin family experiences the loss of Babydoll viscerally, as she was playing on their porch with their daughter of the same age; all Buggy and Helen can think is that it could have been their Diane instead of their neighbors’ daughter. Moreover, Buggy is haunted with sorrowful images of his mother gradually dying of tuberculosis in her apartment; imprinted memories of her crying and coughing blood into a rag as she lay in bed occur to him at various moments in the narrative as he adjusts to his new neighborhood. Although the Martins are acquainted with Trumbull Park’s notoriety for hostile white mob action against the black families living there, they welcome any chance to leave the building that “kill[ed] more than any man or woman” Buggy knows.⁵⁰ While the protagonist Buggy Martin, his family, and his comrades in Trumbull Park are daily confronted with a barrage of bricks and sulfur candles thrown into windows, and bombs exploding outside—one day he counts 150 bombs going off in an evening before he stops counting—the Martins often console themselves with the fact that their family had no choice but to move from the Gardener Building because of their dangerous closeness to death there. “[W]e got to live out here like business-as-usual,” Helen offers her husband. “We got to take this foolishness of these white folks in stride. Live in spite of them—well, not in spite of them either, but *because of* the Gardener Building.”⁵¹ The limited residential options for black families during that time forced them to choose between one death trap and another.

The death that opens Brown’s novel, while spectacular, would have been unremarkable for a 1950s reading audience familiar with the prevalence of dangerous living conditions in kitchenette buildings. By the mid-1940s, the devastation wreaked by fires, rat infestations, and fast-spreading sickness in Chicago and other urban areas like New York led to a renewed call for

⁴⁸ Frank London Brown, *Trumbull Park* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1959), 1.

⁴⁹ I say “unsuccessfully” because although the black families moved into and dwelled in homes in the housing project, they could not *live* there, peacefully or unmolested, due to white mob violence and intimidation, and police restriction, surveillance, and non-enforcement of the law. The novel is primarily interested in presenting a fictional, but deeply resonant, depiction of the real-life integration of Trumbull Park Homes by the author’s family and a handful of others.

⁵⁰ Frank London Brown, *Trumbull Park*, 16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 81, emphasis added.

a housing code in Chicago and the Chicagoland area.⁵² In one document by the MHPC, attention is given to the matter pointedly:

Repeated catastrophes in substandard housing in Chicago dramatize the city's failure to enforce minimum housing standards. In the past year there have been three Chicago tragedies, which write "disgrace" over the door of the building administration of the city. First, Harper's Magazine, and now the Reader's Digest, emblazon the story of substandard housing in Chicago from coast to coast. Their subject the notorious Hickman case, in which four children burned to death, in a dilapidated building on Washburne Avenue—is the story of the "kitchenette" phenomenon, a by-product of the housing shortage in Chicago.⁵³

The MHPC's records on housing code violations show a preponderance of suits filed against kitchenette slumlords who profited from failing to maintain the apartment buildings they owned. In the files, substandard conditions abound, ranging in level of danger from unlit "Exit" signs to falling ceilings.⁵⁴ In a handful of instances, people report injuries from tripping on loose floorboards, falling from a railing giving way, and of children eating lead paint chips that have fallen from walls, presumably onto food.⁵⁵ The precarious proximity to tragedy and transgression was a hallmark of kitchenette dwelling, not because of a propensity toward destruction or delinquency on the part of its inhabitants—as Chicago School sociologists would contend—but due to the compromised built environment of the kitchenette building. Kitchenette residents were intimately familiar—*too* familiar—with the risks of their failing urban habitations. This over-intimacy, due to a lack of space, protection, and privacy, precluded kitchenette residents from the status of modern Western subjects, because claimable space (i.e., property or domain) and the ability and authority to secure and protect privacy were material figurations of modern citizenship in the mid-century U.S.

Over-Intimacy and Toxic Masculinity in *Native Son*

In the opening scene of Richard Wright's *Native Son*—on the first page, in fact—the reader is drawn into the intimate space of the Thomas kitchenette by the protagonist's mother's instruction: "Turn your heads so I can dress."⁵⁶ Bigger Thomas' family lives in a one-room kitchenette, and the four of them share two beds: Bigger with his younger brother Buddy, and his

⁵² Robert E. Merriam, Metropolitan Housing Council, "For release in Monday PM, December 16, 1946 papers and thereafter," MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073, University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

⁵³ "An Analysis of Chicago Departmental Procedures for the Protection of Existing Buildings and Housing," 19 October 1948, MHPC Records, Box 287, folder 3074: "General Housing- Housing Code Enforcement, 1946-48," University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

⁵⁴ MHPC Records, "Housing Code Violations, 1950-1970," Boxes 296-400, University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

⁵⁵ "A.E. Gordan and Sons," MHPC Records, Box 297, folder 3189: "Housing Code Violations, A.E. Gordan & Sons," University of Illinois-Chicago, Library of the Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, Chicago, IL.

⁵⁶ Richard Wright, *Native Son*, (New York: Harper Perennials, 2008), 3.

sister Vera with their mother. Each morning, in gendered pairs, they take turns hastily dressing with eyes averted “to keep them from feeling ashamed.”⁵⁷ One hundred pages after the opening scene, on the morning after Bigger murders his employer’s daughter, the mundaneness of this type of over-intimacy is reiterated as Vera utters the same instructions two separate times to her brothers, who wake up at different times. However, while she laces her shoes she becomes uncomfortable and angry, accusing Bigger, who is staring vacantly in her direction, of looking under her dress.⁵⁸ A dazed or thoughtless stare becomes a transgression in this space. Instead of a budding girl having privacy as she comes into her womanhood, she is forced to rush into and out of her clothes and fears violation. Ms. Thomas consoles her daughter by instructing her to “[c]ome on in the kitchen and dress” behind a curtain erected to cordon off the kitchen space.⁵⁹ Only a temporary solution to separate Vera from her brothers’ presumed wandering eyes, this incident and response illuminates the constraints of their dwelling space. Their home space is not built to adequately accommodate them.

Sara Ahmed writes, “To orientate oneself can mean to adjust one’s position, or another’s position, such that we are ‘facing’ the right direction: we know where we are through how we position ourselves in relation to others.”⁶⁰ In other words, adjustment may be necessary for “proper” orientation, and rightness is embedded in fundamental understandings of orientation. Also, Ahmed suggests that orientation is always about relationality. In the Thomas household, Ms. Thomas has invested in maintaining certain orientations among her family: the proper way to face when another is dressing is away. When one’s body and/or eyes are not averted from the exposed body of another, one has engaged in an improper sociospatial orientation, which also risks an improper relational orientation. Bigger’s improper sociospatial orientation might be a sign that he has somehow lost his way, that he does not know where he is, or that the place where he is has shifted. In this sense, any type of sociospatial transgression can be considered a queer orientation toward both spaces and other subjects.

The anxiety that arises at these points in the narrative is couched in a fear of sexual violence, and incest, in particular. The close quarters of the kitchenette heighten the possibility of, and the trepidation around, incidents of sexual transgression. The fact that Bigger is not portrayed as looking intentionally at his sister does not foreclose the possibility of his having looked or the fact that the space is indeed there for him to look on any given occasion. The suffocating constriction of the Thomas kitchenette, as one segment of a much larger landscape of black confinement and exclusion in the city, is presented as precipitating the sexual assault, serial murder, and imprisonment by which *Native Son* is defined.⁶¹ Bigger is depicted as a “warped personality” by Wright and is meant to represent some of the worst of what could happen as a result of living in a city as racially segregated and economically oppressed as black Chicago.⁶² In essence, Wright presents Bigger’s fate as teleological rather than circumstantial or happenstance: the confinement of the kitchenette at the novel’s opening creates the trajectory for the protagonist’s prison confinement at the novel’s close.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 102-03.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 51.

⁶¹ Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness: Architectures of Confinement and Black Masculinity in Chicago*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

⁶² Wright, *12 Million Black Voices*, 108.

The transgressions that Bigger Thomas feels the racially restricted residential, economic, and social landscape of Chicago has leveled at him create the conditions of his emasculation (as masculinity is given credence in this era as heteropatriarchal capitalist production).⁶³ To right this emasculation, women who come into Bigger's path must be distanced or destroyed and their sexuality denied or disarmed. Mary Dalton—the white daughter of Bigger's employer—and Bigger's girlfriend Bessie are women whom Bigger must sexually overcome and dispose of in order to express and make room for his protected masculine identity.⁶⁴ Mary introduces risky interracial political, social, and sexual commingling as she instructs Bigger to chauffeur her to meet her communist boyfriend Jan: she and Jan engage in intercourse in the backseat while Bigger listens and watches in stolen glances through the rearview mirror. Bigger's (and his family's) need for economic opportunity lands him in anxious proximity to white sexuality, which through Mary and Jan's naive enactments of their liberal ideology (i.e., "slumming" in the South Side) leads to Bigger's physical closeness with the drunken Mary as he assists her into the house undetected.⁶⁵ Their close proximity as black man and white woman leading up to this point in the narrative portends manifestation of national anxieties of race-mixing: black rape and white female victimhood. To protect himself from the inevitable punishing of his body through death (or near-death through incarceration and further removal from humanity) for being discovered in Mary's bedroom, he must destroy her ability to provide evidence against him through verbal outcry by covering her face with a pillow and then must destroy physical evidence of his murder—which would confirm his sexual crime—by incinerating her body in the family's basement furnace. The over-intimacy of the kitchenette domestic environment places undue pressure on him, as an implored heteropatriarch, to secure means for economic advancement for his family; in that process, Bigger finds himself in a comparably but differently dangerous over-intimacy serving the Dalton household. The Thomas kitchenette, while not through collapsing building materials or fatal sickness, produces death.

Further, the overintimate landscape of the one-room Thomas kitchenette requires all sexually intimate activity to be displaced into semi-private public space or in others' private space. Bigger's sister and mother are depicted as asexual figures and are treated with disdain by the protagonist—they are entities that heighten his sense of effeminacy and prevent his virility as he is in frequent close contact with them at home in their spatially constricted kitchenette. The protagonist welcomes occasions to flee his household for temporary relief, and with the chauffeur job at the affluent, white Dalton home he has an opportunity for a more extended reprieve. He must leave behind his mother, sister, and infantilized younger brother to secure his understood sense of manhood. For instance, Bigger and his friend Jack squander away some time sitting in the movie theater, masturbating while awaiting the start of a film.⁶⁶ The movie theater—with dimmed or darkened lights, seats facing unidirectionally toward the screen, and the ability to choose primarily vacant seating areas—provides a semi-private public space wherein

⁶³ Ferguson, Roderick. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 47.

⁶⁴ I say protected here because a central feature of Bigger's sense of masculine self is his (in)ability to protect himself from humiliation, degradation, and poverty.

⁶⁵ This is not to absolve Bigger's character of inexcusable physical engagement with Mary as she was unable to provide consent in her drunken stupor.

⁶⁶ Wright, *Native Son*, 30.

the teens can commingle homosocially and act individually on their needs for sexual release—they perhaps have the degree of privacy available at a wall of urinals.

Bigger’s kitchenette home provides no space for his eighteen-year-old sexual self: he is unable to explore or release himself sexually, whether alone or with a sexual partner. Thus, the insinuation that Bigger looks at Vera while she is dressing is couched in a very complicated possibility, given not only the proximity and relative lack of spatial partitioning in the dwelling, but also the reality of pent-up sexual urges of a young male due in part to these spatial constrictions. Bigger is also given sexual expression at his girlfriend Bessie’s kitchenette, where she is a sole resident. Later in the novel, his sexuality turns gruesomely violent, as he rapes then murders Bessie as they hide out in an abandoned building following Bigger’s guilt-ridden flight from his employer’s home. One sexually-precipitated murder begets another, as Bigger moves from the Dalton household to Bessie’s apartment in reckless, solipsistic, and sinister abandon. The Thomas kitchenette has no room for the healthy expression of sexuality, which also anticipates the protagonist’s violent expression of it.

The built environment of Chicago’s South Side, coupled with the discursive architecture of black pathology and social disorganization produced by the Chicago School and heavily bought into by Wright, produce a failed domestic environment epitomized through the toxic masculinity of Bigger Thomas’ fictional character.

The Possibilities of Over-Intimacy

The over-intimacy of the kitchenette did not always overcome its residents, and the failure of the kitchenette domestic space did not wholly define the possibilities for its inhabitants (as a straightforward reading of the environmentally deterministic *Native Son* would suggest). Jack Halberstam lauds the productive potential of failure, noting, “[W]hile failure certainly comes accompanied by a host of negative affects, such as disappointment, disillusionment, and despair, it also provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life.”⁶⁷ Failure, according to Halberstam, enables the imaginings of alternative societies, futures, and non-futures. It resists the capitalist dichotomy of winners and losers, does not have to have a happy ending, and is more invested in losing one’s way than of arriving.⁶⁸ In this vein, what does the failing kitchenette offer us? While the characters I analyze do not embrace failure in the way that Halberstam suggests, the so-called failures of conventional domesticity in their households allow for unique methods of expressing and striving for—if not attaining—ideals of “proper” domesticity. Failure, while not an aim of these kitchenette dwellers, is deftly addressed and managed as one more obstacle to be surmounted alongside racial discrimination, economic exploitation, and residential segregation. Not only do kitchenette residents make do in the substandard housing they have little choice but to live in, but also they cultivate what bell hooks has described as “homeplaces” where they exist and resist—however subtly—in a society always already ascribing to them inferiority and pathology.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2-3, 15.

⁶⁹ Hooks describes “homeplace” as follows: “Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one’s homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. 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

When multiple people are sharing a small domestic space, privacy not only takes on new import and value as it is a precious rarity, but also it changes modality. Privacy within a space such as the kitchenette apartment more often took shape as a temporary taking, or inhabitation, of place, in what de Certeau might refer to as a tactical maneuver.⁷⁰ Undoubtedly, the tight space of the kitchenette apartment lends itself to close encounters, heightened tensions, and innovative coordinated uses of space. Since Bigger, his brother, mother, and sister all live in the one-room flat, the only way to have privacy is to make it. For Vera and her mother, this means dressing in the kitchen (if kitchen is what it can be called, as it isn't a discrete space of its own). Rashad Shabazz briefly analyzes the intimate act of dressing as a public rather than private one in the space of the Thomas kitchenette. He offers, "If protection from the gaze of others is a central function of autonomy, kitchenettes negated that autonomy by maximizing physical intimacy and making intimate, mundane information—'I need to get dressed,' 'I've got to wash,' and so forth—public. By creating close associations between people the kitchenette made privacy of any kind impossible. . . ."⁷¹ Shabazz's point is an important one to recognize; nevertheless, I want to challenge the notion of impossible privacy and offer a supplementary analysis of this scene.

While the over-intimate space of the kitchenette apartment has at best, inconvenient, and at worst, devastating, consequences on its residents, it also affords opportunities for innovation and intervention by the subjects therein. Bigger's mother has an at-hand solution for violations of privacy: she invites her daughter Vera into the kitchen behind a curtain dividing that space from the living/sleeping area in order to get dressed in a "separate" space from her brothers. The makeshift room divider and privacy screen serve as reminders of the undifferentiated space of the kitchenette. Ms. Thomas *innovates* in her home by way of creating differentiated space that doubles as kitchen area and private dressing area for the female inhabitants.⁷² Further, Ms. Thomas *intervenes* in her home by recognizing the possibility for improper and/or unwanted intimacies among the family and by devising effective solutions: she has disciplined her sons over time such that they know to look away as she dresses; she also immediately reacts at the moment of Vera's complaint to invite her into a previously un- or under-utilized space of (feminine) privacy—the kitchen. The spatial differentiation and spatial designation that Ms. Thomas deploys can be seen as modes of modern production of space. While spatial differentiation signals areas that are delimited or demarcated by way of design for discrete (or differential) use, spatial designation refers to the employment of space for specified purposes, especially in light of undifferentiated spatial layout/design. The curtain is ostensibly already erected prior to the dressing incident—Ms. Thomas has taken liberties to differentiate the cooking space from the sleeping space, most likely to control, in whatever limited or imperfect

despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world." bell hooks, "homeplace," *Yearning: Race, Gender, Cultural Politics*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 42.

⁷⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xix-xx.

⁷¹ Rather than continue in an analysis of intimacy, Shabazz uses the instance as a point of continuation in his unpacking of carcerality, arguing that these instances of seemingly private things happening in public are instances of unwanted surveillance. See *Spatializing Blackness*, 50.

⁷² The kitchen segment is representationally doubled down upon as a woman's space—in addition to the area being off limits to Bigger and his brother for robing and disrobing, Ms. Thomas is depicted in the kitchen cooking at multiple points in the novel.

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fashion, any smoke and heat produced while cooking. However, in the moment of the dressing event, Ms. Thomas engages in spatial designation for the purposes of robing and disrobing in the presence of her male children because there is not a differentiation of private bedroom space to ward off shame. She enacts what Katherine McKittrick refers to as a “respatialization” or a “place-based critique,” wherein black women possess knowledge of and produce “alternative geographic formulations” within their oppressive environments.⁷³ As innovation and efficiency are both markers of modernity, I hold that Ms. Thomas’ actions help to produce the kitchenette as a black modern space.

Further, not all depictions of kitchenettes and their residents were concerned with anxieties of sex, domestic failure, or death. Eldzier Cortor’s 1948 painting, *The Room No. VI*, captures in vibrant simplicity the impossible, yet managed, closeness of the kitchenette apartment. He offers an alternative vision of kitchenette living, one unencumbered by perpetuating or resisting the tangle of pathologies ascribed to black people during this era.

The painting depicts four bodies stretched across a mattress amid rumpled covers and angled limbs, a steely wood-burning stove dangerously—but not menacingly—nearby the bed, periodicals discarded on the floor, and a forgotten dollbaby propped against the baseboard, its unclothed state mirroring the majority of the room’s human subjects in everything but skin tone.

The nude bodies display a sure intimacy among the group as well as a plausibly uncomfortable, warm environment. Both the shared space of the lone mattress and the nudeness of the bodies connote a familial closeness—familial and not sexual because of the presence of the two children and the separateness implied in the posturing of the figures. It appears to be morning, as the figures and the room are well-illuminated, and the bed in unmade while they are in it—perhaps after a night of tossing and turning, unconscious negotiations of sleeping space, tugging of covers, shedding of covers to salvage rest. Two adult and two child figures inhabit the mess of multicolored linens, the elongated adult figures accorded the most visual and corporeal space. The lone clothed figure, a child outfitted in a yellow night shirt, is stretched out on their back, eyes resting shut, hands clasped under their head, face toward the ceiling in a contemplative dream-like state.

The wood-burning stove, while present and large in the corner of the frame, is depicted as an indexical feature of, and fixture in, the habitation being portrayed. It is meant to locate the figures in a *type* of room: not to be mistaken for just another bedroom in an unidentified house in an unspecific place, the stove fixture, when coupled with the crowded bed space and the black bodies, connotes the crowded urban landscape. The plane on the front page of the newspaper temporally locate the setting in or near wartime; the 1948 production date of the painting helps to confirm the general time period.

The used newspaper—perhaps the *Defender* or the *Chicago Bee*—cast to the wooden floor, is a marker of the quotidian, along with a milk bottle and an issue of *Argosy* pulp magazine; these are literate, everyday folks. A solitary white dollbaby, stripped of clothing and accessories, with painted-on smile, is propped at the baseboard of the furthest wall—it is the only smiling figure in the painting. The toy conjures up the Kenneth Clark doll tests of the 1940s that ultimately helped to make the case for juridical racial integration in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision.

⁷³ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006), xix.



FIGURE 3.2 Eldzier Cortor, *The Room No. VI*, July 1948, Oil and gesso on Masonite, 107.3 x 80 cm, Art Institute, Chicago

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The varied directions of the lines of the wooden floorboards, checkered bedding, baseboard, and floral wallpaper, along with the sprawling, elongated bodies and angled limbs create a visual tension. The lines are interrupted, alleviated, and contrasted by the soft curves of the rumpled bedding, the buttoned indentions on the mattress, curved musculature of the central female and child subject, and the rustled newspaper on the floor. Rather than disorder, the piece communicates a serenity within the noticeably lived-in, and thus understandably disheveled (but not unkempt), space. A far cry from the communicated disappointments, deaths, and failings of the kitchenettes highlighted by the housing guidelines and novels, *Room No. VI* renders a neutrally, if not positively, charged intimacy of the kitchenette space.

The kitchenette is a place where intimacies were negotiated and, oftentimes, normalized through spatial relations. Despite the substandard built environment, Cortor offers a representation of this domestic space and its residents as not devalued or degraded through this normalization. *The Room No. VI* exhibits peace, stillness, and being as the inhabitants are affected by, but not preoccupied with, by the trappings of the kitchenette building and the sociopolitics of the urban environment surrounding and producing it. The familial scene, while populated with markers of a stark reality in the city, exudes a tranquility not apparent in other kitchenette representations. Making home and life—but not necessarily “a life”—out of the unplanned situations and spaces in which residents found themselves encapsulates the possibilities of the kitchenette. In contrast to the depiction in Brooks’ “kitchenette building” poem, these kitchenette dwellers just might entertain dreams amid the “involuntary plan” of their domestic circumstances. While bound up in notions and realities of failure and over-intimacy, kitchenettes were also postured to give rise to a generative sharing of worlds.

CHAPTER 4

Kitchenette Kin: Carl Hansberry Enterprises and Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

Ruth: Well—well!—All I can say is—if this is my time in life—MY TIME—to say good-bye—to these goddamned cracking walls!—and these marching roaches!—and this cramped little closet which ain't now or never was no kitchen!...then I say it loud and good, HALLELUJAH! AND GOOD-BYE MISERY...I DON'T NEVER WANT TO SEE YOUR UGLY FACE AGAIN!

—Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959)¹

Defendants carelessly and negligently permitted ceiling above 2nd floor to become cracked, defective, and weak; Defendants carelessly and negligently failed and refused to repair said ceiling . . . As a result, a portion of the ceiling fell on plaintiff while she was in the bathroom.

—Complaint, *Carrie Howard v. C.A. Hansberry Enterprises and Harriet Washington* (1960)²

On October 18, 1959, Carrie Howard was injured when a section of the bathroom ceiling collapsed onto her. Seeking redress, she filed a personal injury suit for \$40,000 against her landlords for failing to properly maintain and repair her residence at 3755 Indiana Avenue.³ The case recalled a 1936 case brought to the Superior Court of Cook County where Gillie Jenkins, a resident of 5409 Calumet Avenue, sued the building's owners after her apartment ceiling fell.⁴ Hansberry Enterprises was implicated as a defendant in both cases. The Jenkins case was dismissed by the court, and the Howard case, if it was ruled against the defendants, would have “do[ne] no harm to [the] Hansberry family” because the premises were insured by La Salle Casualty for up to \$200,000.⁵

The cracked and falling apartment ceilings, occurring more than twenty years apart in buildings owned by the Hansberry family, sound curiously akin to the “cracking walls” Ruth decries in an emotional scene in Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 stageplay *A Raisin in the Sun*. However, Lorraine Hansberry's renowned kitchenette of *A Raisin in the Sun* and the kitchenette buildings associated with her family's real estate business diverged in substantial ways. Might the playwright have been oblivious to her own family's dealings back in her hometown of Chicago as she crafted her groundbreaking work of art, or might the work have been a dramatic

¹ Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 93-94.

² “Injury Actions: 60 S 3587,” Hansberry Code Violations, MPC Records, Box 297, folder 3193.

³ “Injury Actions,” MPC Records.

⁴ Wendy Plotkin, “Deeds of Mistrust,” 187n10; *Gillie Jenkins v. C.A. Hansberry, doing business as Hansberry Enterprises & Park Realty Company, a corporation*, Superior Court of Cook County, Gen. No. 36 S 1782, Cook County Court Archives.

⁵ Plotkin, “Deeds of Mistrust,” 187n10; *Jenkins v. Hansberry*; “Injury Actions,” MPC Records. The MPC report on the Carrie Howard case is compiled before the case is decided so does not report an outcome. Also, Wendy Plotkin notes that because Municipal Court records were destroyed (reasons not listed), finding other early cases against Hansberry Enterprises is a challenge.

critique and conviction of her family members and their residential enterprise? While it is unclear which of these, if either, was the case for Lorraine Hansberry, a deeper investigation of Carl Hansberry Enterprises and *A Raisin in the Sun* offers a distinctive view of the tensions within and among black family, black enterprise, black politics, and black cultural production. The kitchenette is the fulcrum around which these various issues concerning the Hansberrys pivot.

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, the audience meets the Younger family, an African American family of five people and three generations sharing a two-bedroom kitchenette apartment on Chicago's South Side "sometime between the end of WWII and present [1959]."⁶ The family anticipates a life insurance check of \$10,000 on behalf of the deceased patriarch fondly referred to as Big Walter. Competing interests over how the sum might best be spent mire the Youngers in conflict. Walter Lee, Jr. longs to invest in the creation of a local business—a liquor store—so that he can earn a living more respectably than as a chauffeur and provide a better life for his wife Ruth (who works as a domestic) and son Travis. Walter Lee's sister Beneatha is an indecisive, yet decidedly feminist, college student and aspiring medical doctor who counts on some portion of the money for the furthering of her studies. Lena Younger, referenced throughout the play as Mama, has different aims than her two children: she takes action to disencumber them of their cramped kitchenette, an incubator of conflicts, by putting a down payment on a home that she can afford in what happens to be a majority white neighborhood. The remaining funds, which are to be divvied in support of both Walter Lee's and Beneatha's dreams, are squandered when Walter Lee takes all the money and invests in a bad business deal. With the money gone, only the prospect of the Clybourne Park home remains as a potential step toward a different life. After surmounting the challenges of Walter Lee's blunder and the new neighborhood's attempts to block their purchase, the Younger family leaves their kitchenette behind, hopeful for a future of possibilities yet bracing for the fight with racial terror that is sure to await them among their new neighbors.

Hansberry drew on her family's personal experiences with white anti-black hostilities in the Washington Park neighborhood of Chicago to inform the precarious position of the Younger family in their decision to stay or leave their kitchenette apartment. The playwright did not live in a Chicago kitchenette—she was eight years old when her family moved to the property on Rhodes Avenue, and prior to that they had resided in another contested dwelling at 549 E. 60th Street in the Washington Park area.⁷ Before both of those residences the Hansberry family lived farther south in the Black Belt at 4518 Champlain Avenue in West Kenwood; it may have been the apartment that the playwright claimed had a "carpeted quiet" in comparison to her peers' "walk-up flats where it was very bare and rugless."⁸ In fact, Hansberry did not even write her play while residing in Chicago—it was penned from her Bleecker Street apartment in Greenwich Village in New York City during 1956 and 1957.⁹ However, the playwright did have intimate experience of ghetto living conditions because she spent her early years living there, despite her

⁶ Hansberry, *Raisin*, 22.

⁷ Their residency was contested because they were black. See *Lee v. Hansberry* Abstract of Record, 803 OT 1939, p.12, Supreme Court Appellate Case 29 OT 1940, Box 2067, National Archives of Washington, D.C.

⁸ Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 140, 183n3; Hansberry, *Young, Gifted, and Black*, 66, 64.

⁹ Michael Anderson, "A Landmark Lesson in Being Black," *New York Times*, March 7, 1999.

family's higher socioeconomic status; they were confined, like other blacks, to the Black Belt.¹⁰ Rather than construe a drama closely aligned to her family's living conditions, Hansberry renders her experiential knowledge of the impact of white supremacy and black disposability through the setting of the South Side kitchenette apartment. The perniciously mundane operation of anti-black discrimination in midcentury Chicago was best depicted by way of a family's day-in and -out conflicts of personality, space, and value within their domicile. As a representative space, the kitchenette speaks to a broad black residential experience on Chicago's South Side. The kitchenette stands in for, and becomes a proxy to engagement with, racial capitalism, black dream deferral, and resultant intra-familial conflict. While it clearly did not reflect the residential realities of some black Chicagoans, including Hansberry herself, it had a wide representational currency.¹¹

The play served as a vehicle to bring white audiences in touch with black realities as well as to give serious artistic and dramatic attention to black life for the purposes of black creative consumption. However, Hansberry stops short of employing the play to critique her own family's questionable, and in some cases parasitic, business relationships with the black South Side community.¹²

Overall, Hansberry's artistic work dramatizes that which is inaccessible in court records and newspaper reports about kitchenette residences. While landlordship does not enter her artistic rendition of the lives lived in these cramped dwellings—a glaring and ironic absence—the playwright does illuminate the interiority of the space and its inhabitants. Exploring themes of death, family conflict, marriage, feminism, pan-Africanism, black enterprise, employment hierarchies, anti-black violence, and residential segregation, *A Raisin in the Sun* employs the South Side kitchenette apartment as an ideal setting in which to analyze these topics.

“The Respectable Part of the Battle”: Hansberry v. Lee

In her 1969 posthumous autobiography *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, Lorraine Hansberry describes the terror her family experienced upon moving into, and choosing to stay in, their Washington Park home at 6140 Rhodes Avenue in 1937. When Carl Hansberry, the author's father, decided to move his family into the previously all-white neighborhood, disgruntled white residents—and likely other white non-residents who caught wind of the black

¹⁰ Margaret Wilkerson, “The Sighted Eyes and Feeling Heart of Lorraine Hansberry,” *Black American Literature Forum* 17, no. 1 (1983): 8-9. Hansberry describes the black crowded residential areas of Chicago and Harlem as ghettos at various points in her autobiography. See Hansberry, *Young, Gifted, and Black*, 63, 64, 97, 131, 210.

¹¹ This is not to invoke a homogeneous, monolithic, or so-called authentic “black community” or “black experience,” but rather to underscore the wide resonance of kitchenette dwelling as something that touched a vast majority of black Chicagoans. This broad swath included: current or recent kitchenette residents; those lived in the buildings as children only to move to different, but perhaps not much better, housing; and those whose investment in “advancing the race” included discursive disavowal and actual disidentification with the buildings and residents.

¹² It is possible that at the time of the play's writing, in 1956-57, that her family's own controversial real estate dealings were yet to be exposed—either to her or the larger public—as they were in the years following in 1958 and 1959 when the Hansberrys were in housing court on countless occasions. However, this is likely not the case—at least in regard to the public, if not also in regard to Lorraine—because in 1957, the family had over 20 suits against them in housing court. See “Memorandum Number 4,” MHPC Records.

“invaders”—violently targeted the family on a daily and nightly basis.¹³ White attackers hurled bricks, rocks, concrete, and other projectiles into the windows, intending to damage the property, persons, and pride of the family. For Lorraine and family, the neighborhood was “hellishly hostile” as “howling mobs surrounded [their] house” with regularity. The eight-year-old eventual playwright learned that the “‘correct’ way of fighting white supremacy in America include[d] being spat at, cursed and pummeled in the daily trek to and from school.”¹⁴ The terrorists sought to assert and protect the whiteness of the Washington Park neighborhood through concerted mob violence toward the end of not only driving out the black homeowners, but also of deterring any other black residents from attempting to move in.¹⁵ The author recalls that her “desperate and courageous mother,” Nannie Hansberry, actively stood guard over their home and the four children “with a loaded German luger” at nights “while [her] father fought the respectable part of the battle in the Washington court.”¹⁶ Integrating a neighborhood, as innumerable black families could testify during this period, required physical and emotional vigilance.

George Lipsitz provides background and analysis of *A Raisin in the Sun* and the Youngers’ struggle toward homeownership, citing principle—rather than financial security, moral investment in integration, or convenience—as the reason for the fictional family’s calculated battle. The family persists in their acquisition of the Clybourne Park home because, according to Lipsitz, “They decide that they cannot allow anyone to determine where they can or cannot live, where they belong, or what they can do with their money. The right to inhabit and own space is more valuable to them than the space itself.”¹⁷ The home may or may not have turned out to be what bell hooks calls a homeplace: a place black women cultivated “where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where [they] could be affirmed in [their] minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where [they] could restore to [them]selves the dignity denied [them] on the outside in the public world.”¹⁸ But, following Lipsitz, that would also have been beside the point. The very prize and symbol of middle class attainment was—and remains—homeownership. For groups historically excluded from full citizenship in the United States, securing this material symbol of middle class status and, by

¹³ The language of invasion was common in reaction to blacks branching into previously all-white neighborhood blocks. See Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 4, 35, 41, 147; Richard Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 12; Frederick Burgess Lindstrom, “The Negro Invasion of the Washington Park Subdivision” (MA thesis, University of Chicago, 1941).

¹⁴ Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, adapted by Robert Nemiroff, (New York: Signet Classics, 2011), 51.

¹⁵ In the *Lee v. Hansberry* Abstract of Record, the plaintiffs file formal complaint that the Hansberrys had taken ownership of the property to not only reside in it but also to rent out other apartments in the building to black tenants. The plaintiffs claimed the Hansberrys had plans to “dispossess” the current white tenants of an apartment in the property and to replace them with black tenants. Arnold Hirsch also notes that the possibility of white eviction in favor of black tenancy (not necessarily by a black landlord) was very real because black tenants would be charged more and be given less space. *Lee v. Hansberry* Abstract of Record, 803 OT 1939, p.17, Supreme Court Appellate Case 29 OT 1940, Box 2067, National Archives of Washington, D.C.; Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*, 35.

¹⁶ Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, adapted by Robert Nemiroff, (New York: Signet Classics, 2011), 51.

¹⁷ Lipsitz, George. *How Racism Takes Place*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 201.

¹⁸ bell hooks, “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance,” *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 42.

extension, Americanness was all the more consequential.¹⁹ For example, Dianne Harris details how ethnic European immigrants employed the suburban home as proxy for their assimilability into whiteness, eventually achieving more access to the category by way of residential proximity and domestic mimicry. She notes, “The configuration, decor, possessions, and maintenance of the house (and the labor involved in that maintenance) all provided opportunities to convey a range of images and lifestyles. Inner-city apartment dwelling, noise, crowding, smells, and manual labor all spoke of a working-class past and ethnic origins. Little proclaimed whiteness, class stability, and citizenship quite like a house of one’s own in the suburbs.”²⁰ While neither the Hansberrys nor the fictional Youngers vied for the status of whiteness or a house in suburbia, the attainment of a home in the closely-guarded “white” neighborhood—an exercise of full citizenship—might well have been just as distant a dream.

The community of Washington Park maintained its largely white constitution by way of a restrictive covenant. Restrictive covenants were agreements among home owners to restrict the sale and rental of property to certain groups of people. They were geographical tools used to circumscribe white territory for decades at a time, as they bound not only the property holders and residents but also the land itself. Restrictive covenants operated often (if not solely) on a racially exclusionary basis and were developed to maintain domestic segregation of whites and non-whites (blacks, especially); so often was this the case that some legal scholars have used the terms “restrictive covenant” and “racial covenant” interchangeably.²¹ The residents of Washington Park entered into a restrictive covenant in March 1927 “for the purpose of establishing a uniform restriction to safeguard the interests and values of said properties subject thereto”; they declared the covenant was to be in effect until January 1, 1948, after which date it would continue to bear on the land until seventy-five percent of the property owners agreed in writing to alter or abolish it.²² Residential discrimination was thinly veiled as neighborhood protectionism.

The language of the covenant echoed that of many others, likely deriving from (if not serving as one of the models for) the standard restrictive covenant created by a member of the Chicago Plan Commission—Nathan William MacChesney—for the Chicago Real Estate Board in 1927.²³ Two primary provisions anchored the covenant: one restricting white property holders and inhabitants, and another restricting all blacks. Concerning the white restriction, the official verbiage proscribed not only the sale, leasing, conveyance, or gifting of covenanted property to blacks, but also it prohibited those within the covered area from permitting or licensing blacks to “use or occupy” the property except to carry out service work.²⁴ The restriction on blacks read:

¹⁹ Mary Pattillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril in the Black Middle Class*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

²⁰ Dianne Harris, *Little White Houses: How the Postwar Home Constructed Race in America*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 21.

²¹ Allen R. Kamp, “The History behind *Hansberry v. Lee*.” *UC Davis Law Review* 20, no. 3 (1987): 481-99.

²² *Lee v. Hansberry* Abstract of Record, 803 OT 1939, p.16.

²³ Wendy Plotkin, “Deeds of Mistrust,” Appendix B, 318-322; Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, Appendix A, “Standard Form, Restrictive Covenant, Drafted for Chicago Real Estate Board by Nathan William MacChesney of the Chicago Plan Commission, 1927,” 407-410.

²⁴ Plotkin, “Deeds of Mistrust,” Appendix B, 318; Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, Appendix A, 407.

. . . [N]o part of said premises shall in any manner be used or occupied directly or indirectly by any negro or negroes, provided that this restriction shall not prevent the occupation, during the period of their employment, of janitors' or chauffeurs' quarters in the basement or in a barn or garage in the rear, or of servants' quarters by negro janitors, chauffeurs or house servants, respectively, actually employed as such for service in and about the premises by the rightful owner or occupants of said premises.²⁵

Whites were prohibited, by their own agreement, from making their properties and premises accessible to blacks for either temporary or permanent use except as it related to the procurement and fulfillment of menial labor toward the maintenance of the same premises. Blacks were prohibited, with no say in the matter, from obtaining or otherwise making use of the property except as it maintained their subordination in the racial and labor hierarchy. Moreover, anyone within the covenanted area unable to sign the agreement due to disability and who had not appointed a power of attorney was counted as an agreeing signatory of the covenant if their consent was consequential to securing the needed percentage of validating signatures, whether or not it reflected the individual's desires (if their desires were inquired about at all).²⁶ The Chicago Real Estate Board's initial racial zoning decree of 1917 was replicated by the National Association of Real Estate Boards (also based in the city) in 1924 and became the model for national practices of anti-black (and sometimes anti-Semitic, anti-Asian, and anti-Latino/a) residential discrimination through the use and enthusiastic backing of restrictive covenants.²⁷ The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), government underwriter of mortgage loans, restricted their insurance to whites-only properties and neighborhoods and was a proponent of a standardized, readily-adoptable covenant for property holders.²⁸ The covenants were also reinforced by Article 34 of the Realtor's Code of Ethics, also crafted by MacChesney in 1924, that made contributing to residential integration an ethical issue of the profession. Violation of the Code was punishable by license revocation once MacChesney also drafted what was informally known as the MacChesney Act, which was a provision of real estate licensing that gave state commissions oversight and enforcement power of agents in relationship to the Code.²⁹

In the 1939 *Lee v. Hansberry* case, Anna M. Lee et al. brought a suit against Carl Hansberry et al., alleging that the defendants deceptively violated a restrictive covenant covering the Washington Park property that the Hansberrys bought at 6140 Rhodes Avenue. The plaintiffs complained that after the property had been conveyed to the First National Bank of Englewood, a

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The clause reads, ". . . [I]f the owner of any of said parcels or any part thereof shall be under disability, as, for example, that of minority, or for any other reason shall not have the power to execute this agreement, as, for example, when the title is held, without such power, by testamentary trustees or other fiduciaries, the frontage so owned shall be treated as though the owners thereof had power to sign, and had signed this agreement, for the purpose of determining whether this agreement becomes effective or not under the provisions of this paragraph." Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," Appendix B, 319-320; Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, Appendix A, 408.

²⁷ Beryl Satter, *Family Properties*, 40; Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 43, 45-46; Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy*, 194.

²⁸ Richard Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 64-65; Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy*, 194.

²⁹ Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 45-46. See also Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto*, 189-91.

white man by the name of Jay B. Crook acquired the property with the conspiratorial intent to sell it directly to a black man, Carl Hansberry.³⁰ The Illinois Supreme Court ruled in favor of Lee et al., declaring that the Hansberrys were “unlawfully in title, possession and occupancy of the premises” and therefore must vacate their home.³¹ Hansberry and his legal team sought to challenge this ruling and appealed the case up to the Supreme Court of the United States. In the appeals case, Hansberry was the plaintiff, so the case became *Hansberry v. Lee*.

While Hansberry’s litigation team was invested in the court ruling restrictive covenants unconstitutional, their major arguments hinged on the *Lee v. Hansberry* (1939) case being decided in the category of a class action suit, following a ruling on restrictive covenants taken as class action in *Burke v. Kleinman* (1934).³² The Illinois Supreme Court had ruled against Hansberry on the grounds of res judicata, or the inability for the terms of a class or representative suit to be re-litigated.³³ In *Hansberry v. Lee* the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the prior *Burke v. Kleinman* case was *not* a class action suit, and even if it were, it would not be legally binding on Carl Hansberry as a homeowner: the *Lee v. Hansberry* case, in working to retroactively deny the black Hansberry family homeownership and residency, and evict them from their Washington Park home, effectively rendered Hansberry a non-party in the *Burke* suit’s Washington Park home-owning class.³⁴ Put another way, in the *Lee v. Hansberry* case, the Illinois Supreme Court improperly employed res judicata as a basis on which to not challenge the validity of the covenant; the use was improper because Hansberry was not bound by the ruling of *Burke* because he was not a part of the legally-identified class.³⁵ Hansberry had won. While Hansberry and his co-defendants won the suit, it would not be until a later case, *Shelley v. Kraemer* in 1948, that the federal court would rule against governmental enforcement of restrictive covenants.

The Supreme Court case was a major victory for the family and a milestone in the fight by black groups and organizations against the restrictive residential devices. In December 1940, the Hansberrys were able to reoccupy their home—they had been ordered by the Illinois Appellate Court to vacate it in 1938 due to the disputed nature of their residency.³⁶ A few years afterward, the family was to expatriate to Mexico City at the behest of a disillusioned Carl Hansberry, who had already secured a home there. Before that could happen, he died prematurely of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1946 as “a permanently embittered exile in a foreign

³⁰ *Lee v. Hansberry* Abstract of Record, 803 OT 1939, pp. 9-11, Supreme Court Appellate Case 29 OT 1940, Box 2067, National Archives of Washington, D.C.

³¹ *Lee v. Hansberry* Abstract of Record, 803 OT 1939, pp. 31-32, Supreme Court Appellate Case 29 OT 1940, Box 2067, National Archives of Washington, D.C.

³² Kamp, “History behind *Hansberry v. Lee*,” 490.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 491, 494-95.

³⁵ Legal scholar Allen Kamp outlines several grounds on which the U.S. Supreme Court could have reversed the lower court’s decision, one of which was fraud. The covenant the original plaintiffs sought to enforce was never legal due to a failure to obtain signatures from the ninety-five percent of the neighborhood constituency required to establish the covenant (491-92). Additionally, Hansberry’s race precluded him from being regarded as a member of the plaintiff class in the *Burke* decision. Kamp asserts, “If the class is defined as all present and future property owners, Hansberry could never be an owner by the terms of that decree. Nor was there a defendant class that adequately represented the Hansberrys” (498). Moreover, the class was constituted by white homeowners invested in black exclusion, so the interests of Hansberry, a black man, could not be said to be represented with the class. The courts sidestepped the issue of race, focusing instead on the res judicata technicality (493, 495-96). Kamp, “History behind *Hansberry v. Lee*.”

³⁶ Plotkin, “Deeds of Mistrust,” 177, 173-74.

country when he saw that after such sacrificial efforts the Negroes of Chicago were as ghetto-locked as ever.”³⁷ The landmark *Shelley v. Kraemer* case was still two years away. Restrictive covenants were not ruled unconstitutional until the Fair Housing Act was signed into law by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968, followed closely by another key judicial decision in *Johnson v. Mayer* that, according to U.S. economic policy scholar Richard Rothstein, acknowledged housing discrimination as a “badge of slavery,” against which the Thirteenth Amendment protects.³⁸

“A Witness”

On March 11, 1959, Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* debuted at the Ethel Barrymore Theater in Manhattan as the first Broadway play to be written by an African American woman. It also boasted the first black Broadway director, Lloyd Richards. Due to financial disinterest by white backers and a refusal by Broadway theaters to rent a venue to the play because it was deemed “risky” for its racial themes and black cast, producer Phillip Rose held auditions outside of New York; it ran for four days in New Haven, Connecticut, beginning on January 19, 1959 and for two weeks in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.³⁹ Despite Hansberry’s uncertainty about how the play would be received, it was an instant hit. In its two-week pre-Broadway run at the Walnut Street Theatre, the playwright was swarmed by Philadelphia audience members imploring her for autographs upon the opening night’s conclusion; she handed her purse to her still-new friend Jimmy Baldwin and obliged.⁴⁰

The play depicted black aspiration and angst through the African American Younger family’s dreams, relationships, living practices, and decision-making, all staged within their cramped kitchenette apartment. In a letter to her mother, sent from New Haven’s Hotel Taft on January 19, 1959 in the corollary auditions held outside of New York, Hansberry described the purpose of the production:

Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes and life and I think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are—and just as mixed up—but above all, that we have among our miserable and downtrodden ranks—people who are the very essence of human dignity. That is what, after all the laughter and tears, the play is supposed to say. I hope it will make you very proud. See you soon. Love to all.⁴¹

³⁷ Hansberry, *Young, Gifted, and Black*, 51; Plotkin, “Deeds of Mistrust,” 178; “Carl Hansberry, Chicagoan, Dies in Mexico City,” *Chicago Defender*, March 16, 1946, p.1; Margaret Wilkerson, “The Dark Vision of Lorraine Hansberry,” 645.

³⁸ Plotkin, “Deeds of Mistrust,” 2; Rothstein, *Color of Law*, viii-ix.

³⁹ Michael Anderson, “A Landmark Lesson in Being Black,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1999; Robert Nemiroff, “Introduction,” *A Raisin in the Sun*, (New York: Vintage, 1994), 6-7; Walnut Street Theatre, “1959,” Historic Photo Gallery: 1955-1968, photograph of Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, and Lonnie Elder III, courtesy of the Theater Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia.

⁴⁰ Michael Anderson, “A Landmark Lesson in Being Black,” *New York Times*, March 7, 1999; James Baldwin, “Sweet Lorraine,” introduction to Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, adapted by Robert Nemiroff, (New York: Signet Classics, 2011), xii.

⁴¹ Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black*, adapted by Robert Nemiroff, (New York: Signet Classics, 2011), 109.

Pride-worthy her production proved to be: it won the 1959 New York Drama Critics Circle Award for best play (she was the youngest playwright to achieve this accolade), and the following year went on to receive four Tony nominations. Black audiences loved *A Raisin in the Sun* in part because, as James Baldwin offers, “Never before, in the entire history of American theater, had so much of the truth of black people’s lives been seen on the stage. Black people ignored the theater because the theater ignored them.”⁴² He continues later that the black audience could recognize themselves in the drama, able to “suppl[y] the play with an interpretative element which could not be present in the minds of white people: a kind of claustrophobic terror, created not only by their knowledge of the house but by their knowledge of the streets.”⁴³ The audience was grateful for, and overjoyed with, Hansberry’s craftsmanship because she gave voice—and live action—to their plight writ large. Baldwin reflects, “[W]hether or not they considered her an artist, assuredly [they] considered her a witness.”⁴⁴ Her witnessing, however, was full of tensions.

Lorraine was a woman known to be ever-wrestling with contradictions, whether she embodied them, dramatized them, or railed against them as an activist. Citing the playwright’s foregrounding of strong male characters although “deeply ‘womanist’” herself, her public confidence and private doubt about humanity’s ability to triumph over its own barbarism, and her lesbianism within a heterosexual marriage, Margaret Wilkerson noted, “Her own contradictions were enormous.”⁴⁵ In her creative writing, Hansberry often highlighted American paradoxes, and the kitchenette served as a vehicle for exploring some of these. For example, *A Raisin in the Sun* was not the playwright’s first artistic rendering of kitchenette dwellers on Chicago’s South Side. A poem Hansberry wrote entitled “Flag from a Kitchenette Window” appeared in a 1950 edition of left-wing magazine *Masses and Mainstream*. The poem read:

Southside morning
 America is crying
 In our land: the paycheck taxes to
 Somebody’s government
 Black boy in a window; Algiers and Salerno
 The three-colored banner raised to some
 Anonymous freedom, we decide
 And on the memorial days hang it
 From our windows and let it beat the
 Steamy jimcrow airs.⁴⁶

Even in her foray into public writing, the artist tackled contradictions.⁴⁷ The poem presents the paradoxes of black Americans acknowledging and being expected to memorialize the

⁴² James Baldwin, “Sweet Lorraine,” xii.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., xiii.

⁴⁵ Margaret Wilkerson, “The Dark Vision of Lorraine Hansberry: Excerpts from a Literary Biography,” *The Massachusetts Review* 28, no.4 (Winter 1987): 644-45.

⁴⁶ Lorraine Hansberry, “Flag from a Kitchenette Window,” *Masses and Mainstream*, 1950, qtd. in Lisbeth Lipari, “Lorraine Hansberry,” in *Writers of the Black Chicago Renaissance*, ed. Steven Tracy, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 196.

government that, at Hansberry's time of writing, allowed Jim Crow, the nation that could not expand its freedoms to its darker sons and daughters yet sent them to battle and collected their taxes. The poem's title underscores the irony of black Americans' celebration of a nation that enabled the constraints on their lives evident through their homes and living conditions. Although her own family's contradictions were massive, as well, she approached them more delicately.

C.A. Hansberry Enterprises was founded by Carl Augustus Hansberry, Sr., in 1929, the year before he and his wife Nannie would welcome their fourth and last child, Lorraine, into the world.⁴⁸ A company founded to manage kitchenette properties, it grew to own and operate several of its own buildings in only a few years after its creation. Starting with a building purchased 5330 Calumet by Hansberry in 1928 (prior to the company's founding), Hansberry Enterprises expanded its holdings to ten properties on the South Side by 1934, with one on the North Side by 1935, as well.⁴⁹ So strong were his associations with the dwellings, Hansberry was reputed to be the "kitchenette king."⁵⁰ He was widely known to have made a small fortune from his real estate holdings.⁵¹ Upon Carl Sr.'s death, the company continued to function under the leadership of the founder's two sons, Carl Jr. and Perry Hansberry. Nannie Hansberry, their mother and the late Carl Sr.'s wife, also played a substantial role in the acquisition, maintenance, and dissolution of kitchenette properties.⁵² The family business persisted into the 1960s, but not without a fair share of contestations. Like its founder, the descendant operators of Hansberry Enterprises were known to be in court frequently. However, their reasons were not as varied as those of civic leader and prominent businessman Carl Sr. This set of Hansberrys were often in court for housing code violations and other complaints of residents in their kitchenette properties. The kitchenettes that Carl Sr. allegedly invented—according to his oldest daughter Mamie—became the very sources of reputational and financial upset in his successors' lives.⁵³

To some admirers, Carl Sr. was an admirably tenacious businessman, supplying "low-cost apartment accommodations" enjoyed by black Chicagoans.⁵⁴ However, Carl Sr. was also reputed by some to be a slum landlord, being charged by then-community members and later historians of contributing to, and even engineering in part, the Black Belt's overcrowding and exorbitant rents.⁵⁵ His entrepreneurial activities seemed to conflict with his public political aims

⁴⁷ Lisbeth Lipari, "Lorraine Hansberry," in *Writers of the Black Chicago Renaissance*, ed. Steven Tracy, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 196.

⁴⁸ "Huge Fund Being Created to Aid Negro Enterprise," *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, October 10, 1942, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁴⁹ Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 141.

⁵⁰ Margaret Wilkerson, "Lorraine Hansberry," *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

⁵¹ Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis*, 195. In her autobiography, Hansberry speaks of her father's perceived "fortune" made in business, dismissing it by saying parenthetically that "he had done nothing absolutely nothing of the kind: relative to American society of the Nineteen Thirties and Forties Carl A. Hansberry had simply become a reasonably successful businessman of the middle class." However, she also notes that he spent a "small personal fortune" in his battle against restrictive covenants. Lorraine Hansberry, *Young, Gifted, and Black*, 63, 51.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 186n8.

⁵³ Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy*, 195; Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 178.

⁵⁴ "Huge Fund Being Created to Aid Negro Enterprise," *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, October 10, 1942, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

⁵⁵ Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 141, 178-79, 187n9, 216n164.

of advancing fairness in residential dealings and larger scale black integration and equality. However, scholars have noted that Hansberry's political motivations were also likely economically motivated: Carl Sr. "may have stood to gain from an expanded market for his clientele" achieved through victories in the realm of black residential rights.⁵⁶ Political scientist and black historian Preston Smith II notes: "While it is true that Hansberry's holdings did not compare to the larger white real estate companies [as Wendy Plotkin holds], Hansberry did participate and profit from illegal conversions into 'kitchenettes,' the black tenants of which were overcrowded and overcharged. While many upper-class blacks did not derive their wealth from the exploitation of their working-class brothers, Hansberry did."⁵⁷

Nonetheless, not all of his capitalizations on housing can be treated equally. As Beryl Satter noted of her father's conundrum of working to provide decent housing with managing the accumulating costs of maintenance in aging buildings, not all landlords were predatory or greedy in their ownership and operation of apartment properties in the Black Belt.⁵⁸ In some cases, Hansberry Enterprises stepped in to aid others in not losing property: when one woman's home was about to go into foreclosure during the Depression, the company began to manage it, and it stayed afloat for two years more under the widow's ownership.⁵⁹ In another instance, Nannie Hansberry intervened in the fate of a "financially troubled property on the Near West Side . . . in 1939," converting the living space into kitchenette apartments to be rented out.⁶⁰ While the Depression allowed for some Chicagoans to take advantage of people unable to manage their mortgages and to accumulate properties—such as what Hansberry did during this period—it also opened up a demand for people who could help prevent some struggling homeowners from losing everything and who could create housing options for those unable to pay or secure a mortgage. The financial circumstances were not ideal for most, and the business practices and housing "solutions" in the form of building accumulation and kitchenette conversion can be questioned on grounds of integrity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these practices cannot simplistically be reduced to malicious and self-serving intent.

Urban and cultural historian Beryl Satter, in *Family Properties*, analyzed her own family's messy web of housing advocacy and practices on Chicago's West Side, the only other area where midcentury blacks could secure mortgaged or rented properties in the city.⁶¹ Her father Mark J. Satter, a second-generation Jewish American, owned and operated four apartment buildings in the transitioning Jewish-to-black Lawndale neighborhood in the 1950s. A locally renowned housing advocate and practicing generalist attorney, Satter had discovered the predatory speculation white real estate brokers practiced to the detriment of their largely black clientele. When a financially overburdened black couple approached him to help delay an

⁵⁶ Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 145. See also Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy*, 195, 198.

⁵⁷ Preston Smith II, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis: Housing Policy in Postwar Chicago*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 373n17.

⁵⁸ Beryl Satter, *Family Properties*, 10.

⁵⁹ Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 185-86n8. Plotkin notes that after the widow lost the property, Hansberry's step-brother and -sister-in-law acquired the property until they divorced, at which point Hansberry himself took over the property. Nannie Hansberry managed the property after Carl Sr.'s death until 1959 when she sold it. I add that Nannie likely sold the property as a part of the liquidation imposed by the series of housing code violation suits brought against the company.

⁶⁰ Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 187n10.

⁶¹ Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009).

eviction order, he discovered that the couple were victims of a contract-buying scheme. In contract buying, the individuals under contract were required to pay exorbitant monthly payments toward their mortgage in addition to high down payments and interest rates, while the broker retained the deed of the property until full payment was satisfied. If the “homeowners” were delinquent on any payment, they would immediately forfeit their mortgage due to the unfulfilled contract and lose all money invested in the home. The couple had, like most blacks who sought homeownership during this era, bought their house on a contract whose terms made them only nominal homeowners, forcing them to take responsibility for physical maintenance of the property without having the benefit of owning the home outright. The speculator had already turned a high profit for the property—in this case the broker had purchased it for \$4300 and sold it a week later to the family for almost \$14,000 plus interest. When the couple went delinquent, he would be able to put them out and find others similarly desperate to get out of the crowded spaces they inhabited in the Black Belt to buy on contract under comparable terms.⁶² The cycle continued.

Satter intervened and went to bat for countless other would-be homeowners, challenging what to him was unconscionable exploitation. However, the advocate would eventually be lumped in with the slumlords as his own properties slipped into disrepair as the expenses increased and his conscience disallowed him from rent gouging or selling the properties off to someone who would.⁶³ Ultimately, when Satter died at forty-nine of a heart condition, his moral and material investments in his Lawndale properties left his wife and family financially strapped and emotionally embittered. The properties were sold soon after his passing but yielded no sale profits for his household. Mark J. Satter, a once-beloved landlord and accomplished attorney, died with fierce enemies in his buildings and in the legal/political sphere; his professional life was an extended irony. Beryl Satter’s meticulous digging for a fuller picture of the man who died when she was six led her to the masterful exposé of real estate speculators on the West Side and the complicated relationships some landlords had with their professional interests and personal needs. Lorraine Hansberry would explore her family’s real estate tensions through a different medium.

“An Emergency Exists”: The Hansberrys in Housing Court

Between 1955 and 1960, the Hansberry family and various banks and companies operating jointly with them were defendants in housing court for 114 suits involving nineteen different properties according to a study conducted by the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council (MHPC). The majority of the violations were concentrated at nine addresses, many of which were involved in the aforementioned 1959 suit.⁶⁴ Eighty of the cases were filed in the years 1957 and 1958, the time during which Lorraine was finalizing the writing of, and producer Phillip Rose was fundraising for, *A Raisin in the Sun*. In the year of the play’s debut, eleven code violation suits were brought against the Hansberrys.⁶⁵ Of the six-year period studied and in the cases for which case dispositions were reported by the MHPC, housing court judges fined the

⁶² Satter, *Family Properties*, 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁶⁴ “Memorandum Number 4: Housing Code Violations by the Hansberry Family,” Hansberry Code Violations, MPC Records, Box 297, Folder 3193, p.3-4, UIC.

⁶⁵ “Memorandum Number 4,” Hansberry Code Violations, p.2.

defendants a total of \$26,350, only \$1,940 of which the Hansberrys paid. In 1958 alone, the Hansberrys were fined \$19,300; they paid none of their fines in that year.⁶⁶ It was not until 1960 that the family cleared their housing court debts.⁶⁷

In June of 1959, the City of Chicago brought an injunction against a group of defendants comprised of the Hansberrys and extensions of their real estate enterprises. The injunction named seven Hansberry family members, one of which included playwright Lorraine V. Hansberry, as parties to negligent residential property upkeep. The suit targeted eight discrete buildings on the South Side in a sixty-page complaint that detailed 270 housing code violations, with each property containing upwards of twenty—and as many as forty-five—violations.⁶⁸ In the defendants' answer to the injunction, their first point was: "That as to the property at 6345-47 South Greenwood Avenue, they are the owners and not Lorraine K. [*sic*] Hansberry. Accordingly on their motion, Lorraine Hansberry (author of *A Raisin in the Sun*) was dismissed as a party defendant."⁶⁹ The correction was a point of fact—as the playwright did not own the property—however, the family also likely deemed the clearing of the playwright's name a foremost concern due to her newfound place in the limelight. Indeed, it may have been her place in the limelight that made her a ready target. Hansberry herself seemed to show little concern. James Baldwin noted that she took harsh criticism "with a kind of astringent humor, refusing, for example, even to consider defending herself when she was being accused of being a 'slum-lord' because of her family's real-estate holdings in Chicago."⁷⁰

On the Greenwood Avenue property, a three-story building with basement stood containing seventeen dwelling units. Approximately thirty-seven adults and an "undetermined number of children" resided there, averaging about two adults per unit.⁷¹ Depending on the square footage of the units—if they had two rooms, for instance—the space may have been manageable, though far from ideal, with a child or two. However, with thirty-four housing code violations, the living conditions were extremely compromised.⁷² Some properties fared worse than this, either spatially or materially. For example, the property at 707-09 East 40th Street—another included in the 1959 suit—also contained a three-story building with a basement. The building contained seven units housing thirty-nine adults, with the number of children unreported, averaging over five adults in each dwelling unit.⁷³ While this property reported

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁷ Plotkin, "Deeds of Mistrust," 187-188n10; "\$22,122 Is Paid In Hansberry Building Fines," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 24, 1960, 14. There is a discrepancy of almost \$2,300 between the MHPC report and the newspaper reports. (Plotkin cites a *Defender* article of August 27, rather than the above *Tribune* article, in her footnote. I was unable to locate that article, but she reports \$22,000 as well.) It is unclear whether the MHPC was not apprised of a set of payments by the Hansberrys or if some portion of the total outstanding amount was paid between the time of the MHPC report and the newspaper reports. See "Memorandum Number 4," MPC Records, p4.

⁶⁸ The MHPC report on the filed injunction notes that "in many instances the same violation occurred in more than one area. . . . Thus the actual number of violations far exceeds the 270 mentioned." Note that while two of the properties were ultimately inaccurately affiliated with them and therefore dropped from the suit, the Hansberrys claimed an interest in the other six properties. This would bring the official count of violations down to 202, a nonetheless tremendous amount. "Injunction, 595-9976," Hansberry Code Violations, MPC Records, UIC Library of Health Sciences, Chicago, IL, p1, 2.

⁶⁹ "Injunction, 595-9976," p. 2.

⁷⁰ James Baldwin, "Sweet Lorraine," xiii.

⁷¹ "Complaint," Hansberry Code Violations, p54, MPC Records.

⁷² "Injunction," Hansberry Code Violations, p1.

⁷³ "Complaint," Hansberry Code Violations, p19-20.

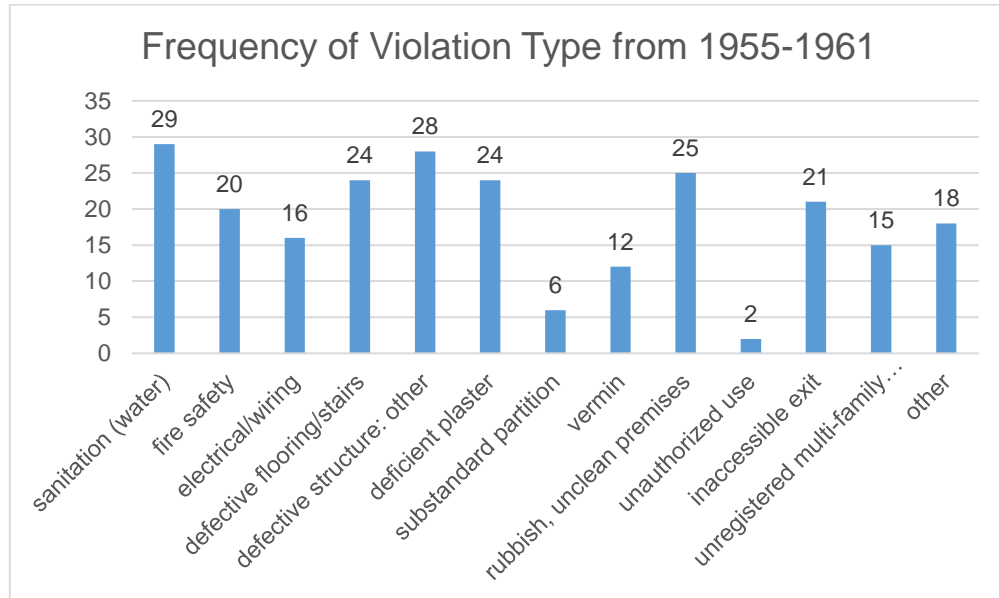


FIGURE 4.1 Hansberry Enterprises, Frequency of Violation Type from 1955-1961, [Source: Hansberry Code Violations, MPC Records, UIC Library of Health Sciences, Chicago, IL]

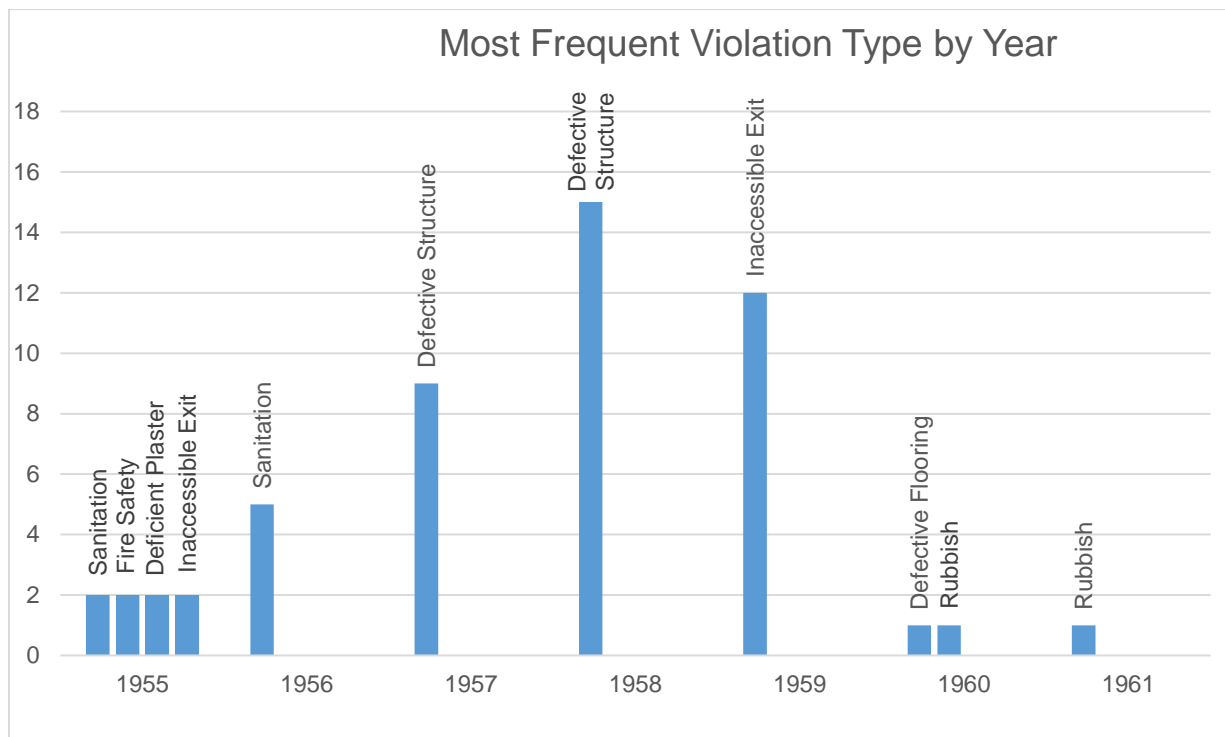


FIGURE 4.2 Hansberry Enterprises, Most Frequent Violation Type by Year, [Source: Hansberry Code Violations, MPC Records, UIC Library of Health Sciences, Chicago, IL]

twenty-seven violations, which was fewer than the Greenwood location, the overcrowding and thus spatial constriction in the 40th Street building presented a far worse living situation for its residents.⁷⁴

From the very opening of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry makes it clear that the play is a critique of the constriction of space and of dreams for black people. The detail of the setting given in the stage directions clues the audience in that the structured space of the apartment is a key site where the “unkept promises of migration”—to borrow from Elizabeth Schlabach—are made evident.⁷⁵ Consider the following stage direction:

Moreover, a section of this room, for it is really not a room unto itself, though the landlord’s lease would make it seem so, slopes backward to provide a small kitchen area, where the family prepares the meals that are eaten in the living room proper, which must also serve as dining room. The single window that has been provided for these ‘two’ rooms is located in this kitchen area. The sole natural light the family may enjoy in the course of a day is only that which fights it way through this little window.⁷⁶

In this excerpt, it becomes clear that the Younger kitchenette, like many other apartments, has been passed off by the landlord to be something that it is not. The quotations around “two” signals the skepticism about the accounting of rooms. While the apartment was likely advertised as a four-room apartment, this excerpt alerts us that it is no more than three rooms: the bedroom, the breakfast-room-turned-bedroom, and the kitchen-living room.⁷⁷ The convergence of cooking, dining, and leisure/entertainment spaces results in blurred boundaries for all activities. The kitchenette is always a multipurpose space.

In another instance, Ruth rails against Walter Lee for preventing their son Travis from sleeping. Because Travis sleeps on the couch in the living room, his “bedroom” is always accessible to others and, indeed, is never truly a bedroom at any point.⁷⁸ Walter Lee entertains his friends late into the nights and does so in the proper entertaining space: the living room. However, his entertaining becomes a problem insofar as it infringes on one of the many purposes for which the living room is put to use: namely, Travis’ sleeping space. What could be harmless engagement with friends becomes irresponsible parenting within the overcrowded space of the kitchenette apartment. Walter Lee fails at being a responsible parent at times (in keeping Travis awake) because he works to succeed at being a good host and friend some nights. The failure

⁷⁴ “Injunction,” Hansberry Code Violations, p1.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Schlabach, *Along the Streets of Bronzeville: Black Chicago’s Literary Landscape* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 94.

⁷⁶ Hansberry, *Raisin*, 24.

⁷⁷ Note that the Younger’s three-room kitchenette apartment, while cramped for the family, accords more space than did many kitchenettes of the era, which were mostly one- or two-room dwellings. In this regard, the play is removed, by degrees, both from a wider black experience in kitchenettes and the playwright’s family’s business. It is unlikely that the Hansberry properties boasted many, if any, three-room apartments.

⁷⁸ Travis Younger does not appear to have any real place he can keep his things or any space he can claim as his own—as soon as he wakes up and bundles his blankets, his “room” returns to its daytime function as kitchen/living room/dining room, if in fact it ever ceased to be those things. Perhaps the kitchen-living-dining-room functions are never suspended, but sleeping is added to both the room’s affordance and actual utility.

occurs not because of Walter Lee's decision to entertain his buddies, but rather because there is not adequate space in the Younger kitchenette apartment to both entertain guests in the evening and allow Travis a place to sleep.

As a work of the stage, however, the Younger apartment is presented as both meager and spatially sprawling. With all or majority of the action taking place within the kitchenette, it visually and physically utilizes the majority of the stage space. This physical and visual rendering is necessary for the characters to enact the plot in a way that allows a theater audience to see and understand character placement and movement, both grand and subtle gestures. However, masses of black Chicagoans living in the South Side during mid-century could only dream to dwell in as much space as the Youngers are portrayed to have. The spatial smallness of actual kitchenettes would likely not translate well on a Broadway stage, thus allowing large numbers of middle-class white theater-goers to experience an intimacy with black apartment life that was distant from the prevalent reality of many of their fellow black city-dwellers. Moreover, rendering a home space that is not as visually and spatially oppressive to its characters might have made the play more legible and palatable to white audiences, given its already explicit critiques of white racist aggression (with mentions of home bombings) and anti-blackness (with the offer of the neighborhood association in Clybourne Park). I point out these limitations of the play not to diminish the significance of its standout work, but rather to underscore the need to hold the representation of black life for the characters on the stage with the realities of black life for many Chicagoans at the time.

Additionally, the play depicts the relational, but not material, risks of kitchenette living, despite the fact that material failures in kitchenettes were commonly known to be urgent issues. They were front and center in court complaints against Hansberry Enterprises. In each of the counts against the Hansberrys in the June 1959 case (each count representing a set of violations at a discrete property), the City of Chicago declared in complaint that:

. . . [T]he occupants of said premises and the owners and occupants of premises adjacent and abutting thereto are in imminent and continuing danger as a result of the failure of the defendants to comply with the minimum standards of health and safety as set forth in the applicable ordinances of the City of Chicago; that by reason of the condition of the basement and boiler of said premises and the overburdening of the electrical circuits therein, there is continuing and imminent danger of fire; that in such event the lack of adequate provision for exit as provided by the fire prevention ordinances of the City of Chicago and the disrepair and flimsy condition of the stairways and fire escapes from said premises will result in danger and heavy loss of life and injury to the occupants of said premises; that the unsanitary and unsafe condition of the plumbing and other sanitary facilities in said premises, contrary to the provisions of the Municipal Code of Chicago, in such cases made and provided, endanger the health of the occupants of the said premises and give rise to epidemic and disease; that in these circumstances there is imminent danger and an emergency exists. . . .⁷⁹

⁷⁹ "Complaint," Hansberry Code Violations, p.43.

The violations, when taken separately, posed a threat to the health and safety conditions of the building. However, their interrelated and compounding nature—such as the overtaxed electrical circuits and rotting stairwells—exponentially heightened the inhabitants’ proximity to danger. Neighbors and the general public were also at risk, according to the complaint.⁸⁰ Regarding the landlords in their study, the MHPC concludes, “It would appear that the violations of the Housing Code is a matter of economics. So long as it is cheaper to pay the fines and attorney fees and delay repairing the buildings, then the danger of fire and infection will be present in [the] buildings, along with other less dangerous inconveniences and hazards.”⁸¹ It is no wonder that death and delay are characteristic themes in a number of kitchenette narratives, although its manifestations—whether material or figurative—varies.⁸²

Deferral and Delay in the Kitchenette

In *A Raisin in the Sun*, Mama tells Ruth that the kitchenette apartment was only intended to be a temporary dwelling place for herself and Mr. Younger, a stopover on their way to their final destination of owning their own home.⁸³ However, as the years wear on, the Youngers find themselves starting a family and still keeping residence in the kitchenette apartment. Time and use has worn all parts of the apartment, from the carpet to the cracking walls to the couch whose “upholstery has to fight to show itself from under acres of crocheted doilies and couch covers.”⁸⁴ Lena and her husband never conceptualized the apartment as home because they had a future dwelling place in mind, yet it became home as they shared their love, built their family, and faced life’s challenges in that place. Despite the home that the Youngers eventually made, the play mis- or dis-remembers the kitchenette’s home-like qualities, rendering an environment marked by loss, crowding, and strained relationships. The play offers that when spaces of temporariness are forced to become spaces of permanence, progress is thwarted and life, growth, and time expire.

The experience of blackness in Western society is fundamentally one of deferral and delay.⁸⁵ Homi Bhabha discusses the “belatedness of the black man” in his analysis of Fanon’s psychosocial reflections in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Bhabha offers that Fanon’s belatedness—his subjecthood and humanity figured over and against, and indeed *after*, white male subjecthood—is a fact of blackness. Bhabha presents this belatedness as part and parcel to a Eurocentric modernity that subscribes to an unproblematized homogeneous temporality (such as in Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*).⁸⁶ Black people and other marginalized and colonized groups are consigned to the “waiting room of history.”⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Memorandum Number 4,” Hansberry Code Violations, p.7.

⁸² See Richard Wright, *Native Son*; Gwendolyn Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville*; Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha*; Frank London Brown, *Trumbull Park*; Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

⁸³ Hansberry, *Raisin*, 44.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁵ Black women’s subjectivities are not factored into Fanon’s respective philosophical and analytical formulations, removing them even further from present-ness. For more on the absence of black women from Fanon’s conception of black identity through the Hegelian dialectic, see Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁸⁶ Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 339-40.

⁸⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

Gwendolyn Brooks and Hansberry render a similar belatedness as constitutive of kitchenette living and, thus, black migrant life in Chicago. Hansberry employs Langston Hughes' renowned poem "Harlem" as an epigraph to the published version of the play. It reads:

What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

*Or does it explode?*⁸⁸

Understandably, Hughes's verse is credited as a key source of the play's inspiration, as it furnishes its distinct title. However, Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "kitchenette building" from *A Street in Bronzeville*, published six years before Hughes' famous "Harlem," could also be used—and perhaps more aptly—as a departure point for analysis of the play.⁸⁹ In fact, although Hughes was in many ways a mentor and encourager of Brooks as a young writer, it is quite possible that he was inspired by her poem, as the two had become friends by this point and also shared social circles and literary fora. Brooks' "kitchenette building" renders a concrete depiction of what is crafted as poignant abstraction in Hughes.⁹⁰ Her verse reads:

We are things of dry hours and the involuntary plan,
Grayed in, and gray. "Dream" makes a giddy sound, not strong
Like "rent," "feeding a wife," "satisfying a man."

But could a dream send up through onion fumes
Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes
And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall,
Flutter, or sing an aria down these rooms

Even if we were willing to let it in,
Had time to warm it, keep it very clean,
Anticipate a message, let it begin?

⁸⁸ Langston Hughes, "Harlem," in *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (New York: Holt, 1951).

⁸⁹ In fact, Hughes, who spent time in Chicago and penned verse inspired by his stay there, may have also had that city in mind, his specific titling notwithstanding. In other poems, he referenced Chicago along with Harlem as if along a continuum of a black urban imaginary. See Langston Hughes, "Visitors to the Black Belt," *One Way Ticket* (1949).

⁹⁰ The deferral of dreams as well as imagery of rotting garbage are found in both poems.

We wonder. But not well! not for a minute!
 Since Number Five is out of the bathroom now,
 We think of lukewarm water, hope to get in it.⁹¹

Within the confines of the kitchenette, dreams are figured as impotent, unable to move residents in the ways that urgent demands do. The “giddy” lightness of dreams is no match for the immediacy of “feeding a wife” or the pungency of “onion fumes” and greasy old garbage. Inhabitants must prioritize the tangible and pressing things like rent and accessing the communal bathroom over nurturing dreams. There is no “time to warm [them], keep [them] very clean,” so to avoid the demise of their dreams, some residents do not entertain them, “not for a minute!”

The dreams deferred form one aspect of delay in the kitchenette. In the poem we see that prime time has always already passed in the space of the kitchenette: “yesterday’s garbage [is] ripening in the hall,” hours are dry (as opposed to teeming with vital possibility), and the water is “lukewarm.”⁹² Similarly, Hansberry’s play opens with in-depth stage directions explicitly detailing how worn out and “tired” the furniture of the Younger kitchenette is.⁹³ Although the directions acknowledge that the home items “were actually selected with care and love and even hope—and brought to this apartment and arranged with taste and pride,” the play distances the audience and the family from this original point of novelty and newness, saying that only Mama probably remembers the furniture as something *other than* “weary” and worn.⁹⁴ Thus, we get the sense that Lena’s children, Beneatha and Walter Lee, as well as Ruth (Walter’s wife) and Travis (their son) have only known the cramped and weary conditions of the kitchenette.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the reader-audience meets the Younger family only *after* “[a]ll pretenses but living itself have long since vanished from the very atmosphere of this room.”⁹⁶ Big Walter and Lena’s desire to only inhabit the kitchenette building temporarily was whittled away by circumstance, and long-term residence became “the involuntary plan.” The grayness may only be suspended by the “light and violet” of the dreams made real by the presence of their children, as evinced in the play when Mama quotes Big Walter saying, “Seem like God didn’t see fit to give the black man nothing but dreams—but He did give us children to make them dreams seem worthwhile.”⁹⁷

The “ripening” garbage in Brooks’ poem in fact signals the gradual, but always already present, onset of death in the kitchenette building—that which is cast off blossoms in its degradation in this space. Big Walter’s death looms over Hansberry’s entire play as always there yet already in the past. We, as reader-audience, neither encounter him in his life nor see the Younger family in mourning. What we do encounter of Walter Lee, Sr. is his legacy of working hard (to the point of death, in Lena’s opinion), his dashed dreams, and his anticipated life insurance check. Furthermore, Lena believes that the grief Walter felt at the loss of their first son to their impoverished conditions was so abysmal as to propel him into a working frenzy (to

⁹¹ Gwendolyn Brooks, *A Street in Bronzeville* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1945), 2.

⁹² Brooks, *Street in Bronzeville*, 2. Note that Hughes’ “Harlem” also references dryness: “Does it dry up/ like a raisin in the sun?”

⁹³ Hansberry, *Raisin*, 23.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Ruth likely knew the “cracking walls” of another prior to marriage. Hansberry, *Raisin*, 93.

⁹⁶ Hansberry, *Raisin*, 24.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24, 45-46.

improve their living conditions) which in turn drove him to death.⁹⁸ The presence of death is inescapable. However, despite the presumably recent death of Big Walter, the Younger family is not presented as grieving his loss.⁹⁹ Mama is not taking his absence particularly hard, even though it would seem that his death on top of their son little Claude's—both due to their squalid living conditions and oppressed state in society—would evoke compounded feelings and outpourings of grief from the woman. Instead, Mama is inured to the pains of death: it is as if she is either always grieving because of the restricted opportunities for her black family in a white supremacist society or, conversely, she no longer grieves anything because she has recognized the ever-present shadow of death, loss, and little light (literally and figuratively) in the cramped confines of her family's world.

Likewise, Walter Lee, a cast off of society as a black man, is beaten so low by the unattainability of his dream that he plans to shuffle and grovel in minstrel-like fashion in front of the representative of the Clybourne Park neighborhood association sent to buy back the house. Beneatha exclaims in dismay, “Where is the real honest-to-God bottom so he can't go any farther!” and Mama laments, “Yes—death done come in this here house. Done come walking in my house on the lips of my children.”¹⁰⁰ Walter Lee is at a new low, to the point where his sister denies his manhood, calling him “nothing but a toothless rat.”¹⁰¹ Rats, like the roaches that linger in the wall, feed off of waste and decay in and around the kitchenette.¹⁰² Walter has only fed on the “garbage” that society has given him—a life relegated to serving whites, living in dilapidated spaces, and being the “taken” of the world.¹⁰³ Further, Beneatha suggests that even in the lowly realm of his ratliness, Walter has lost both his ability to consume anything and his ability to fight back—he is “toothless.” The garbage he is brimming over with has rotted his teeth—his fight—away. Fortunately for himself and the family, Walter Lee overcomes his defeatism and rejects the representative's lucrative offer. However, the degradation stemming from loss in this scene signals back to the consistent presence of death for countless South Side blacks in mid-century Chicago. For black Chicagoans in kitchenette buildings, these aspects of the American dream—successful, independent revenue generation and homeownership—was a primary dream that was deferred.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Ibid., 45, 75.

⁹⁹ The play does not mention how long it has been since Big Walter's death, but life insurance is presumably issued to families within a few months of the deceased's passing.

¹⁰⁰ Hansberry, *Raisin*, 142; 144.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 144.

¹⁰² Think back to the rat Travis and his friends chased and killed just outside of their building and the rat that Bigger kills in the first few pages of *Native Son*, right in the middle of their one-room living space. The vicious rat Bigger kills puts up a fight first, hissing and biting and showing its “long yellow fangs.” Moreover, after it is dead, Bigger notes (likely with exaggeration) that it is “over a foot long” and grew so big by “[e]ating garbage and anything else [it could] get.” Richard Wright, *Native Son*, 6-7.

¹⁰³ Hansberry, *Raisin*, 141.

¹⁰⁴ Notably, Brooks writes from her own kitchenette experience but also achieves her version of the American dream with her writing successes. A 1945 *Chicago Defender* article written the week Brooks' first book of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville*, is published notes the paradox of the author's increasing distance from the socioeconomic experiences about which she writes: “It was in this same tiny kitchenette, where her little family must share a bath with four others, that she produced, two years ago, a cryptic, 13-line verse, ‘Kitchenette Building,’ which struck across Chicago's tragic housing situation for Negroes with the simple query as to the possibility of artistic dreams being engendered in ‘yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall.’ . . . Yet to her, in this same kitchenette, have come to her all her poems as well as all the notices of her pyramiding success.” See Marjorie

Noticeably absent from the delay dramatized in *A Raisin in the Sun* is another core aspect of kitchenette living: waiting on the landlord to perform building upkeep. Ruth is elated at the chance to escape the “cracking walls” and “marching roaches” of the Younger apartment, yet the landlord who is partially responsible for their living conditions—due to lack of adequate maintenance, repair, and extermination—does not enter the dialogue or action of the play.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the sole reference to the Youngers’ landlord, or any landlords at all, is found in the initial dramaturgical stage cues setting the scene at the opening of the play. Unlike the meddling neighborhood association representative, the violent mobs sure to come upon their move to Clybourne Park, or the employers for which the Youngers work, landlords could not be so easily or narrowly associated with whiteness due to the playwright’s—and likely the community’s—intimate knowledge of, and ties to, the Hansberrys’ ownership and operation of kitchenette buildings. It is possible that Lorraine Hansberry skirted more direct engagement with the issue of kitchenette landlordship to avoid criminalizing the actions and business investments of her kin.

Conclusion

When Lorraine Hansberry wrote *A Raisin in the Sun*, she made an argument for understanding the kitchenette as performative space in order to expose—quite literally, in the setting of an opened-up apartment—how black life is lived in the confines of a racist society. The kitchenette becomes the synecdoche of an urban, oppressive, Jim Crow Midwest, as the tenement building figures as the conspicuous arm of a racist state and populace; it is also the stage on which black people, and new southern black migrants especially, enacted their private lives. The private made public, through the work of theater, grapples with the daily negotiations black people undergo to “be at home” in a society that oppresses them. The kitchenette, as the primary space of action in the play, shapes (to some extent) the performances of the Youngers as they move among their tight living quarters. Moreover, Hansberry draws a tacit corollary between the staged theatrical production and the embodied practices of the everyday in actual Chicago kitchenette spaces. The Younger family could be any black family in a Chicago kitchenette: their performance-in-space, while artistically telling a specific fictional story, stands in for a larger, common experience of black working-class people in the urban Midwest. The representation conveys some of the scriptedness of everyday life for people contending with the materiality of structural oppression in their home spaces.

Furthermore, while Hansberry’s play did (and continues to do) important work around bringing issues of African American housing discrimination to the fore, as a play it also fails to do that work in a crucial way. Hansberry’s failure to indict her family and other landlords—black and white—in the complex web of struggles within and surrounding the Youngers’ kitchenette robs the play of additional nuance. The playwright does not fail to critique any number of issues internal to the black community, including conflicts over religious views, gender roles, beauty

Peters, “Poetess Brooks Calmly Greets Book’s Success in Kitchenette,” *The Chicago Defender*, September 1, 1945, p. 11, Accessed Oct. 11, 2015 in *ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Defender*.

¹⁰⁵ Hansberry, *Raisin*, 93-94. Delay or neglect of garbage collection appears in Brooks’ poem and Hughes’ “Visitors to the Black Belt,” but it was a failure of the city administration rather than individual building owners. Landlords, however, were responsible for providing an adequate number of trash receptacles and replacing tops to the containers if they went missing in order to prevent or inhibit vermin infestation. See Brooks, “Kitchenette Building”; Langston Hughes, “Visitors to the Black Belt,” *One Way Ticket* (1942). See also “Proposed Housing Standards: Final Draft, October 6, 1954,” p.10, Housing Code Violations, MPC Records, Box 287, folder 3073.

ideals, rejection and romanticism of ties to Africa, parenting and reproduction, and familial and romantic love. She even inserts what could be considered a critique of her brother, Carl Jr., in her representation of Walter Lee's exploded pipe dream of a liquor store: the eldest Hansberry son owned a dram shop (either a tavern or liquor store) at 6400 South Cottage Grove Avenue.¹⁰⁶ However, the legacy of her parents, and especially her father Carl Sr., in their fight for black residential rights almost two decades prior seemed to elevate the couple such that their other shortcomings and actions were beyond critique. Lena Younger (Mama) is the picture of tough-loving, fastidious motherhood, not unlike Nannie Hansberry, while the late Big Walter is invoked only as hardworking and heroic, a nod to the deceased Carl Sr.¹⁰⁷ The \$10,000 life insurance check, too, that drives the plot of the play is reminiscent of her parents' noble sacrifice: they used \$10,000 of their own money to establish the Hansberry Foundation to fund legal battles for civil rights.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps her abiding commitment to the struggle for black freedom and her deep respect for her parents' hand in it, caused the playwright to shy away from—or boldly avoid—drawing attention to the paradoxes of black kitchenette landlordship. In the end, she may very well have held onto a lesson instilled in her as a child: “[A]bove all, there were two things which were never to be betrayed: the family and the race.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Carl Jr.'s dram shop was involved in a 1961 injury suit documented by the MHPC: in December 1960, Mary Mays was battered and sexually assaulted by an intoxicated patron of the establishment and wanted redress from Carl Jr.'s shop. No outcome was reported for the suit, but the MHPC noted, “An action of this sort does not hurt the Hansberry family since they had dramshop insurance.” It is unclear how long Carl Jr. owned the store, but if he had not at the time of Hansberry's authoring of the play, it is quite possible that it was a previously known aspiration. See “Injury Actions: 61 S 1807,” Hansberry Code Violations, MPC Records, Box 297, folder 3193.

¹⁰⁷ In her autobiography Hansberry recounts her parents' stoicism: “Of love and my parents there is little to be written: their relationship to their children was utilitarian. We were fed and housed and dressed and outfitted with more cash than our associates and that was all. . . . But of love, there was nothing ever said.” However, she also presents in adoration a larger-than-life image of her father as “a man whom kings might have imitated” and about whom she shockingly realizes “like all men, must have known *fear*....” Hansberry, *Young, Gifted, and Black*, 48, 50.

¹⁰⁸ “Huge Fund Being Created to Aid Negro Enterprise,” *New York Amsterdam Star-News*, October 10, 1942, *ProQuest Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁰⁹ Hansberry, *Young, Gifted, and Black*, 48.

CODA

Since at least the early twentieth century, Chicago has loomed largely in scholarship on the modern city, the black family, and, especially, housing. Moreover, the renewed interest among scholars of African American/Black Studies in landscape-shifting movements to or within Chicago (including the Great Migration and the Chicago Black Renaissance), extends, revisits, and reinvigorates what might be assumed to be well-worn topics of scholarly inquiry on the so-called Second City. In this study, I have closely examined the intricacies of kitchenette life and representation, putting forth a primary claim that Chicago's Black Belt kitchenette buildings were central to black experience and discourses of blackness in the city during the mid-twentieth-century and should, therefore, be recognized as integral to the making of black urban modernity during this era.

In Chapter 1, I spotlighted Grace Garnett, an African American woman who devised the Chicago kitchenette concept in 1914, an update to the historical record that had been otherwise vague in details of the kitchenette's origins in the city. Highlighting her innovation as well as her disapproval of the kitchenette's devolution into an overcrowded, dilapidated habitation, I continued into an analysis of the kitchenette as a quintessential modern space. I contended that the Chicago kitchenette building, and the racially discriminatory landscape from which it emerged, represents the ways in which racial exclusion and exploitation is as constitutive of Western modernity as are the innovations made by black subjects apart from, and sometimes in response to, this oppression.

Analyzing mundane objects and routines in kitchenettes, in Chapter 2 I amplified how expensive in money, time, energy, and labor kitchenette living was for its black residents. Because black Chicagoans were charged more for rents (sometimes as much as double) than their white or ethnic European counterparts, and because black residents inherited the old and disposed-of domiciles of other racial groups, kitchenette inhabitants in the expanding Black Belt of the mid-twentieth century were predisposed to increased labor expenditure and different modes of being "at home." I analyzed the images created by freelance Jewish photographer Mildred Mead as she documented Black Belt kitchenettes under a commission for the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council; I also incorporated close reading of scenes from Frank London Brown's novel *Trumbull Park* to elucidate how negotiations of the kitchenette environment created unique embodied practices that remained with residents long after their kitchenette tenancy. In the intervening space between chapters 2 and 3, I curated an interlude of photographs of kitchenette housing and residents taken by Edwin Roskam, Russell Lee, and Mildred Mead to furnish a broader perspective on the commonplace Chicago kitchenette apartment building and how it was visually represented.

In Chapter 3, through close readings of Gwendolyn Brooks' *Maud Martha* and Richard Wright's *Native Son* alongside the Metropolitan Housing and Planning Council's campaign for a renewed city housing code, I analyzed the kitchenette as a domestic site steeped in intimacy and failure. Offering what I have termed "over-intimacy," I highlighted how the uncomfortably close kitchenette proximities within individual apartments as well as within entire buildings generated moral concerns written into housing policy and which black tenants navigated by re-designating space for certain mundane activities.

CODA

I examined the racial uplift activities of Lorraine Hansberry's family in Chapter 4, analyzing how the kitchenette became a paradoxical representation of racial housing advocacy and a source and site of intra-familial tension. Juxtaposing the renowned playwright's 1959 *A Raisin in the Sun* to her family's slumlordship that funded Carl Hansberry's court battle to overturn the legality of racial covenants, I demonstrate how the kitchenette was divergently employed to serve the Hansberrys' interests in advocating for residential mobility for black Chicagoans. An investment in protecting her family and the race are evident in Lorraine Hansberry's play, as a commentary on landlordship is noticeably absent from *A Raisin in the Sun*'s critique of black Chicago's oppressive living and social conditions, despite her family's participation in kitchenette building ownership and neglect.

Overall, *Kitchenette Building: A Cultural History* contributes to the recent evolving conversation underscoring twentieth-century Chicago's prominent place in modern black history, geography, sociality, advocacy, and creativity. Modeling a highly interdisciplinary mode of scholarly inquiry, this project responds to the demands of the Chicago kitchenette to engage with the built environment, housing policy, public health discourse, theories of urbanization and the Chicago School of Sociology, and discourses and practices of black domesticities. Moreover, the project demonstrates that deep analysis of this domestic space necessitates a mixed-methods historical approach, which in this study has included a dialectical close reading practice across and among literary, visual, archival, and architectural texts.

My theory of *black spatial affordance* acknowledges and makes room for the capacity within constraint that black subjects have historically created and navigated within exclusionary landscapes. While in this project the theory is applied to the Chicago kitchenette building, black spatial affordance may well be utilized to rigorously interrogate the nuances and seeming paradoxes of black experiences in space and place beyond the temporal and geographical bounds of mid-twentieth-century black Chicago. The theory allows for a wide range of possible applications to interdisciplinary interrogations of spectacular and mundane black life and history. My hope is that others may find black spatial affordance to be as useful of a framework as I have.

* * * * *

Today, a stroll down many streets in Bronzeville presents beautiful brick and greystone houses or condominiums in clusters amid stretches of vacant land. These lots, often the result of demolition of condemned structures (or buildings otherwise deemed unfit or unwanted for use), are the vestiges of urban renewal campaigns that did not replenish the housing stock in the affected areas. In calls for urban development and slum clearance, the areas considered most blighted—largely those populated by Chicago's black citizens and sections of ethnic European immigrants—were targeted for renewal through building demolition, resident dis- and replacement, and new construction of private and public housing. Vacant lots became so prevalent in the 1940s that Gwendolyn Brooks highlighted them with a poem in her 1945 poetry collection *A Street in Bronzeville*. Then, as today, they are traces of the removed social and built environment, of the condemned people and places of the Black Belt. The imprints of kitchenette buildings remain in Bronzeville, even if a broad swath of buildings and innumerable residents have long since been absented from its material and social geography.



FIGURE 5.1 Vacant lot on South Prairie Avenue near E. Pershing Road, Chicago, IL, taken by author, March 2017



FIGURE 5.2 Homes across from vacant lot, South Prairie Ave near E. Pershing Rd, Chicago, IL, taken by author, March 2017

Archival Collections

- Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley
Gwendolyn Brooks Papers
- Harold Washington Library, Chicago Public Library
Phone Directories, microfilm
- Library of Health Sciences Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago
Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) Records
- National Archives of Washington, D.C.
Lee v. Hansberry Abstract of Record, 803 OT 1939, Supreme Court Appellate Case 29 OT 1940
- Newberry Library, Chicago, IL
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps
- Richard Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago
City of Chicago Building Permits, microfilm
- University of Chicago Special Collections
Mildred Mead Photos, 1948-62
- Vivian G. Harsh Afro-American Research and Special Collections, Chicago Public Library
Illinois Writers Project/"Negro in Illinois" Papers

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