Chocolate Cities
Co-Creating Liberated Spaces for People of Color

September 2021
ThirdSpace Action Lab was created to disrupt the vicious cycle of disinvestment and displacement that negatively impacts the vitality of low-income communities of color.

We are a grassroots solutions studio (think: McKinsey & Parliament-Funkadelic have a soulful, multiracial baby) dedicated to prototyping creative, place-based solutions to complex socio-economic problems.

We are institutional and community organizers, turning multidisciplinary research into evidence-based strategies and activating “third places” to co-create more liberated spaces for people of color.
Our Vision

We believe that the future of our neighborhoods depends on our collective efforts to transcend the limitations of the popular imagination and consider what will be possible if we insist on the beauty of forgotten places, the value of the people who live there, and seize the opportunity to realize our shared vision for an equitable and inclusive society. We are committed to making this vision a reality.
What We Do
Activating Space. Activating People.

Community Collaboration
Engagement, Organizing, & Ethnography

Applied REI Insights
Research & Strategy Development

Space Activation
Reimagining “Third Places”
Why We Do It

We believe that racial equity and inclusion are central, non-negotiable components of a **viable growth strategy**.

We believe that a human-centered design framework applied in communities of color should be **inspired by all residents**—especially, those who called this place home before its revitalization.

Above all, we believe in **the sanctity of humanity**—that all humans have intrinsic value, deserve beauty, and need more than their basic needs satisfied.
Our Goal: Equitable Systems Change

A fundamental, racially equitable change in:

- policies,
- processes,
- relationships,
- and power structures,

as well as deeply held values and norms.

GROUNDWATER APPLICATION

FISH – Individuals
- Fixing, improving, or helping

LAKE – Systems and Institutions
- Culture
- Practices
- Policies
- Structures

GROUNDWATER – Root Cause
- Racial History and its Legacy
- Narratives
THE GROUNDWATER ANALYSIS

Overview
A Groundwater Approach is based on five key observations about racial inequity:

1. Racial inequity looks **the same across systems**.
2. Socio-economic difference **does not explain** the racial inequity.
3. Systems **contribute significantly** to disparities.
4. Poor outcomes are **concentrated in certain geographic communities**; usually poor communities and communities of color.
5. The systems-level disparities **cannot be explained by a few ‘bad apples’** or ill-intentioned gatekeepers.
REI Movement 2017-2021
By the Numbers

9,700
Total registrations for REI Training since 2016

8,500
Local registrations for REI Training since 2016
If racism is a public health crisis, what do we do?

If mass incarceration + the criminalization of poor, black + Latinx communities hasn’t resulted in safer communities, what do we do?

If the global COVID pandemic has only exacerbated existing racial disparities in quality of life indicators, what do we do?
OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

The Impact Continuum:
Awareness Building →
More Thoughtful Action
(Rinse & Repeat)
OUR PRAXIS is SOUL WORK

TRANSDISCIPLINARY
APPLIED RACIAL EQUITY
NARRATIVE + STORYTELLING
MOVEMENT BUILDING
HISTORY = PREFACE
TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE
BLACK SPACE IS POLITICAL
HUMAN-CENTERED
Chocolate City
CLEVELAND
Chocolate City Cleveland is a creative labor of love. This is an exercise in community collaboration. It is a multigenerational, multimedia, multidisciplinary experiment intended to preserve our collective memory of a better past, as to imagine a brighter future for Cleveland’s Black neighborhoods.
Chocolate Cities, defined.

“Chocolate cities are a perceptual, political, and geographic tool and shorthand to analyze, understand, and convey insights born from predominantly Black neighborhoods, communities, zones, towns, cities, districts, and wards; they capture the sites and sounds Black people make when they occupy place and form communities. Chocolate cities are also a metaphor for the relationships among history, politics, culture, inequality, knowledge, and Blackness.”

Excerpt From: Chocolate Cities - Marcus Anthony Hunter & Zandria F. Robinson
(re)Creating the Black Map of Cleveland

We're remixing stories—curating primary sources + cultural artifacts that represent the Black experience in Cleveland. We'll be establishing new oral histories—capturing stories from people that live, work, play + pray in the neighborhoods that constitute the Black East Side.

Many of the folks who remember the thriving, connected, and predominantly Black communities in The Hood are aging or joining The Ancestors. **These stories will be lost forever if we don’t capture them now.** We don’t want to solely celebrate the Big Names—the politicians, business leaders, celebrities, etc.

Instead, we want to uplift the many history-makers in our community whose stories will shed light on what these neighborhoods—the physical landmarks, events, people, culture + rituals—once were and could become again.
SOOO MANY MAPS...
“Chocolate cities are windows into Black migration, urbanization, rural and suburban life, and racial inequality. Informed by a variety of sources, experiences, and data, we call this new geography and framework the chocolate maps—a perspective that more accurately reflects the lived experiences and the future of Black life in America, and thus of the nation.”

Excerpt From: Chocolate Cities - Marcus Anthony Hunter & Zandria F. Robinson
The Chocolate City Cleveland Map

Our first ACTION is the creation of the Chocolate City CLE Map: an interactive virtual tour of the areas around East 105th Street.

The CCC Map seeks to recreate the vibes of the street scene (past + present) by highlighting some of the people, places + cultural artifacts throughout time that have made 105 one of the most important streets on the East Side.
We want to document how Black people understand the map of the East Side—the places we value, the places we feel safe, the places of joy + community.

We’re interested in how this is expressed in our own voices + vernacular—how folks describe where they “stay” and the routes they take from point A to B.

We’re interested in how these insights, observations + anecdotes add more color and texture to a broader conversation about the future of Greater Cleveland's Black neighborhoods.

The Chocolate City Cleveland Map
The Chocolate City Cleveland Map

Mobile Map Prototype
The Madison
Medical Associates Building, Cleveland, Ohio, 1960 | Designed by Robert P. Madison

Location: 1464 E. 105th Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44106

“The Medical Associates Building was the first multi-story medical facility for doctors of color built in the state of Ohio. Society has changed and the need for segregated facilities no longer exists. I am pleased that the current owners in 2017 created a new purpose for the continued usefulness of this structure. Its official title is the PNC Glenville Arts Campus, but most neighbors simply call it the Madison Building.”

- Robert P. Madison
Chocolate City Stories (Oral History Project)

Beginning in the **summer of 2021**, TSAL + Partners will capture stories from the East Side’s Black **residents, transplants + expats** to delve deeper into **the ways we experience the Black Map**, and our collective dreams for the future of the East Side.

These stories will be **archived** on the CCC Website + **integrated into the Map**.
CHOCOLATE CITY STORIES

Robert P. Madison: Architect

As a decorated member of the historic Buffalo Soldiers, Second Lieutenant Robert P. Madison decided to enroll in the architecture program at Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, only to be summarily denied access based on his race. He returned in full dress uniform, with his Purple Heart from an injury sustained in Italy, and declared they could not keep him out of college. Under duress, he was admitted, but told by the administrators that he would never work as an architect.

How wrong they were. Madison opened the first African-American architect firm in Ohio in 1954, and only the 10th in the country. This was only the beginning of many accomplishments and contributions to American society, including the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, the American Embassy in Senegal, Cleveland Browns Stadium, and buildings for Cuyahoga Community College and Cleveland State University.

Source: https://designingvictory.com/
The aim of this project is to use cross-platform and “cultural storytelling” techniques and user experiences to amplify these black community voices and their “first hand” memories to preserve a truer, “authentic” narrative of this historic American moment in time and humanities experience to foster knowledge and civic engagement around the important role of social justice, arts, history and culture — thus allowing communities of color to “learn from their past to REIMAGINE and REDEFINE, from the ground up, the 21st century African American experience” amid today’s rapidly changing demographic and cultural landscape in urban America, specifically in Washington, D.C.

Source: https://blackbroadwayonu.com/#section-about
Monuments + Historical Markers

Given what we know about the long (and continued) struggle for access and authentic representation within mainstream cultural institutions, we can assume that the historical markers we see around the city *tell an incomplete story of the sites + events that The Community finds valuable.*

We intend to **honor + memorialize Black spaces** through the creation of a living museum in the public realm—temporary + permanent creative activations (visual + performance art, Placekeeping interventions, etc).

By documenting these actions, we preserve our history as **an inheritance to future generations of Black Clevelanders.**
“We view a community-driven, participatory process for the redevelopment of these sites and for the expansion of public art in public spaces throughout New Orleans as a critical means to continue and expand those conversations, and to ensure that when future generations question the intentions behind and the purpose of future monuments, the answers are ones of which they can be proud.”

Source: https://www.papermonuments.org/aboutus
Collaborate with Us

Chocolate City CLE intends to engage a diverse cadre of collaborators across disciplines, neighborhoods, political + personal identities, and movements all aligned in our collective love for Black people.

This movement needs YOU! If you are interested in learning, dreaming and or creating with the Chocolate City Collective hit us up at collab@3rdspaceactionlab.co
CHECK OUT

What is the black Community?

Where is the black Community?

What are the places that MATTER to us?

How might these black spaces—our schools, our sacred places (churches, mosques, Football fields + basketball courts), the places where we’ve been building community for generations—help us understand the black History we’ve created together in our hometown?
PEACE.
THANK YOU
Activating Space. Activating People.

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